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Author: Prosper Mérimée

Translator: E. M. Waller

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THE ABBÉ AUBAIN AND MOSAICS

By

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Translated by

EMILY MARY WALLER

With an Introduction by

ARTHUR SYMONS

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INTRODUCTION

Mérimée's temperament was really that of the scholar, not of the artist, and even his art came to him as a kind of scholarship. He did one thing after another, as if challenging himself to accomplish a certain end, and then, that end accomplished, he no longer cared to repeat it. That is the scholar's way, not the artist's; and the scholar's instinct is seen, too, in that too purely critical attitude which he adopted, towards others and towards himself, working in almost a hostile fashion upon every impulse, so as to destroy his interest in any part of his work but the way in which it was done. He began his career by two very serious mystifications, *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul*, a collection of short plays supposed to be translated from the Spanish, and *La Guzla*, a collection of ballads in prose supposed to be translated from the Illyrian. Later on he was, perhaps, a little too anxious to represent himself as having intended from the first to parody the fierceness and the "local colour" of the Romantics. "Vers l'an de grâce 1827 j'étais *romantique*," he says ironically, in the preface of 1840, as he reprints his work of thirteen years ago. "Nous disions aux *classiques*: 'Vos Grecs ne sont point des Grecs; vos Romains ne sont point des Romains; vous ne savez pas donner à vos compositions la *couleur locale*. Point de salut sans *couleur locale*.'" But no doubt he wished from the first to show that he also, by a mere disinterested effort of intelligence, could be as exotic as the Romantics; that Romanticism, like everything else, was a thing that could be done deliberately, done and then dropped. The invention of history and archaeology leads to history and archaeology themselves. Mérimée next produced a piece in dialogue on *La Jacquerie*, in which there is more and better history than drama; then followed his historical novel, the *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, in which he set himself, as deliberately as usual, to do more carefully what Walter Scott, then a fashion in France, had done with genius. He produced the most perfect of historical novels, and looked about for some new difficulty to conquer.

He found it in the short story, of which he was to make something firmer, more architectural, than anything yet made in this form of fiction. It was then that he wrote the best of his short stories, from the *Mateo Falcone* of 1829 to the *Carmen* of 1845. Here, anyone else would have said, he had found himself; here was the moment to pause, to "settle down" to the task of doing what he could do best, better than anyone else. But Mérimée had no sooner perfected his method than he began to tire of it. His imagination perhaps tired; he turned to history, and wrote books on the history of Spain and Russia; he became Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and wrote minute descriptions of churches; he translated from the Russian, from Poushkin, Gogol, and Tourguenieff; he travelled, and wrote somewhat dry accounts of his travels; he wrote *Lokis, La*

Chambre Bleue, and *Djoumane*, the only stories which he had written for twenty-five years; and he seems to have written them in order to prove to himself that he could still write them. He died at Cannes in 1870, "claquemuré entre deux vieilles *governess*," notes Goncourt in his *Journal*: "une des plus tristes fins du monde."

Mérimée is perhaps the only writer in whom form is equivalent to what is called in slang "good form." He did his best to assimilate his mind to what seemed to him, the English pattern, as others of his compatriots have had their clothes made by English tailors. The English pattern of mind seemed to him, not that mind as it has expressed itself heroically in poetry, and with something of loose splendour in prose, but the typical middle-class mind, severe, precise, doing things by rule, stiffly proud, a mask for emotion. It was not English literature which he cared for and wished to rival, but those sides which he saw most clearly of the English temperament. As the greatest English writers have not put those sides of the national character, to any considerable extent, into their books (perhaps because, being men of genius, they were exceptions to a rule), Mérimée's work, with its cold, exact, polite record of warm and savage things, has no resemblance with English literature, and becomes, in French literature, a new thing, the personal expression of a new, singular temperament.

"Ce comédien de l'insensibilité," Goncourt calls him; and it is Goncourt who relates the famous story of his childish resolve to keep his emotions to himself, after the discovery that even his parents could turn them into ridicule. "Il était né avec un cœur tendre et aimant," says Mérimée of the hero of his *Vase Etrusque*, "mais, à un age où l'on prend trop facilement des impressions qui durent toute la vie, sa sensibilité trop expansive lui avait attiré les railleries de ses camarades." In the exterior which Mérimée so carefully made for himself, it is not necessary to decide how much was genuine at the beginning and how much became genuine through force of habit. It made, at all events, the art of his stories; and we have only to turn to another page of the Goncourts' *Journal* to see how precisely that art corresponds with what struck those acute observers in the manner of his conversation. "Il cause en s'écoutant avec de mortels silences, lentement, mot par mot, goutte à goutte, comme s'il distillait ses effects, faisant tomber autour de ce qu'il dit une froideur glaciale." It is such an icy coldness that disengages itself from the finest of his stories; from *Mateo Falcone*, for instance, perhaps his masterpiece, in its intensity of effect and in its economy of means. It amused him to tell moving and pitiful things so relentlessly, getting the same pleasure in the anticipation of what his readers would feel that he got from the actual looks and words of the people to whom he talked in the drawing-rooms. He counted on a certain repugnance in those who most admired him, as men of his disposition count on the help of a certain instinctive dislike in those of whom they are most anxious to make themselves masters.

In his stories, with their force, clearness, concise energy, Mérimée is without charm; "as if," says Walter Pater, in his remarkable and closely packed essay, "in theological language, he were incapable of grace." "Gifted as he was with pure *mind*," with a style "the perfection of nobody's style," he is a kind of hard taskmaster, who is at least sure of getting his own way, sure of never loosening his hold. He has, above all things, a mastery over effect; and he has none of those preoccupations of the poet, of the thinker, or of the "inspired" writer, which so often come to shake the equilibrium of that to which they add a heavy and toppling burden of splendour. Each of his stories is a story, nothing more or less, and in each he does exactly what he set out to do, even the dry, scholarly digressions, as they may sometimes seem, being only a part of the plan, of the building up of the illusion. He is interested in his characters only as they come into the light of a crisis; they live for him only in that moment; all the rest is so much detail, so much psychology in the abstract, with which he has nothing to do. Maupassant was to follow him, while thinking that he followed Flaubert, in this rigorous art of cutting your coat to your cloth. It was Mérimée, really, who perfected the short story in France, who left it a model for the writers of every nation.

Towards the end of his life Mérimée became deeply interested in Russia, and it was through his translations and studies that Tourguenieff became almost a French writer. In Tourguenieff he had partly a follower, but one who gave a new, more profound, more essentially human character to the short story, which has since been developed so fruitfully in Russia. To the Russian, to Tourguenieff, to Tolstoi, to Gorki, the soul is interesting in itself, for its own sake. Mérimée only pays heed to it when it does something interesting, when it precipitates itself into action. That is why so many Russian stories, with all their charm and meaning, remain nebulous, and why Mérimée's are always hard, firm, each complete as a drama. Look at Gorki, and how easily he loses the thread of his narrative or how often he forgets to have a thread to follow, so significant to him is the mere existence of these people, among whose actions he is embarrassed to choose. Take the first act of his play, *Les Petits Bourgeois*, and see how little selection or composition there is, with what an assemblage of little intimate details, each closely observed, but each observed without relation to any other or to the movement of the whole. Mérimée gives us no detail which has not its almost mathematical significance, but in this orderly arrangement of life it sometimes happens that we are left with a sense of something out of which life has been trimmed dead.

"In history," says Mérimée, in the preface to his *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, "I care only for anecdotes." It was the anecdote which he cared for also in fiction, and with him, as with Stendhal, from whom he got the word and perhaps some of his taste for the thing, the anecdote was a somewhat more formal variety of what was afterwards to be called the document. Mérimée as a writer stands somewhere between Choderlos de Laclos or Crébillon fils, and the generation

of "Realists" which was to follow him. He has the naïve immorality, the deliberate frivolity of the eighteenth century; but he is frivolous with the gravity of a scholar. Genuinely interested in those questions which women discuss among themselves, he knew how to work artistically upon his own interest, giving it an ironical turn, which saves it from the criticism of his intelligence. And in those anecdotes, to which he reduces history, and out of which he makes the more living history of his fiction, he finds as much of the soul of great passions and profound emotions as he cares to consider. The document is not yet crude fact, as with the Realists; it is fact chosen carefully for its significance, and arranged just so much as it needs in order to seem as well as be significant. "Dans chaque anecdote pouvant servir à porter la lumière dans quelque coin du cœur," says Mérimée, speaking of Stendhal (he might be speaking for himself), "il retenait toujours ce qu'il appelait le *trait*, c'est à dire le mot ou l'action qui révèle la passion." It was for this word or action in which passion reveals itself that Mérimée was always a seeker: how often and how absolutely he found it, the tales which follow may be left to prove for themselves.

ARTHUR SYMONS.

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A.R.W.

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Born at Paris, September 28th, 1803

Died at Cannes, September 23rd, 1870

THE ABBÉ AUBAIN

It were idle to say how the following letters came into our possession. They seem to us curious, moral and instructive. We publish them without any change other than the suppression of certain proper names, and a few passages which have no connection with the incident in the life of the Abbé Aubain.

THE ABBÉ AUBAIN

From Madame de P—— to Madame de G——

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *November*, 1844.

I promised to write to you, my dear Sophie, and I keep my word; besides, I have nothing better to do these long evenings.

My last letter informed you that I had made the simultaneous discovery that I was thirty and ruined. For the first of these misfortunes, alas! there is no remedy; as for the second, we have resigned ourselves to it badly enough, but, after all, we are resigned. We must pass at least two years, to repair our fortune, in the dreary manor-house, from whence I write this to you. I have been simply heroic. Directly I knew of the state of our finances I proposed to Henry that he should economise in the country, and eight days later we were at Noirmoutiers.

I will not tell you anything of the journey. It was many years since I had found myself alone with my husband for such a length of time. Of course, we were both in a bad temper; but, as I was thoroughly determined to put on a good face, all went off well.

You were acquainted with my good resolutions, and you shall see if I am keeping to them. Behold us, then, installed. By the way, Noirmoutiers, from a picturesque point of view, leaves nothing to be desired. There are woods, and cliffs, and the sea within a quarter of a league. We have four great towers, the walls of which are fifteen feet thick. I have fitted a workroom in the recess of

the window. My drawing-room, which is sixty feet long, is decorated with figured tapestry; it is truly magnificent when lighted up by eight candles: quite a Sunday illumination. I die of fright every time I pass it after sunset. We are very badly furnished, as you may well believe. The doors do not fit closely, the wainscoting cracks, the wind whistles, and the sea roars in the most lugubrious fashion imaginable. Nevertheless I am beginning to grow accustomed to it.

I arrange and mend things, and I plant; before the hard frosts set in I shall have made a tolerable habitation. You may be certain that your tower will be ready by the spring. If I could but have you here now! The advantage of Noirmoutiers is that we have no neighbours: we are completely isolated. I am thankful to say I have no other callers but my priest, the Abbé Aubain. He is a well-mannered young man, although he has arched and bushy eyebrows and great dark eyes like those of a stage villain. Last Sunday he did not give us so bad a sermon for the country. It sounded very appropriate. "Misfortune was a benefit from Providence to purify our souls." Be it so. At that rate we ought to give thanks to that honest stockbroker who desired to purify our souls by running off with our money.

Good-bye, dear friend.

My piano has just come, and some big packing-cases. I must go and unpack them all.

P.S.—I reopen this letter to thank you for your present. It is most beautiful, far too beautiful for Noirmoutiers. The grey hood is charming. I recognise your taste there. I shall put it on for Mass on Sunday; perhaps a commercial traveller will be there to admire it. But for whom do you take me, with your novels? I wish to be, I *am*, a serious-minded person. Have I not sufficiently good reasons? I am going to educate myself. On my return to Paris, in three years from now (good heavens! I shall be thirty-three), I mean to be a Philaminte. But really, I do not know what books to ask you to send me. What do you advise me to learn? German or Latin? It would be very nice to read *Wilhelm Meister* in the original, or the tales of Hoffmann. Noirmoutiers is the right place for whimsical stories. But how am I to learn German at Noirmoutiers? Latin would suit me well, for I think it so unfair that men should keep it all to themselves. I should like to have lessons given me by my priest.

LETTER II.

The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *December*, 1844.

You may well be astonished. The time passes more quickly than you would believe, more quickly than I should have believed myself. The weakness of my lord and master supports my courage through everything. Really, men are very inferior to us. He is depressed beyond measure. He gets up as late as he can, rides his horse or goes hunting, or else pays calls on the dullest people imaginable—lawyers and magistrates who live in town, that is to say, six leagues from here. He goes to see them when it is wet! He began to read *Mauprat* eight days ago, and he is still in the first volume. "It is much better to be pleased with oneself than to slander one's neighbours." This is one of your proverbs. But I will leave him in order to talk of myself.

The country air does me incalculable good. I am magnificently well, and when I see myself in the glass (such a glass!) I do not look thirty; but then I walk a good deal. Yesterday I managed to get Henry to come with me to the seashore. While he shot gulls I read the pirate's song in the *Giaour*. On the beach, facing a rough sea, the fine verses seemed finer than ever. Our sea cannot rival that of Greece, but it has its poetry, as the sea everywhere has. Do you know what strikes me in Lord Byron? —his insight and understanding of nature. He does not talk of the sea from only having eaten turbot and oysters. He has sailed on it; he has seen storms. All his descriptions are from life. Our poets put rhyme first, then common sense—if there is any in verse. While I walk up and down, reading, watching and admiring, the Abbé Aubain—I do not know whether I have mentioned my Abbé to you; he is the village priest—came up and joined me. He is a young priest who often comes to me. He is well educated, and knows "how to talk with well-bred people." Besides, from his large dark eyes and pale, melancholy look, I can very well see that he has an interesting story, and I try to make it up for myself. We talked of the sea, of poetry; and, what will surprise you much in a priest of Noirmoutiers, he talked well. Then he took me to the ruins of an old abbey upon a cliff and pointed out to me a great gateway carved with delightful goblins. Oh! if only I had the money to restore it all! After this, in spite of Henry's remonstrances, who wanted his dinner, I insisted upon going to the priest's house to see a curious relic which the curé had found in a peasant's house. It was indeed very beautiful: a small box of Limoges enamel which would make a lovely jewel-case. But, good gracious! what a dwelling! And we, who believe ourselves poor! Imagine a tiny room on the ground floor, badly paved, whitewashed, furnished with a table and four chairs, and an armchair padded with straw, with a little flat cake of a cushion in it, stuffed, I should think, with peachstones, and covered with small pieces of white and red cotton. On the table were three or four large Greek and Latin folios. These were the Fathers of the Church, and below, as though hidden, I came upon *Jocelin*. He blushed. He was very attentive, however, in doing the honours of his wretched lodgings without pride or false modesty. I suspected he had had a romantic story. I soon had a proof of it. In the Byzantine casket which he showed us there was a faded bouquet five or six years old at least. "Is that a

relic?" I asked him. "No," he replied, with some agitation. "I do not know how it came there." Then he took the bouquet and slipped it carefully in his table drawer. Is that clear enough? I went back to the château saddened to have seen such poverty, but encouraged to bear my own, which, beside his, seemed of oriental opulence. You should have seen his surprise when Henry gave him twenty francs for a woman whom he had introduced to our notice! I really must make him a present. That straw armchair in which I sat is far too hard. I will give him one of those folding iron chairs like that which I took to Italy. You must choose me one, and send it to me as soon as possible.

LETTER III.

The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *February*, 1845.

I certainly am not bored at Noirmoutiers. Besides, I have found an interesting occupation, and I owe it to my Abbé. He really knows everything, botany included. It reminds me of Rousseau's *Letters* to hear the Latin name for a nasty onion I laid on the chimney-piece for want of a better place. "You know botany, then?" "Not very well," he replied; "just enough to teach the country folk the herbs which might be useful to them; just enough, I might say, to give a little interest to my solitary walks." I thought at once that it would be very amusing to gather pretty flowers in my walks, to dry them, and to arrange them in order in "my old Plutarch tied up with ribbons." "Do teach me botany," I said to him. He wished to wait until the spring, for there are no flowers at this bad time of the year. "But you have some dried flowers," I said; "I saw them at your house." I meant to refer to his tenderly preserved old bouquet. If you could have seen his face!... Poor wretched man! I pretty quickly repented of my indiscreet allusion. To make him forget it I hastened to tell him that one ought to have a collection of dried plants. This is called a *herbarium*. He agreed at once, and the very next day he brought me in a grey paper parcel several pretty plants, each with its own label. The course of botany had begun, and I made astonishing progress from the very first. But I had no idea botany was so immoral, or of the difficulty of the first explanations, above all from a priest. You know, my dear, plants marry just as we do, but most of them have many husbands. One set is called phanerogams, if I have remembered the barbarous name properly. It is Greek, and means to marry openly at the townhall. Then there are the cryptogams—those who marry secretly. The mushrooms that you eat marry in secret. All this is very shocking, but he did not come out of it so badly—better than I did, who had the silliness to shout with laughter, once or twice, at the most delicate passages. But I have become cautious now and I do not put any more questions.

LETTER IV.

The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *February*, 1845.

You must be burning to hear the story of that preciously preserved bouquet; but, the fact is, I dare not ask him about it. In the first place it is more than probable that there is no story underneath; then, if there is one, perhaps it would be a story which he did not like to talk about. As for me, I am quite convinced that ... but come, don't let us tell fibs! You know that I cannot keep any secrets from you. I know this story, and I will tell it you in a few words; nothing easier. "How did it come about, Monsieur l'abbé," I said to him one day, "that with your brains and education you resigned yourself to the care of a little village?" He replied, with a sad smile: "It is easier to be the pastor of poor peasants than of townspeople. Everyone must cut his coat according to his cloth." "That is why," said I, "you ought to be in a better position." "I was once told," he went on, "that your uncle, the Bishop of N——, had deigned to notice me in order to offer me the cure of Sainte-Marie; it is the best in the diocese. My old aunt, who is my only surviving relative, and who lives at N——, said that it was a very desirable position for me. But I am all right here, and I learnt with pleasure that the bishop had made another choice. What does it matter to me? Am I not happy at Noirmoutiers? If I can do a little good here it is my place; I ought not to leave it. Besides, town life reminds me...." He stopped, his eyes became sad and dreamy, then, recovering himself suddenly, he said, "We are not working at our botany...." I could not think any longer of the litter of old hay on the table, and I continued my questions. "When did you take orders?" "Nine years ago." "Nine years ... but surely you were then old enough to be established in a profession? I do not know, but I have always imagined it was not a youthful call which led you to the priesthood." "Alas! no," he said, in an ashamed manner; "but if my vocation came late, it was determined by causes ... by a cause...." He became embarrassed and could not finish. As for me, I plucked up courage. "I will wager," I said, "that a certain bouquet which I have seen had some part in that determination." Hardly had the impertinent question escaped me than I could have bitten out my tongue rather than have uttered such a thing, but it was too late. "Why, yes, Madam, that is true; I will tell you all about it, but not to-day—another time. The Angelus is about to ring." And he had left before the first stroke of the bell. I expected some terrible story. He came again the next day, and he himself took up the conversation of the

previous day. He confessed to me that he had loved a young person of N——, but she had little fortune, and he, a student, had no other resources besides his wits. He said to her: "I am going to Paris, where I hope to obtain an opening; you will not forget me while I am working day and night to make myself worthy of you?" The young lady was sixteen or seventeen years old, and was very sentimental. She gave him her bouquet as a token of faith. A year after he heard of her marriage with the lawyer of N—— just when he had obtained a professorship in a college. He was overwhelmed by the blow, and renounced the chair. He told me that during these years he could not think of anything else, and he seemed as much moved whilst reciting this simple love story as though it had only just happened. Then he took the bouquet out of his pocket. "It was childish of me to keep it," he said, "perhaps even it was wrong," and he threw it on the fire. When the poor flowers had finished crackling and blazing, he went on in a calmer voice: "I am grateful to you for having asked me to tell this story. I have to thank you for making me part with a souvenir which it is scarcely suitable I should keep." But his heart was full, and it was easy to see how much the sacrifice had cost him. Poor priests! what a life is theirs! They must forbid themselves the most innocent thoughts, and must banish from their hearts every feeling which makes the happiness of other men ... even those recollections which are a part of life itself. Priests remind us of ourselves, of all unfortunate women to whom every living feeling is forbidden as criminal. We are allowed to suffer, but even in that we must hide our pain. Good-bye, I reproach myself for my ill-advised curiosity, but it was indulged in on your behalf.

(We omit here several letters which do not contain any reference to the Abbé Aubain.)

LETTER V.

The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *May*, 1845.

I have meant to write to you for a long time, my dear Sophie, but have always been kept back by a feeling of shame. What I want to tell you is so strange, so ridiculous and, withal, so sad, that I scarcely know whether you will be moved to tears or to laughter. I am still at a loss to understand it myself. But I will come to the facts without more beating about the bush. I have mentioned the Abbé Aubain to you several times in my previous letters: he is the curé of our village, Noirmoutiers. I also told you the story which led to his entering into the priesthood. Living away from everybody, and my mind full of those melancholy thoughts which you know trouble me, the companionship of a clever, cultivated and agreeable man was extremely congenial to me. Very likely I let him see that he interested me, for, in a very short time, he came to our house as though he were an old friend. I admit it was quite a novel pleasure to me to talk with a man of cultured mind. The ignorance of the world did but enhance his intellectual distinction. Perhaps, too—for I must tell you everything; I do not wish to hide from you any little failings of my character—perhaps, too, the naïvete of my coquetry (to use your own expression), for which you have often scolded me, has been at work unconsciously. I love to be pleasant to people who please me, and I want to be liked by those whom I like.... I see you open your eyes wide at this discourse, and I think I can hear you exclaim "Julie!" Don't be anxious; I am too old to be silly. But to continue. A degree of intimacy has sprung up between us without—let me hasten to say—anything either having been said or done inconsistent with his sacred calling. He is very happy in my society. We often talk of his earlier days, and more than once my evil genius has prompted me to bring up the subject of that romantic attachment which cost him a bouquet (now lying in ashes on my hearth) and the gloomy cassock he wears. It was not difficult to see that he thought of his faithless mistress less often. One day he met her in the town, and even spoke to her. He told me all about it on his return, and added quite calmly that she was happy and had several charming children. He saw, by chance, some of Henry's fits of temper; hence ensued almost unavoidable confidences from my side, and on his increased sympathy. He understood my husband as though he had known him for a matter of ten years. Furthermore, his advice was as wise as yours, and more impartial, for you always hold that both sides are in the wrong. He always thinks I am in the right, but at the same time recommends prudence and tact. In short, he proves himself a devoted friend. There is something almost feminine about him which captivates me. His disposition reminds me of yours: it is great-minded and strong, sensitive and reserved, with an exaggerated sense of duty.... I jostle my words together one on top of the other in order to delay what I want to tell you. I cannot speak openly; this paper frightens me. If only I had you in the fireside corner, with a little frame between us, embroidering the same piece of work! But at length, at length, Sophie, I must tell you the real truth. The poor fellow is in love with me. You may laugh, or perhaps you are shocked? I wish I could see you just now. He has not of course said a word to me, but those large dark eyes of his cannot lie.... At these words I believe you will laugh. What wonderful eyes those are which speak unconsciously! I have seen any number of men try to make theirs expressive who only managed to look idiotic. I must confess that my bad angel almost rejoiced at first over this unlucky state of things. To make a conquest—such a harmless conquest as this one—at my age! It is something to be able to excite such a feeling, such an impossible passion!... But shame on me! This vile feeling soon passed away. I said to myself I have done wrong to a worthy man by my thoughtless conduct. It is dreadful; I must put a stop to it immediately. I racked my brains to think how I could send him away. One day we were walking together on the beach at low tide; he did not dare to utter one word, and I was equally embarrassed. Five moments of deadly silence followed, during which I picked up shells to cover

my confusion. At last I said to him, "My dear Abbé, you must certainly have a better living than this. I shall write to my uncle the bishop; I will go to see him if necessary." "Leave Noirmoutiers!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands. "But I am so happy here! What more can I desire while you are here? You have overwhelmed me with good things, and my little house has become a palace." "No," I replied, "my uncle is very old; if I had the misfortune to lose him I should not know whom to address to obtain a suitable post." "Alas! Madam, I should be very sorry to leave this village!... The curé de Sainte-Marie is dead,... but I am not troubled, because I believe he will be replaced by l'abbé Raton, who is a most excellent priest. I am delighted with his appointment, for if Monseigneur had thought of me——"

"The curé de Sainte-Marie is dead!" I cried.

"I will go to my uncle at N—— to-day."

"Ah, Madam, do nothing in the matter. The Abbé Raton is much better fitted for it than I; and, then, to leave Noirmoutiers!..."

"Monsieur l'abbé," I said resolutely, "you must!" At these words he lowered his head and did not venture to oppose. I nearly ran back to the château. He followed me a couple of paces behind, poor man, too much upset to open his mouth. He was quite crushed. I did not lose a minute. By eight o'clock I was at my uncle's house. I found him very much prejudiced in favour of his Raton; but he is fond of me, and I know my power. At length, after a long discussion, I got my way. Raton is cast aside, and l'abbé Aubain is curé of Sainte-Marie. He has been at the town for two days. The poor fellow understood my "You must." He thanked me seriously, but spoke of nothing beyond his gratitude. I am grateful to him for leaving Noirmoutiers so soon, and for telling me even that he was in haste to go and thank Monseigneur. He sent me at parting his pretty Byzantine casket, and asked permission to write to me sometimes. Ah, well, my dear. *Are you satisfied, Coucy?* This is a lesson which I shall not forget when I get back into the world. But then I shall be thirty-three, and shall hardly expect to be admired ... and with such devotion as his!... Truly, that would be out of the question. Never mind, from the ruins of all this folly I save a pretty casket and a true friend. When I am forty, and a grandmother, I will plot to obtain the Abbé Aubain a living in Paris. Some day you will see this come to pass, my dear, and he will give your daughter her first communion.

LETTER VI.

The Abbé Aubain to the Abbé Bruneau. Professor of Theology at Saint-A——.

N——, *May*, 1845.

My Dear Professor,—It is the curé of Sainte-Marie who is writing to you, not any longer the humble, officiating priest of Noirmoutiers. I have left my solitary marshes and behold me a citizen, installed in a fine living, in the best street in N——; curé of a large, well-built church, well kept up, of splendid architecture, depicted in every album in France. The first time that I said Mass before a marble altar, which glittered with gilding, I had to ask myself if I really were myself. But it is true enough, and one of my delights is the hope that at the next vacation you will come and pay me a visit. I shall have a comfortable room to offer you, and a good bed, not to mention some bordeaux, which I call my bordeaux of Noirmoutiers; and I venture to say it is worth your acceptance. But, you ask me, how did you get from Noirmoutiers to Sainte-Marie? You left me at the entrance to the nave, you find me now at the steeple.

O Melibœe deus nobis hæc otia fecit.

Providence, my dear Professor, sent a grand lady from Paris to Noirmoutiers. Misfortunes of a kind we shall never know had temporarily reduced them to an income of 10,000 crowns per annum. She is an agreeable and good woman, unfortunately a bit jaded by frivolous reading, and by association with the dandies of the capital. Bored to death by a husband with whom she has little in common, she did me the honour of becoming interested in me. There were endless presents and continual invitations, then every day some fresh scheme in which I was wanted. "M. l'abbé, I want to learn Latin.... M. l'abbé, I want to be taught botany." *Horresco referens*, did she not also desire that I should expound theology to her? What would you have, my dear Professor? In fact, to quench such thirst for knowledge would have required all the professors of Saint-A——. Fortunately, such whims never last long: the course of studies rarely lasted beyond the third lesson. When I told her that the Latin for rose was *rosa*, she exclaimed, "What a well of learning you are, M. l'abbé! How could you allow yourself to be buried at Noirmoutiers?" To tell you the truth, my dear Professor, the good lady, through reading the silly books that are produced nowadays, got all sorts of queer ideas into her head. One day she lent me a book which she had just received from Paris, and which enraptured her. *Abélard*, by M. de Rémusat. Doubtless you have read it, and admired the learned research made by the author, unfortunately in so wrong a spirit. At first I skipped to the second volume, containing the "Philosophy of Abélard," and, after reading that with the greatest interest, I returned to the first, to the life of the great heresiarch. This, of course, was all Madam had deigned to read. That, my dear Professor, opened my eyes. I realised that there was danger in the society of fine ladies enamoured of learning. This one of Noirmoutiers could give points to Héloïse in the matter of infatuation. This, to me, extremely novel situation was troubling me much, when, suddenly, she said to me, "M. l'abbé, the

incumbent of Sainte-Marie is dead, and I want you to have the living. *You must*." Immediately she drove off in her carriage to see Monseigneur; and, a few days later, I was curé of Sainte-Marie, somewhat ashamed of having obtained the living by favour, but in other respects delighted to be far away from the toils of a *lioness* of the capital. A lioness, my dear Professor, is the Parisian expression for a woman of fashion.

> Ω Ζεῦ, γυναικῶν οἷον ὦπάσὰς γένος.[1]

Ought I to have rejected this good fortune in order to defy the temptation? What nonsense! Did not St. Thomas of Canterbury accept castles from Henry II.? Good-bye, my dear Professor, I look forward to discussing philosophy with you in a few months' time, each of us in a comfortable armchair, before a plump chicken and a bottle of bordeaux, *more philosophorum. Vac let me ama*.

[1] A line taken, I believe, from the *Seven Against Thebes*, of Æschylus, "O Jupiter! women!... what a race thou hast given us!" The Abbé Aubain and his Professor, the Abbé Bruneau, are good classical scholars.

MATEO FALCONE

Coming out of Porto-Vecchio, and turning north-west towards the centre of the island, the ground is seen to rise very rapidly, and, after three hours' walk by tortuous paths, blocked by large boulders of rocks, and sometimes cut by ravines, the traveller finds himself on the edge of a very broad *mâquis*, or open plateau. These plateaus are the home of the Corsican shepherds, and the resort of those who have come in conflict with the law. The Corsican peasant sets fire to a certain stretch of forest to spare himself the trouble of manuring his lands: so much the worse if the flames spread further than is needed. Whatever happens, he is sure to have a good harvest by sowing upon this ground, fertilised by the ashes of the trees which grew on it. When the corn is gathered, they leave the straw because it is too much trouble to gather. The roots, which remain in the earth without being consumed, sprout, in the following spring, into very thick shoots, which, in a few years, reach to a height of seven or eight feet. It is this kind of underwood which is called *mâquis*. It is composed of different kinds of trees and shrubs mixed up and entangled as in a wild state of nature. It is only with hatchet in hand that man can open a way through, and there are *mâquis* so dense and so thick that not even the wild sheep can penetrate them.

If you have killed a man, go into the *mâquis* of Porto-Vecchio, with a good gun and powder and shot, and you will live there in safety. Do not forget to take a brown cloak, furnished with a hood, which will serve as a coverlet and mattress. The shepherds will give you milk, cheese, chestnuts, and you will have nothing to fear from the hand of the law, nor from the relatives of the dead, except when you go down into the town to renew your stock of ammunition.

When I was in Corsica in 18— Mateo Falcone's house was half a league from this *mâquis*. He was a comparatively rich man for that country, living handsomely, that is to say, without doing anything, from the produce of his herds, which the shepherds, a sort of nomadic people, led to pasture here and there over the mountains. When I saw him, two years after the event that I am about to tell, he seemed about fifty years of age at the most. Imagine a small, but robust man, with jet-black, curly hair, an aquiline nose, thin lips, large and piercing eyes, and a deeply tanned complexion. His skill in shooting passed for extraordinary, even in his country, where there are so many crack shots. For example, Mateo would never fire on a sheep with swanshot, but, at one hundred and twenty paces, he would strike it with a bullet in its head or shoulders as he chose. He could use his gun at night as easily as by day, and I was told the following example of his adroitness, which will seem almost incredible to those who have not travelled in Corsica. A lighted candle was placed behind a transparent piece of paper, as large as a plate, at eighty paces off. He put himself into position, then the candle was extinguished, and in a minute's time, in complete darkness, he shot and pierced the paper three times out of four.

With this conspicuous talent Mateo Falcone had earned a great reputation. He was said to be a loyal friend, but a dangerous enemy; in other respects he was obliging and gave alms, and he lived at peace with everybody in the district of Porto-Vecchio. But it is told of him that when at Corte, where he had found his wife, he had very quickly freed himself of a rival reputed to be equally formidable in love as in war; at any rate, people attributed to Mateo a certain gunshot which surprised his rival while in the act of shaving before a small mirror hung in his window. After the affair had been hushed up Mateo married. His wife Giuseppa at first presented him with three daughters, which enraged him, but finally a son came whom he named Fortunato; he was the hope of the family, the inheritor of its name. The girls were well married; their father could reckon in case of need upon the poniards and rifles of his sons-in-law. The son was only ten years old, but he had already shown signs of a promising disposition.

One autumn day Mateo and his wife set out early to visit one of their flocks in a clearing of the *mâquis*. Little Fortunato wanted to go with them, but the clearing was too far off; besides, it was necessary that someone should stay and mind the house; so his father refused. We shall soon see that he had occasion to repent of this.

He had been gone several hours and little Fortunato was quietly lying out in the sunshine, looking at the blue mountains, and thinking that on the following Sunday he would be going to

town to have dinner at his uncle's, the corporal,[1] when his meditations were suddenly interrupted by the firing of a gun. He got up and turned towards that side of the plain from which the sound had proceeded. Other shots followed, fired at irregular intervals, and each time they came nearer and nearer until he saw a man on the path which led from the plain to Mateo's house. He wore a pointed cap like a mountaineer, he was bearded, and clothed in rags, and he dragged himself along with difficulty, leaning on his gun. He had just received a gunshot in the thigh.

This man was a *bandit* (Corsican for one who is proscribed) who, having set out at night to get some powder from the town, had fallen on the way into an ambush of Corsican soldiers.[2] After a vigorous defence he had succeeded in escaping, but they gave chase hotly, firing at him from rock to rock. He was only a little in advance of the soldiers, and his wound made it out of the question for him to reach the *mâquis* before being overtaken.

He came up to Fortunato and said—

"Are you the son of Mateo Falcone?"

"Yes."

"I am Gianetto Sanpiero. I am pursued by the yellow-collars.[3] Hide me, for I cannot go any further."

"But what will my father say if I hide you without his permission?"

"He will say that you did right."

"How do you know?"

"Hide me quickly; they are coming."

"Wait till my father returns."

"Good Lord! how can I wait? They will be here in five minutes. Come, hide me, or I will kill you."

Fortunato replied with the utmost coolness—

"Your gun is unloaded, and there are no more cartridges in your *carchera*."[4]

"I have my stiletto."

"But could you run as fast as I can?"

With a bound he put himself out of reach.

"You are no son of Mateo Falcone! Will you let me be taken in front of his house?"

The child seemed moved.

"What will you give me if I hide you?" he said, drawing nearer.

The bandit felt in the leather pocket that hung from his side and took out a five-franc piece, which he had put aside, no doubt, for powder. Fortunato smiled at the sight of the piece of silver, and, seizing hold of it, he said to Gianetto—

"Don't be afraid."

He quickly made a large hole in a haystack which stood close by the house. Gianetto crouched down in it, and the child covered him up so as to leave a little breathing space, and yet in such a way as to make it impossible for anyone to suspect that the hay concealed a man. He acted, further, with the ingenious cunning of the savage. He fetched a cat and her kittens and put them on the top of the haystack to make believe that it had not been touched for a long time. Then he carefully covered over with dust the bloodstains which he had noticed on the path near the house, and, this done, he lay down again in the sun with the utmost sangfroid.

Some minutes later six men with brown uniform with yellow collars, commanded by an adjutant, stood before Mateo's door. This adjutant was a distant relative of the Falcones. (It is said that further degrees of relationship are recognised in Corsica than anywhere else.) His name was Tiodoro Gamba; he was an energetic man, greatly feared by the banditti, and had already hunted out many of them.

"Good day, youngster," he said, coming up to Fortunato. "How you have grown! Did you see a man pass just now?"

"Oh, I am not yet so tall as you, cousin," the child replied, with a foolish look.

"You soon will be. But, tell me, have you not seen a man pass by?"

"Have I seen a man pass by?"

"Yes, a man with a pointed black velvet cap and a waistcoat embroidered in red and yellow."

"A man with a pointed cap and a waistcoat embroidered in scarlet and yellow?"

"Yes; answer sharply and don't repeat my questions."

"The priest passed our door this morning on his horse Piero. He asked me how papa was, and I replied——"

"You are making game of me, you rascal. Tell me at once which way Gianetto went, for it is he we are after; I am certain he took this path."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know that? I know you have seen him."

"How can one see passers-by when one is asleep?"

"You were not asleep, you little demon: the gunshots would wake you."

"You think, then, cousin, that your guns make noise enough? My father's rifle makes much more noise."

"May the devil take you, you young scamp. I am absolutely certain you have seen Gianetto. Perhaps you have even hidden him. Here, you fellows, go into the house, and see if our man is not there. He could only walk on one foot, and he has too much common sense, the villain, to have tried to reach the *mâquis* limping. Besides, the traces of blood stop here."

"Whatever will papa say?" Fortunato asked, with a chuckle. "What will he say when he finds out that his house has been searched during his absence?"

"Do you know that I can make you change your tune, you scamp?" cried the adjutant Gamba, seizing him by the ear. "Perhaps you will speak when you have had a thrashing with the flat of a sword."

Fortunato kept on laughing derisively.

"My father is Mateo Falcone," he said significantly.

"Do you know, you young scamp, that I can take you away to Corte or to Bastia? I shall put you in a dungeon, on a bed of straw, with your feet in irons, and I shall guillotine you if you do not tell me where Gianetto Sanpiero is."

The child burst out laughing at this ridiculous menace.

"My father is Mateo Falcone," he repeated.

"Adjutant, do not let us embroil ourselves with Mateo," one of the soldiers whispered.

Gamba was evidently embarrassed. He talked in a low voice with his soldiers, who had already been all over the house. It was not a lengthy operation, for a Corsican hut only consists of a single square room. The furniture comprises a table, benches, boxes and utensils for cooking and hunting. All this time little Fortunato caressed his cat, and seemed, maliciously, to enjoy the confusion of his cousin and the soldiers.

One soldier came up to the haycock. He looked at the cat and carelessly stirred the hay with his bayonet, shrugging his shoulders as though he thought the precaution ridiculous. Nothing moved, and the face of the child did not betray the least agitation.

The adjutant and his band were in despair; they looked solemnly out over the plain, half inclined to return the way they had come; but their chief, convinced that threats would produce no effect upon the son of Falcone, thought he would make one last effort by trying the effect of favours and presents.

"My boy," he said, "you are a wide-awake young dog, I can see. You will get on. But you play a dangerous game with me; and, if I did not want to give pain to my cousin Mateo, devil take it! I would carry you off with me."

"Bah!"

"But, when my cousin returns I shall tell him all about it, and he will give you the whip till he draws blood for having told me lies."

"How do you know that?"

"You will see. But, look here, be a good lad and I will give you something."

"You had better go and look for Gianetto in the *mâquis*, cousin, for if you stay any longer it will take a cleverer fellow than you to catch him."

The adjutant drew a watch out of his pocket, a silver watch worth quite ten crowns. He watched how little Fortunato's eyes sparkled as he looked at it, and he held out the watch at the end of its steel chain.

"You rogue," he said, "you would like to have such a watch as this hung round your neck, and to go and walk up and down the streets of Porto-Vecchio as proud as a peacock; people would ask you the time, and you would reply, 'Look at my watch!'"

"When I am grown up, my uncle the corporal will give me a watch."

"Yes; but your uncle's son has one already—not such a fine one as this, however—for he is

younger than you."

The boy sighed.

"Well, would you like this watch, kiddy?"

Fortunato ogled the watch out of the corner of his eyes, just as a cat does when a whole chicken is given to it. It dares not pounce upon the prey, because it is afraid a joke is being played on it, but it turns its eyes away now and then, to avoid succumbing to the temptation, licking its lips all the time as though to say to its master, "What a cruel joke you are playing on me!"

The adjutant Gamba, however, seemed really willing to give the watch. Fortunato did not hold out his hand; but he said to him with a bitter smile—

"Why do you make fun of me?"

"I swear I am not joking. Only tell me where Gianetto is, and this watch is yours."

Fortunato smiled incredulously, and fixed his black eyes on those of the adjutant. He tried to find in them the faith he would fain have in his words.

"May I lose my epaulettes," cried the adjutant, "if I do not give you the watch upon that condition! I call my men to witness, and then I cannot retract."

As he spoke, he held the watch nearer and nearer until it almost touched the child's pale cheeks. His face plainly expressed the conflict going on in his mind between covetousness and the claims of hospitality. His bare breast heaved violently almost to suffocation. All the time the watch dangled and twisted and even hit the tip of his nose. By degrees he raised his right hand towards the watch, his finger ends touched it; and its whole weight rested on his palm although the adjutant still held the end of the chain loosely.... The watch face was blue.... The case was newly polished.... It seemed blazing in the sun like fire.... The temptation was too strong.

Fortunato raised his left hand at the same time, and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder to the haycock against which he was leaning. The adjutant understood him immediately, and let go the end of the chain. Fortunato felt himself sole possessor of the watch. He jumped up with the agility of a deer, and stood ten paces distant from the haycock, which the soldiers at once began to upset.

It was not long before they saw the hay move, and a bleeding man came out, poniard in hand; when, however, he tried to rise to his feet his stiffening wound prevented him from standing. He fell down. The adjutant threw himself upon him and snatched away his dagger. He was speedily and strongly bound, in spite of his resistance.

Gianetto was bound and laid on the ground like a bundle of faggots. He turned his head towards Fortunato, who had come up to him.

"Son of ——," he said to him more in contempt than in anger.

The boy threw to him the silver piece that he had received from him, feeling conscious that he no longer deserved it; but the outlaw took no notice of the action. He merely said in a cool voice to the adjutant—

"My dear Gamba, I cannot walk; you will be obliged to carry me to the town."

"You could run as fast as a kid just now," his captor retorted brutally. "But don't be anxious, I am glad enough to have caught you: I would carry you for a league on my own back and not feel tired. All the same, my friend, we will make a litter for you out of the branches and your cloak. The farm at Crespoli will provide us with horses."

"All right," said the prisoner; "I hope you will put a little straw on your litter to make it easier for me."

While the soldiers were busy, some making a rough stretcher out of chestnut boughs and others dressing Gianetto's wound, Mateo Falcone and his wife suddenly appeared in a turning of the path from the *mâquis*. The wife came in bending laboriously under the weight of a huge sack of chestnuts, while her husband jaunted up carrying his gun in one hand, and a second gun slung in his shoulder-belt. It is considered undignified for a man to carry any other burden but his weapons.

When he saw the soldiers, Mateo's first thought was that they had come to arrest him. But he had no ground for this fear, he had never quarrelled with the law. On the contrary he bore a good reputation. He was, as the saying is, particularly well thought of. But he was a Corsican, and mountain bred, and there are but few Corsican mountaineers who, if they search their memories sufficiently, cannot recall some little peccadillo, some gunshot, or dagger thrust, or such-like bagatelle. Mateo's conscience was clearer than most, for it was fully ten years since he had pointed his gun at any man; yet at the same time he was cautious, and he prepared to make a brave defence if needs be.

"Wife, put down your sack," he said, "and keep yourself in readiness."

She obeyed immediately. He gave her the gun which was slung over his shoulder, as it was likely to be the one that would inconvenience him the most. He held the other gun in readiness, and

proceeded leisurely towards the house by the side of the trees which bordered the path, ready to throw himself behind the largest trunk for cover, and to fire at the least sign of hostility. His wife walked close behind him holding her reloaded gun and her cartridges. It was the duty of a good housewife, in case of a conflict, to reload her husband's arms.

On his side, the adjutant was very uneasy at the sight of Mateo advancing thus upon them with measured steps, his gun pointed and finger on trigger.

"If it happens that Gianetto is related to Mateo," thought he, "or he is his friend, and he means to protect him, two of his bullets will be put into two of us as sure as a letter goes to the post, and he will aim at me in spite of our kinship!..."

In this perplexity, he put on a bold face and went forward alone towards Mateo to tell him what had happened, greeting him like an old acquaintance. But the brief interval which separated him from Mateo seemed to him of terribly long duration.

"Hullo! Ah! my old comrade," he called out. "How are you, old fellow? I am your cousin Gamba."

Mateo did not say a word, but stood still; and while the other was speaking, he softly raised the muzzle of his rifle in such a manner that by the time the adjutant came up to him it was pointing sky-wards.

"Good day, brother,"[5] said the adjutant, holding out his hand. "It is a very long time since I saw you."

"Good day, brother."

"I just called in when passing to say 'good day' to you and cousin Pepa. We have done a long tramp to-day; but we must not complain of fatigue, for we have taken a fine catch. We have got hold of Gianetto Sanpiero."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Giuseppa. "He stole one of our milch goats last week."

Gamba rejoiced at these words.

"Poor devil!" said Mateo, "he was hungry."

"The fellow fought like a lion," continued the adjutant, slightly nettled. "He killed one of the men, and, not content to stop there, he broke Corporal Chardon's arm; but that is not of much consequence, for he is only a Frenchman.... Then he hid himself so cleverly that the devil could not have found him. If it had not been for my little cousin Fortunato, I should never have discovered him."

"Fortunato?" cried Mateo.

"Fortunato?" repeated Giuseppa.

"Yes; Gianetto was concealed in your haycock there, but my little cousin showed me his trick. I will speak of him to his uncle the corporal, who will send him a nice present as a reward. And both his name and yours will be in the report which I shall send to the superintendent."

"Curse you!" cried Mateo under his breath.

By this time they had rejoined the company. Gianetto was already laid on his litter, and they were ready to set out. When he saw Mateo in Gamba's company he smiled a strange smile; then, turning towards the door of the house, he spat on the threshold.

"It is the house of a traitor!" he exclaimed.

No man but one willing to die would have dared to utter the word "traitor" in connection with Falcone. A quick stroke from a dagger, without need for a second, would have immediately wiped out the insult. But Mateo made no other movement beyond putting his hand to his head like a dazed man.

Fortunato went into the house when he saw his father come up. He reappeared shortly carrying a jug of milk, which he offered with downcast eyes to Gianetto.

"Keep off me!" roared the outlaw.

Then, turning to one of the soldiers, he said——

"Comrade, give me a drink of water."

The soldier placed the flask in his hands, and the bandit drank the water given him by a man with whom he had but now exchanged gunshots. He then asked that his hands might be tied crossed over his breast instead of behind his back.

"I prefer," he said, "to lie down comfortably."

They granted him his request. Then, at a sign from the adjutant, they set out, first bidding adieu to Mateo, who answered never a word, and descended at a quick pace towards the plain.

Well-nigh ten minutes elapsed before Mateo opened his mouth. The child looked uneasily first at his mother, then at his father, who leant on his gun, looking at him with an expression of

concentrated anger.

"Well, you have made a pretty beginning," said Mateo at last in a voice calm, but terrifying, to those who knew the man.

"Father," the boy cried out, with tears in his eyes, just ready to fall at his knees.

"Out of my sight!" shouted Mateo.

The child stopped motionless a few steps off his father, and began to sob.

Giuseppa came near him. She had just seen the end of the watch-chain hanging from out his shirt.

"Who gave you that watch?" she asked severely.

"My cousin the adjutant."

Falcone seized the watch, and threw it against a stone with such force that it broke into a thousand pieces.

"Woman," he said, "is this my child?"

Giuseppa's brown cheeks flamed brick-red.

"What are you saying, Mateo? Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Yes, very well. This child is the first traitor of his race."

Fortunato's sobs and hiccoughs redoubled, and Falcone kept his lynx eyes steadily fixed on him. At length he struck the ground with the butt end of his gun; then he flung it across his shoulder, retook the way to the *mâquis*, and ordered Fortunato to follow him. The child obeyed.

Giuseppa ran after Mateo, and seized him by the arm.

"He is your son," she said in a trembling voice, fixing her black eyes on those of her husband, as though to read all that was passing in his mind.

"Leave go," replied Mateo; "I am his father."

Giuseppa kissed her son, and went back crying into the hut. She threw herself on her knees before an image of the Virgin, and prayed fervently. When Falcone had walked about two hundred yards along the path he stopped at a little ravine and went down into it. He sounded the ground with the butt end of his gun, and found it soft and easy to dig. The spot seemed suitable to his purpose.

"Fortunato, go near to that large rock."

The boy did as he was told, then knelt down.

"Father, father, do not kill me!"

"Say your prayers!" repeated Mateo in a terrible voice.

The child repeated the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, stammering and sobbing. The father said "Amen!" in a firm voice at the close of each prayer.

"Are those all the prayers you know?"

"I know also the Ave Maria and Litany, that my aunt taught me, father."

"It is long, but never mind."

The child finished the Litany in a faint voice.

"Have you finished?"

"Oh, father, forgive me! forgive me! I will never do it again. I will beg my cousin the corporal with all my might to pardon Gianetto!"

He went on imploring. Mateo loaded his rifle and took aim.

"May God forgive you!" he said.

The boy made a frantic effort to get up and clasp his father's knees, but he had no time. Mateo fired, and Fortunato fell stone dead.

Without throwing a single glance at the body, Mateo went back to his house to fetch a spade with which to bury his son. He had only returned a little way along the path when he met Giuseppa, who had run out alarmed by the sound of firing.

"What have you done?" she cried.

"Justice!"

"Where is he?"

"In the ravine; I am going to bury him. He died a Christian. I shall have a mass sung for him. Let

someone tell my son-in-law Tiodoro Bianchi to come and live with us."

1829.

[1] Corporals were formerly the chief officers of the Corsican communes after they had rebelled against the feudal lords. To-day the name is still given sometimes to a man who, by his property, his connections and his clients, exercises influence, and a kind of effective magistracy over a *pieve* or canton. By an ancient custom Corsicans divide themselves into five castes: *gentlemen* (of whom some are of higher, *magnifiques*, some of lower, *signori*, estate), corporals, citizens, plebeians and foreigners.

[2] *Voltigeurs*: a body raised of late years by the Government, which acts in conjunction with the gendarmes in the maintenance of order.

[3] The uniform of the *voltigeurs* was brown with a yellow collar.

[4] A leather belt which served the joint purposes of a cartridge-box and pocket for despatches and orders.

[5] The ordinary greeting of Corsicans.

THE VISION OF CHARLES XI

"There are more things in heav'n and earth, Horatio,
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

SHAKSPEARE: *Hamlet.*

Though people laugh at visions and supernatural apparitions, several have been too well authenticated to be discredited, for, should one be consistent, it would be necessary to ignore the whole witness of historic evidence.

A correctly drawn-up report, signed by four reliable witnesses, is the guarantee of the truth of the incident about to be related. I should add that the prediction set forth in this report was so set forth and cited a very long time before the events occurred in our days which seemed to fulfil it.

Charles XI., father of the famous Charles XII., was a most despotic king, but at the same time the wisest of the monarchs who have reigned over Sweden. He restricted the overbearing privileges of the nobility, abolished the power of the Senate, and created laws by his own authority; in fact, he changed the constitution of the country, which before was an oligarchy, and compelled the states to vest the absolute control in him. He was, besides, an enlightened man, steadfastly attached to the Lutheran religion, brave, of an inflexible, self-contained, decided character, and entirely devoid of imagination.

He had just lost his wife, Ulrique Eléonore. Although it is said that his severity had hastened her end, he held her in esteem, and appeared more affected by her death than would have been expected of a man so hard of heart. After that event he grew still more taciturn and gloomy than before, and gave himself up to work with an application that showed an urgent desire to dispel sad thoughts.

At the close of one autumn evening he was sitting in his private apartment in the Stockholm Palace, in his dressing-gown and slippers, before a great fire. With him was his chamberlain, Count Brahé, who was one of his most favoured courtiers, and his physician, Baumgarten, who, it may be remarked in passing, set up for a sceptic, and who would have liked people to disbelieve in everything but in medicine. This night he had been summoned to advise on some slight ailment.

The evening lengthened, but contrary to his habit the King made no sign of dismissal to his companions. He sat in deep silence, his head lowered, and his eyes fixed upon the burning logs, wearied of their company, but afraid, without knowing why, of being left alone. Count Brahé had shrewdly observed that his presence was distasteful to the King, and had several times hinted that he feared His Majesty was in need of repose; but the King had signified by a gesture that he wished him to remain. The physician, in his turn, spoke of the ill-effects to health of keeping late hours. Charles only muttered, "Stay where you are; I have no desire to sleep yet."

At this stage the courtiers tried several different topics of conversation, but all fell flat at the end of the second or third sentence. It was evident that His Majesty was in one of his black moods, and in such circumstance the position of a courtier is decidedly delicate. Count Brahé, suspecting that the King was brooding over the loss of his wife, gazed for some time at the portrait of the Queen which hung on the wall of the room, and remarked with a deep sigh—

"What an excellent likeness! Just the expression she wore, so majestic and yet so gentle."

"Bah!" the King broke in rudely. "That portrait is too flattering. The Queen was ugly."

He was always suspicious of there being underlying reproaches whenever anyone mentioned her name in his presence. Then, vexed at his harshness, he rose and paced the room to hide a blush of shame. He stopped in front of the window which looked on to the courtyard.

It was a dark night and the moon was in its first quarter. The palace in which the Kings of Sweden now reside was not then finished, so that Charles XI., who had begun it, lived then in the old palace on the promontory of Ritterholm overlooking the Lake Mœler. It was a vast building in the form of a horse-shoe. The King's cabinet was at one of the extremities, and nearly opposite it was the large audience hall where Parliament assembled to receive communications from the Crown.

The windows of this chamber appeared to be illuminated with a bright light. This struck the King as strange, but at first he thought the light might be produced by the torch of some valet. Still, what could anybody be doing there at such an hour, and in a room which had not been opened for some time? Besides, the light was too bright to proceed from a single torch. It might be the work of an incendiary, but there was no smoke, and the windows were not broken.

Charles watched the windows some time in silence. No sound could be heard; everything betokened simply an illumination. Meanwhile Count Brahé extended his hand towards the bellrope to summon a page in order to send him to find out the cause of this singular light, but the King stopped him. "I will go to the hall myself," he said.

Whilst he spoke they saw his face grow pale with superstitious fear; but he went out with a firm tread, followed by the chamberlain and physician, each holding a lighted candle.

Baumgarten went to rouse the sleeping porter who had charge of the keys with an order from the King to open immediately the doors of the assembly hall. The man was greatly surprised at this unexpected order. He dressed himself quickly, and joined the King with his bunch of keys. At first he opened the door of a gallery which was used as an antechamber or private entrance to the assembly hall. The King entered. Imagine his surprise at finding the walls completely draped in black.

"Who gave the order for hanging this room thus?" he demanded angrily.

"No one, Sire, to my knowledge," replied the uneasy porter. "The last time I swept out the gallery it was panelled, as it always has been.... I am certain this hanging never came out of Your Majesty's depository."

The King, walking at a rapid pace, had already traversed more than two-thirds of the gallery. The Count and porter followed closely; the physician Baumgarten was a little behind, divided between his fears of being left alone and of being exposed to the consequences of what promised to be such a strange adventure.

"Go no further, Sire," exclaimed the porter. "Upon my soul, there is sorcery behind this. At such an hour ... and since the death of the Queen your gracious wife ... they say she walks in this gallery.... May God protect us!"

"Stop, Sire," entreated the Count in turn. "Do you not hear the noise that comes from the assembly hall? Who knows to what dangers Your Majesty may be exposed?"

"Sire," broke in Baumgarten, whose candle had just been blown out by a gust of wind, "at least allow me to go and fetch a score of your halberdiers."

"Let us go in," said the King sternly, stopping before the door of the great apartment. "Porter, open the door immediately."

He kicked it with his feet, and the noise, echoing from the roof, resounded along the gallery like the report of a cannon.

The porter trembled so much that he could not find the keyhole.

"An old soldier trembling!" said Charles, shrugging his shoulders. "Come, Count, you open the door."

"Sire," replied the Count, recoiling a step, "if Your Majesty commanded me to walk up to the mouth of a German or a Danish cannon I would obey unhesitatingly, but you wish me to defy the powers of hell."

The King snatched the key from the hands of the porter.

"I quite see," he observed contemptuously, "that I must attend this matter myself," and before his suite could stay him he had opened the heavy oaken door and entered the great hall, pronouncing the words "By the power of God!" His three acolytes, urged by a curiosity stronger than their fear —and perhaps ashamed to desert their King—went in after him. The great hall was lighted up by innumerable torches, and the old figured tapestry had been replaced by black hangings. Along the walls hung, as usual, the German, Danish, and Russian flags—trophies taken by the soldiers of Gustavus Adolphus. In their midst were the Swedish banners, covered with crape as for a funeral.

An immense assembly filled the seats. The four orders of the State (the nobility, clergy, citizens and peasants) were arranged in their proper order. All were clothed in black, and this array of human faces, lit up against a dark background, so dazzled the eyes of the four witnesses of this extraordinary scene that not one figure was recognisable in the crowd. Thus an actor who stands before a large audience is not able to distinguish a single individual; he sees but a confused mass of faces.

Seated on the raised throne from which the King usually addressed his Parliament, they saw a bleeding corpse clothed in the royal insignia. At his right stood a child with a crown on his head and a sceptre in his hand; at his left an old man, or rather another spectre, leant against the throne. He wore the State cloak as used by the former administrators of Sweden before Vasa had made it a kingdom. In front of the throne, seated before a table covered with large books and rolls of documents, were several grave and austere-looking personages, clothed in long black robes, who looked like judges. Between the throne and the seats of the assembly a block was raised covered with black crepe; against it lay an axe.

No one in that supernatural assembly seemed to notice the presence of Charles and the three people with him. At their entry they could only hear at first a confused murmur of inarticulate words; then the oldest of the black-robed judges arose—the one who seemed to be the president—and struck the book which lay open in front of him three times with his hand. Deep silence immediately followed. Then there came into the hall by a door opposite to that by which Charles had entered several young men of noble bearing and richly clad. Their hands were tied behind their backs, but they walked with heads erect and confident looks. Behind them a stalwart man in a jerkin of brown leather held the ends of the cords which bound their hands. The most important of the prisoners—he who walked first—stopped in the middle of the hall before the block and looked at it with supreme disdain. While this was going on the corpse seemed to shake convulsively, and a fresh stream of crimson blood flowed out of its wound. The youth kneeled down and laid his head on the block, the axe flashed in the air and the sound of its descent followed immediately. A stream of blood gushed over the dais and mingled with that from the corpse; the head bounded several times on the crimsoned pavement, and then rolled at the feet of Charles. It dyed him with its blood.

Up to this moment surprise had held the King dumb, but this frightful spectacle unloosed his tongue. He stepped forward towards the dais, and, addressing himself to the figure who was clothed in the administrator's robes, he pronounced boldly the well-known form of words—

"If thou art of God, speak; if thou art from the Other, leave us in peace."

The phantom spoke to him slowly in solemn tones—

"KING CHARLES! this blood will not be shed during your reign...." (here the voice grew less distinct) "but five reigns later. Woe, woe, woe to the House of Vasa!"

Then the spectres of the countless personages who formed this extraordinary assembly gradually became fainter, until they soon looked like coloured shadows, and then they completely disappeared. All the fantastic lights were extinguished, and those of Charles and his suite revealed only the old tapestries, slightly waving in the draught. They heard for some time afterwards a melodious sound, which one of the witnesses described as like the sighing of wind amongst leaves, and another to the rasping sound given by the strings of a harp that is being tuned. All agreed as to the duration of the apparition, which they judged to have lasted about ten minutes.

The black draperies, the dissevered head, the drops of blood which had stained the dais—all had vanished with the phantoms; only upon Charles's slipper was there a bloodstain. This was the sole witness left by which to recall the scene of that night, had it not been sufficiently engraved upon his memory.

When the King returned to his chamber he had an account written of what he had seen, signed it himself, and caused it to be signed by his fellow-witnesses. In spite of the precautions taken to keep the contents of this document secret it was soon known, even during the lifetime of Charles XI. It still exists, and up to the present time no one has thought fit to throw doubts upon its authenticity. In it the King concludes with these remarkable words:—

"And if that which I herein relate is not the simple truth, I renounce all my hope in the life to come, the which I may have merited for some good deeds done, and, above all, for my zeal in working for the welfare of my people, and in preserving the faith of my forefathers."

Now, when the reader recollects the death of Gustavus III., and the doom of Ankarstrœm, his assassin, they will find more than a mere coincidence between that event and the circumstances of this extraordinary prophecy.

The young man beheaded before the States Assembly should be called Ankarstrœm.

The crowned corpse should be Gustavus III.

The child, his son and successor, Gustavus Adolphus IV.

Finally, the old man was the Duke of Sudermania, uncle of Gustavus IV., regent of the Crown, and, in the end, King, after the deposition of his nephew.

HOW WE STORMED THE FORT

(*L'enlèvement de la redoute.*)

A military friend of mine, who died of fever in Greece some years ago, related to me one day the story of the first engagement in which he had taken part. His narrative was so striking that I wrote it down from memory as soon as I had an opportunity. It is as follows:—

On the evening of the 4th September I rejoined my regiment. I found the colonel in bivouac. At first he received me rather coolly, but, after having read General B——'s letter of recommendation, his manner changed, and he said a few kind words.

He introduced me to my captain, who had just returned from a reconnoitring expedition. This captain, whose acquaintance I had scarcely the time to make, was a tall, dark man, with a severe and forbidding expression. He had been a common soldier, and had won his commission and the cross on the battlefield. His voice was weak and hoarse, and contrasted strangely with his almost gigantic height. I was told that this strange voice was due to a ball which had pierced him through at the Battle of Jéna.

On hearing that I came from the school at Fontainebleau he shrugged his shoulders and said, "My lieutenant died yesterday." I understood that he meant to imply, "You are intended to take his place, and you are not up to it." A cutting reply rose to my lips, but I restrained myself.

Behind Fort Cheverino, which stood about two gunshots off our bivouac, rose the moon. It was large and red as it usually is when rising. But this evening it seemed to me to have an unusual splendour. For an instant the fort stood outlined in black against the shining orb, which looked like the cone of a volcano during eruption. An old soldier, near whom I was standing, remarked on the moon's colour.

"How very red it is!" he said; "it is a sign that it will cost much to take this precious fort."

I was always superstitious, and this omen, above all at such a moment, impressed me greatly. I laid myself down, but could not sleep. I got up and walked about for some time, watching the long lines of fire scattered over the heights beyond the village of Cheverino.

When I thought the fresh, sharp night air had sufficiently quickened my blood, I returned to the fire. I wrapped myself carefully in my cloak and closed my eyes, thinking not to open them before the morning. But sleep obstinately evaded me. Gradually my thoughts took a melancholy hue. I told myself I had not one friend amongst the hundred thousand men who covered that plain. If I were wounded I should go to the hospital, there to be treated without consideration by ignorant surgeons. All I had heard of surgical operations returned to my memory. My heart beat fast, and instinctively I arranged my handkerchief and pocket-book over my breast as a kind of cuirass. I was overcome with weariness, and I became more drowsy each moment, but at each moment some dark thought sprang up with greater force and woke me into a start.

Nevertheless weariness overcame me, and, when the reveille sounded, I was fast asleep. We fell into our ranks; the roll was called; then we piled arms again, and everything suggested that we were going to pass a quiet day.

About three o'clock an aide-de-camp arrived, bearing a despatch, and we were ordered to shoulder arms. Our skirmishers scattered themselves over the plain; we followed them slowly, and in about twenty minutes' time we saw all the outposts of the Russians fall back and re-enter the fort.

One battery of artillery was on our right, another on our left, but both were well in advance of us. They opened a sharp fire on the enemy, who answered briskly; and very soon the fort of Cheverino was hidden under thick clouds of smoke.

Our regiment was almost protected from the Russian fire by a ridge of earth. Since they aimed rather at our artillery than at us, their balls passed over our heads, or at the most cast earth and small stone at us.

The moment the order to advance was given us my captain looked at me so closely that I felt impelled to stroke my budding moustache two or three times with as nonchalant an air as possible. In fact, I had no fear; my only dread was that people might think me afraid. Furthermore, these inoffensive shots contributed to keep me in a calm state of mind. My vanity told me that I was really in danger, being at last under battery fire. I was delighted to find myself so cool, and I dreamed of the pleasure of relating in the drawing-room of Madame B——, Rue de Provence, the story of the taking of the fort of Cheverino.

The colonel rode past our company and said to me, "Well, you are going to get it hot at your first battle."

I smiled with a truly military air, at the same time brushing from my sleeve some dust which a ball thirty paces off had thrown up.

It was evident that the Russians had noticed the miscarriage of their balls, for they replaced them by shells which could more easily reach us in the hollow where we were posted. One that burst near by knocked off my cap and killed a man close to me.

"I congratulate you," said the captain to me, as I picked up my cap. "Now you are safe for the day."

I was acquainted with the soldier's superstition that the axiom *non bis in idem* holds good as much on the battlefield as in the court of justice. I replaced my cap jauntily.

"That's a free and easy kind of greeting," I replied as jovially as possible. This poor joke seemed excellent under the circumstances.

"You are lucky," said the captain; "you need not fear anything more, and you will command a company to-night. I know very well that a bullet for me will find its billet to-day. Each time I have been wounded the officer next to me has been grazed by a spent bullet, and," he added in a lower and half-ashamed tone, "their names always began with a P."

I took courage; most people would have done the same; most people would have been equally struck with such prophetic words. Conscript as I was, I did not think I could confide my feelings to anybody. I thought I ought always to appear cool and brave.

About half an hour after, the fire of the Russians slackened considerably: then we sallied out of our cover to storm the fort.

Our regiment was composed of three battalions. The second was ordered to outflank the fort from the side of the gorge; the other two were to make the assault. I was in the third battalion.

Coming out from behind the buttress which had protected us, we were greeted by several rounds of fire, which did but little harm in our ranks. The whistling of the balls startled me: I kept looking round, thus bringing upon myself joking remarks from my more seasoned comrades.

"Upon the whole," I said, "a battle is not so very dreadful."

We advanced at the double, preceded by our sharpshooters; suddenly the Russians gave three cheers, three distinct hurrahs, then they stopped firing and became silent.

"I do not like that silence," said my captain; "it bodes no good to us."

I thought our men were a little too noisy, and I could not help inwardly contrasting their tumultuous clamour with the impressive silence of the enemy.

We quickly reached the outskirts of the fort, where the palisades had been broken and the earth thrown up by our balls. The soldiers leapt upon this newly-broken ground with shouts of "Vive l'Empereur!" more loudly than one could have thought possible from men who had already shouted so much.

I raised my eyes, and never shall I forget the spectacle before me. Most of the smoke had risen, and was hanging like a canopy about twenty feet above the fort. Through the blue haze I could see the Russian Grenadiers, with arms fixed, like motionless statues, behind their half-destroyed parapet. I can see now each soldier, his left eye fixed on us, his right hidden by his raised gun. In an embrasure a few feet from us a man was holding a lighted fuse to a cannon.

I shuddered, and I thought my last hour had come.

"Now the fun begins," cried my captain. "Here goes!"

These were the last words I heard him speak.

A roll of drums sounded in the fort. I saw all the muskets levelled. I closed my eyes, and heard an appalling uproar, followed by shrieks and groans. I opened my eyes, surprised to find myself still alive. The fort was again wrapped in smoke. I was surrounded with wounded and dying. My captain lay stretched at my feet: his head had been smashed by a ball, and I was covered with his brains and blood. Out of all my company there were only six men and myself left standing.

A moment of stupor followed this carnage. The colonel, putting his hat on the end of his sword, was the first to climb the parapet, shouting "Vive l'Empereur!" He was soon followed by all the survivors. I cannot remember clearly what followed. I do not know how we entered the fort. We fought hand to hand in such a dense smoke that we could not see. I suppose I hit, for I found my sabre covered with blood. At last I heard the shout "Victory!" and, the smoke clearing away, I saw the ground of the fort covered with blood and corpses. The guns especially were buried under heaps of dead. Scattered about in disorder stood about two hundred men in French uniform: some were loading their pieces, others wiping their bayonets. Eleven Russian prisoners were with them.

The colonel was lying covered with blood on a broken ammunition box near the gorge. Several soldiers crowded round him. I joined them.

"Where is the senior captain?" he asked one of the sergeants.

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders in a significant way.

"And the senior lieutenant?"

"Here is the gentleman who came yesterday," said the sergeant in a perfectly calm voice.

The colonel smiled bitterly.

"Well, monsieur, you are commander-in-chief," said he to me. "Have the gorge of the fort fortified at once with these waggons. The enemy is in force, but General C—— is coming to support you."

"Colonel," I said to him, "you are badly wounded."

"A fig for that, my lad. We have taken the fort!"

TAMANGO

Captain Ledoux was a born sailor. He had started at the bottom and worked his way up to the rank of assistant quarter-master. At the battle of Trafalgar his left hand was so severely damaged by splinters of wood that he had to have it amputated, and, consequently, he received his discharge, together with first-rate testimonials. The quiet monotony of home life was distasteful to him, and, when he was offered the post of second lieutenant on board a corsair, he eagerly seized the opportunity of going to sea again. The money which came to him as his share of a few captures enabled him to buy books and to study the theory of navigation as a supplement to the practical knowledge he already possessed. In due time he became captain of a pirate lugger which could boast of three guns and a crew of sixty dauntless sailors: the longshoremen of Jersey still remember the exploits of this pirate lugger. Then came the peace, which was a great grief to him; he had amassed a considerable amount of money during the war and had looked forward to increase his little fortune at the expense of the English. But he was obliged to offer his services to peaceful merchants; and, as he was known to be a man of courage and experience, he had no difficulty in finding a ship. When slave trading was prohibited by law it could not be undertaken without running great risks, for it was necessary not only to evade the watchfulness of the French Customs officers (which was not so very difficult), but also to escape being captured by English cruisers. Captain Ledoux proved invaluable to these "ebony"[1] merchants.

Unlike the majority of sailors who spend many years in subordinate positions, Captain Ledoux had not that deep-rooted dread of innovation, nor that innate feeling of routine, which even their elevation to higher rank is seldom able to expunge. On the contrary, he was the first to suggest to his shipbuilder the use of metal tanks for holding fresh water. He had the handcuffs, too, and the chains—indispensable articles on board such vessels—made in a particular fashion and carefully varnished to prevent their rusting. But that for which he was well known to all the slave traders was the brig he had constructed under his personal supervision and according to his own ideas. He had christened her *Hope*. Built for slave trading, she was a fast sailer, narrow and long like a war-ship, and yet able to hold a great number of blacks. He had had the 'tween decks made narrower and less lofty; had reduced the height to forty inches, declaring that that left sufficient room for any nigger of reasonable stature to sit at ease—why should they want to stand up? There would be more than enough standing for them when they reached the colonies, he explained.

The slaves would sit with their backs against the sides of the ship in two parallel lines, leaving a free space between their feet which, in all other slave ships, was only used as a gangway. It was Ledoux's idea to make use of this free space by putting more slaves there, forcing them to sit at right angles to the others. In this way his brig would hold at least ten slaves more than any other ship of the same size. In case of need, more still could have been put on board, but he was considerate enough to insist that each nigger should have a space measuring about five foot by two in which to stretch his limbs during the six weeks' journey. For, after all, niggers were human beings like the white men, he explained to the shipwright, as an excuse for his generous treatment.

The *Hope* weighed anchor in the port of Nantes on a Friday—a fact which superstitious people subsequently recalled. The Customs officers who visited the brig for the purpose of inspecting everything on board did not come across six large cases full of chains, handcuffs, and those irons which were for some unknown reason called "bonds of justice." The very considerable supply of fresh water which had been stowed on board did not seem to astonish them, in spite of the fact that the *Hope* (according to her bills) was only going to Senegambia for the purpose of trading in wood and ivory. The journey was certainly not a long one, but perhaps they thought there was no harm in erring on the safe side—for the water would be invaluable if they happened to be becalmed.

So the good ship *Hope* set sail on a Friday, thoroughly well provisioned and equipped. Ledoux fancied at first that the masts seemed hardly stout enough; but in the course of time he found that the vessel fulfilled his expectations in every way. They had a first-rate journey, and the coast of Africa was soon sighted. The anchor was lowered at Joal (if I mistake not), that portion of the coast being at the time unguarded by English cruisers; and the native merchants immediately came on board.

The moment could not have been more favourable. Tamango, a well-known warrior and slave dealer, had just reached the coast with a convoy of slaves, which he was selling at cheap rates with the confidence of a man who feels that he has the power of meeting any demands as soon as the article of his trade becomes scarcer.

Captain Ledoux landed at the mouth of the river and called on Tamango. He found him sitting in a straw hut, which had been hastily erected for him, together with his two wives, a few petty traders, and the slave drivers. Tamango had felt bound to put some clothes on to receive the white captain. The old blue uniform which he wore could still be recognised as having been a corporal's, but there were two gold epaulettes on each shoulder, both fastened to the same button and hanging down, one behind, the other in front. As he did not wear a shirt, and the tunic was too small for a man of his stature, a broad zone of black skin was visible between the white facings of the uniform and the canvas breeches. It looked like a belt. A heavy cavalry sword

which hung at his side was fastened by a string, and a fine double-barrelled English rifle completed the outfit in which the African warrior doubtless considered himself more than a match for the most exquisite dandy from London or Paris.

Captain Ledoux stared at him for some time in silence, and Tamango, flattered by the belief that he was making a great impression on the white man, drew himself up like a grenadier being inspected by a strange general. Ledoux, after having critically examined him, turned to his chief officer and observed, "There's a piece of brawn which would fetch at least a thousand crowns if we could only land him safe and sound in Martinique."

As soon as they had sat down the customary greetings were exchanged, a sailor who had a smattering of the *Volof* language acting as interpreter. A basket full of bottles of brandy was brought, drinking began at once, and the captain thought to propitiate Tamango by making him a present of a fine copper powder-flask with a portrait of Napoleon embossed on it. The gift was acknowledged with the conventional show of gratitude. Tamango then suggested that they should go and sit outside in the shade (not forgetting the brandy bottle) and inspect the slaves he had to sell.

They came forward in a long file, worn out by fear and fatigue, all bearing on their shoulders a huge fork over two yards long, the two prongs of which were fastened at the back of the neck with a wooden bar. Whenever they set out on a march one of the slave drivers bears on his shoulder the handle of the yoke of the first slave, who carries that of the man behind him; the second slave carries the yoke-handle of the third slave, and so on with the others. When a halt is made, the leader of the file drives the pointed end of his yoke-handle into the ground and the whole column comes to a stand-still. Of course, there can be no question of escape from the file with a heavy yoke two yards long fastened round one's neck.

The captain shrugged his shoulders as each slave, male or female, passed before him; he called them puny creatures, said that the females were too old or too young, and complained of the degeneracy of the black race.

"The whole race is deteriorating," he declared. "It used to be quite different in the olden days when every woman was five foot six, and four men could easily have worked a frigate's capstan and raised the sheet anchor."

However, he critically picked out a first assortment of blacks, choosing the strong and the good-looking, for which he was willing to pay the usual price; on the remainder he demanded a considerable reduction. But Tamango knew his own mind; he insisted that his wares were valuable, and spoke of the scarcity of men and the dangers of the traffic. He ended by quoting the very lowest price he could possibly accept for the slaves the white captain still had room for on board.

Ledoux stared at him in amazement and indignation when he heard Tamango's proposal interpreted. The captain got up, swearing like a trooper, apparently with the intention of putting an end there and then to all bargaining with a man so unreasonable. But Tamango, after some difficulty, persuaded him to sit down. Another bottle was opened and the discussion renewed. Now it was the black man's turn to call the white captain's views outrageous and extravagant. They talked and haggled as bottle after bottle was emptied; but the liquor was having quite a different effect on the two contracting parties. The more the Frenchman drank the less became his offers, and the more the nigger drank the less he insisted on his demands. So, when the case of brandy was finished, it was found that they had come to terms. In exchange for the hundred and sixty slaves, Tamango accepted a quantity of worthless cotton, powder, gun-flints, three casks of brandy, and fifty rusty rifles. The captain, to ratify the compact, shook the half-tipsy nigger by the hand, and immediately the slaves were handed over to the French sailors, who lost no time in putting on iron chains and handcuffs in place of the wooden yokes—a striking demonstration of the superiority of European civilisation.

There were still about thirty slaves—children, old men, or infirm women. But there was no more room on board. Tamango, not knowing what to do with this refuse, offered to sell them to the captain at the rate of a bottle of brandy a head. The offer was a tempting one. Ledoux remembered a performance of the *Sicilian Vespers*, at Nantes, at which he had noticed that a considerable number of sturdy and well-furnished people had managed to push their way into the pit which was already full, and ultimately find seats, thanks to the compressibility of human bodies. He agreed to take the twenty slimmest of the thirty slaves. Tamango then offered to dispose of the ten remaining for a glass of brandy a head. The fact that children go half-price and take up half-room in railway carriages crossed the captain's mind. So he accepted three children, but said he would not take one more. Tamango, seeing himself left still with seven slaves on his hands, seized his rifle and took aim at the nearest woman. She was the mother of the three children.

"Buy her," he said to the white man, "or I'll fire. Half a glass of brandy, or she dies."

"But what the deuce am I to do with her?" asked Ledoux.

Tamango fired, and the slave fell down dead.

"Now for another!" cried Tamango, taking aim at a decrepit old man. "A glass of brandy, or——"

The bullet went off at random, for one of his wives had suddenly seized his arm. She had

happened to recognise in the old man whom her husband was about to kill a *guiriot*, or magician, who had prophesied that she would be queen.

Tamango, excited by all the brandy he had consumed, lost control of himself when he found himself thus thwarted. He struck his wife roughly with the butt end of his gun, and turned towards the captain.

"Take her," he said; "I'll make you a present of this woman."

"I shall be able to find room for you," said Ledoux, as he took her by the hand, and he smiled when he saw how beautiful she was.

The interpreter—a charitable man—asked Tamango for the remaining six slaves in exchange for a cardboard snuff-box. He took off their yokes and told them to go whither they would. They hurried away in different directions, at a loss to know how to reach their homes, two hundred leagues from the coast.

In the meantime the captain had said good-bye to Tamango and was hard at work getting his cargo on board. He did not think it safe to remain longer in the river, for fear of the cruisers which might return at any moment. So he made up his mind to set sail on the morrow. Tamango could not do anything but lie down on the grass in the shade, and sleep away the effects of the brandy.

When he woke up the vessel was already under sail, and moving down the river. Tamango, still very dizzy from the effects of his recent debauch, called for his wife Ayché. He was reminded that she had been unfortunate enough to displease him, and that he had made a present of her to the white captain who had taken her away on board with him. Half stupefied at this news, Tamango clasped his head in his hands; then, seizing his gun, he rushed away by the most direct route towards a little creek about half a mile from the sea. He knew the river made several detours before it reached the sea, and, by means of a small boat which ought to be there, he hoped to overtake the brig, delayed in her voyage, as she would be, by the winding river. He was not deceived; he leaped into the boat and just managed to reach the slave ship in time.

Ledoux was surprised to see him; still more so to learn that he wanted his wife back.

"You gave her to me," he said, "and I have no intention of giving you back your present," and he turned and left him.

But the black insisted, said he would give back some of the goods he had received in exchange for the slaves. The captain laughed, and told him that Ayché was a fine woman and that he intended to keep her. Poor Tamango burst into a torrent of tears, and groaned and cried like a man being tortured by a surgeon. He flung himself about the deck calling for his darling Ayché, and dashed his head against the planks as though he were trying to commit suicide. The captain, quite unmoved, pointed to the shore, and suggested that it was time for him to go. But Tamango held to his point. He went to the length of offering his golden epaulettes, his sword, his rifle. All in vain.

Meantime the lieutenant of the *Hope* suggested to the captain, "Why not take this lusty brute in place of the three slaves who died during the night; he is worth more than they."

Ledoux looked at him. Yes. He was worth at least a thousand crowns. Besides, this journey, which promised to be exceptionally remunerative, would probably be his last; his fortune would be made, and he would give up the slave trade. If so, what did it matter what sort of a reputation he left behind on the coast of Guinea? There was not a soul in sight on the shore, and the black chieftain was entirely at his mercy. It would only be a matter of disarming him, for it would hardly be safe to lay hands on him while he still had arms in his possession. So Ledoux asked him for his gun, as if he wished to examine it to see whether it was really worth exchanging for the beautiful negress. Whilst he was scrutinising it, he took care to jerk the charge out. The lieutenant succeeded in obtaining his sword, and Tamango stood disarmed. Two sturdy sailors sprang on him, brought him to the ground, and tried to bind him. But the black man struggled heroically as soon as he recovered from the surprise, and he fought for long with the two sailors in spite of the disadvantage at which they had him. By sheer strength he sprang to his feet, and with one blow he felled the man who held him by the neck. Leaving half his coat in the hands of the other sailor, he dashed furiously towards the lieutenant to regain his sword, and received a cut on the head which, without going deep, made a large wound. He fell a second time, and the sailors soon bound him hand and foot. He yelled with rage and struggled and writhed like a wild boar caught in a net; after a while, seeing that all resistance was useless, he shut his eyes and remained absolutely motionless. Had it not been for his heavy and hurried breathing, one might have thought him dead.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the captain, "won't these slaves he sold to us chuckle heartily when they see him a slave like them! They will begin to think there must be such a thing as Providence."

Meanwhile poor Tamango was bleeding fast. The charitable interpreter, who, the day before, had saved the lives of the six slaves, came to bind up his wound and speak a few words of sympathy with him. No record exists of what he said, and Tamango remained as motionless as a corpse. Two sailors carried him like a package down to his allotted place in the 'tween decks. For two days he refused to touch anything to eat or drink, and he scarcely opened his eyes. His

companions in captivity, once his prisoners, had watched him brought into their midst with terror-stricken amazement. So great was the awe with which his mere presence still inspired them that not one of them durst jeer at the misery of the man who was the cause of all their suffering.

Sailing rapidly on the wings of a strong land breeze, the vessel was soon out of sight of the coast of Africa. The captain's mind, no longer haunted with visions of English cruisers, began to dwell on the prospective fortune he hoped to reap in the colonies towards which he was sailing. His cargo of "ebony" was in good health. There were no contagious diseases. Only twelve negroes had died of suffocation, and they were the weakest—a mere trifle. But in order to preserve his human cargo as much as possible from the effects of the passage he had them brought up on deck once a day. Three successive batches of these unhappy slaves came up to inhale, for one hour each batch, the stock of fresh air which was to last through the twenty-four hours. A portion of the crew mounted guard, armed to the teeth for fear of insurrection; but they took care that the slaves were never entirely freed from their shackles. Sometimes a sailor who could play the violin would treat them to some music, and it was curious to watch all those black faces gazing up at the fiddler, gradually losing their look of abject despair, and then breaking forth into loud laughter—clapping their hands too, as much as their chains would allow them. Exercise being essential to health, one of Captain Ledoux's salutary regulations was that all the slaves should be made to dance, just as horses are made to prance when embarked on a long journey.

"Come along, my boys, dance and amuse yourselves!" the captain would shout in a voice of thunder, cracking his heavy slave-whip. In less than no time the poor blacks were leaping and dancing.

For some time Tamango's wound kept him below the hatches. But at length he appeared on deck; at first he stood in the midst of the crowd of cringing slaves, holding his proud head very high, and his sad but untroubled eyes gazed over the wide expanse of ocean which surrounded the ship; then he lay down, or rather threw himself down on deck, without even troubling to shift his chains into a less awkward position. Ledoux was sitting behind him on the quarter-deck, smoking his pipe at ease. Near him stood Ayché, holding in her hand a tray of liquors which she was ready to pour out for him. Instead of shackles she wore a pretty blue cotton dress and dainty morocco shoes, which clearly showed that she occupied a position of honour in the captain's domestic circle. One of the black men who loathed Tamango pointed her out to him. As soon as he caught sight of her he cried out, and, springing up impetuously, reached the quarter-deck before the sailors on guard could prevent such a flagrant breach of naval discipline.

"Ayché!" he shouted at the top of his voice—and Ayché shrieked as he added, "do you imagine that there is no MAMA JUMBO in the land of the white man?"

The sailors rushed to his side with uplifted clubs, but he calmly folded his arms and walked slowly back to his place, whilst Ayché burst into a flood of tears, and seemed appalled at his mysterious question.

The interpreter explained what the awful Mama Jumbo was, the very mention of which had roused such terror.

"It is the bogey of the black men," he said. "When a husband is afraid his wife is going to behave as some wives do, as well in France as Africa, he threatens her with Mama Jumbo. I have seen Mama Jumbo with my own eyes, and I understand the trick; but the poor blacks ... they are so unsophisticated they do not understand anything. Picture to yourself a group of women dancing in an evening—having a *folgar*, as they call it in their dialect—near a thick and sombre grove. Suddenly weird music is heard. Not a soul is to be seen, for all the musicians are hidden amongst the trees. The sounds of the reed flutes, wooden drums, *balafos*, and guitars made of the half of a gourd make a melody calculated to produce the devil himself. No sooner do the women hear the music than they begin to tremble and would run away if their husbands would let them; they know too well what is going to happen. Suddenly a huge white figure as tall as our top-gallant-mast comes stalking out of the wood, with a head as big as a pumpkin, eyes like hawse-holes, and a mouth like the devil's, full of fire. It moves slowly, very slowly, and does not come more than half a cable's length away from the grove. The women shriek and yell like costermongers. It is 'Mama Jumbo.' And then their husbands tell them to confess their sins, for if they do not speak the Mama Jumbo is there to gobble them up alive. Some of the women are foolish enough to acknowledge everything, and their husbands proceed to give them a sound thrashing."

"But what is the white figure, this Mama Jumbo?" asked the captain.

"Why, it's only some Merry Andrew, muffled up in a white sheet, holding up on the end of a stick a hollow gourd, with a lighted candle inside, that serves as a head. It is nothing worse than that, for it does not require much ingenuity to deceive these poor blacks. But, when all's said and done, it's not such a bad invention, this Mama Jumbo of theirs; I wish my wife believed in it."

"If my wife knows nothing of Mistress Jumbo," said Ledoux, "she has met with Master Stick, and she knows well enough what the result would be if she played any pranks with me. We are not a long-suffering family, we Ledoux, and though I have only one fist left it can still use a rope's-end to some purpose. As to that joker who started the subject of Mama Jumbo, tell him to keep still, and that if he frightens this little woman again I'll have him flogged till his skin changes from black to the colour of an underdone beefsteak."

The captain led Ayché down to his room and tried to comfort her, but neither his caresses nor his

blows (there was a limit even to the captain's patience) succeeded in pacifying the beautiful negress; her tears flowed in torrents. Ledoux went up on deck in a bad humour and vented his feelings on the officer on duty concerning the first thing that came uppermost.

During the night, when nearly everyone on board was sound asleep and the men on watch were listening to a low, sad, monotonous chant, which seemed to come from the 'tween decks, they heard the shrill, piercing shriek of a woman. Then they heard Ledoux's fierce voice swearing and threatening, and the sound of his heavy whip echoed through the whole vessel. Then the noise ceased, and all was silent. On the morrow Tamango came on deck, his face disfigured, but still as proud and undaunted as ever.

As soon as Ayché caught sight of him she rushed from the quarter-deck, where she had been sitting by the side of the captain, and fell on her knees before Tamango, exclaiming in a frenzy of despair—

"Forgive me, Tamango, forgive me!"

Tamango looked steadily into her eyes for a minute, and then, seeing that the interpreter was not within earshot, he ejaculated "A file!" and, turning his back upon her, lay down on the deck. The captain chid her savagely, even struck her once or twice, and enjoined her never again to speak to her ex-husband. But he had not the least inkling of the meaning of the few words they had exchanged, and he did not ask any questions about them.

Tamango meanwhile, locked up with the other slaves, continually exhorted them to make one great effort to regain their liberty. He spoke to them of the small number of the white men, and called their attention to the increasing carelessness of their guards; and, without going into details, he promised them that he would find some way of leading them back to their country. He boasted of his knowledge of the occult sciences, for which the black races have great veneration, and declared that any who refused to assist in the attempt would incur the wrath of the devil. All these harangues were delivered in the dialect of the Peules, which was known to most of the slaves, but which the interpreter did not understand. Such was the credit of the dreaded orator, and so inveterate was their habit of obeying him, that his eloquence worked wonders, and he was begged to fix a day for their emancipation long before he had even had time to work out all his plans. So he told the conspirators vaguely that the time was not yet come, and that the devil, who appeared to him at night, had not yet given the word; but he bade them hold themselves in readiness for the first signal. In the meantime he did not lose any opportunity of testing the vigilance of the crew. One day he saw a sailor leaning over the side of the vessel watching a shoal of flying-fish which were following the ship. Tamango took the rifle which had been left standing against the gunwale, and began to handle it, mimicing grotesquely the exercises he had seen the sailors do. The rifle was immediately taken from him, but he had learnt that it was possible to touch a weapon without at once arousing suspicion. When the time came for him to use one in earnest, woe betide the man who tried then to wrest it from him!

One morning Ayché threw him a biscuit, making at the same time a sign which he alone understood. The biscuit contained a small file, and on that tool hung the success of the plot. Tamango took good care not to let his companions see the file; but, when night had fallen, he began to utter unintelligible sounds, accompanied by weird gestures. Gradually he became more and more excited, and the mutterings increased to loud groans. As they listened to the varied intonations of his voice, the slaves felt convinced that he was engaged in an animated conversation with an unseen person. They were all terrified, not doubting that the devil was at that moment in their midst. Tamango put the finishing touch to the scene by exclaiming joyfully—

"Comrades! the spirit which I have conjured has at length fulfilled his promises, and I hold in my hand the talisman which is to save us. Now you only need to summon up a little courage, and you are free men."

Those near him were allowed to feel the file, and not one of them was sharp enough to suspect that the whole thing was a gross imposture.

At length, after many days of expectation, the great day of liberty and vengeance dawned. The conspirators had been sworn to secrecy by a solemn oath, and the arrangements had been settled after much deliberation. The strongest amongst those who happened to go on deck at the same time as Tamango were to seize the arms of their guards, some of the others were to go to the captain's room to fetch the arms which were kept there. Those who had succeeded in filing through their handcuffs were to lead the way; but in spite of several nights' persistent toil, the majority of the slaves were still unable to take any active part in the attack. So three lusty negroes were singled out to slay the man who kept in his pocket the keys of the manacles, and to return at once and unfetter their companions.

That day Captain Ledoux seemed in the best of tempers. Contrary to his usual habits, he pardoned a cabin boy who had incurred a flogging. He congratulated the officer of the watch on his seamanship, told the crew he was pleased with their work and promised to give them all a gratuity at Martinique, which they would reach very soon. All the sailors at once began to amuse themselves by making plans as to how they would use the gratuity. Their thoughts were of brandy and of the swart women of Martinique, when Tamango and his fellow—conspirators were brought up on deck.

They had been careful to file their handcuffs in such a way that nothing was noticeable, but at the same time so that they could break them open easily. Furthermore, they rattled their chains so

much that morning, that they seemed to be twice as heavily laden as usual. When they had had time to drink in the air, they all joined hands and began to dance, whilst Tamango intoned his tribal war song[2] which he always used before going to battle. After they had danced for some time, Tamango, as if tired out, stretched himself at full length near a sailor who was leaning back at his ease against the ship's bulwarks; all the others followed his example, so that every one of the guards was singled out by the several negroes.

As soon as he had managed to remove his handcuffs quietly, Tamango gave a tremendous shout, which was the signal, seized the sailor near him violently by the legs, threw him head over heels, and, planting his foot on his stomach, wrenched the gun away from him and shot the officer of the watch. Simultaneously every other sailor on deck was seized, disarmed, and forthwith strangled. From all sides came sounds of the struggle. The boatswain's mate, who had the keys of the handcuffs, was one of the first victims. In a moment the deck was swarming with a crowd of niggers. Those who could not find arms seized the bars of the capstan or the oars of the gig. The fate of the white men was already sealed; a few sailors made a show of resistance on the quarter-deck, but they lacked weapons and resolution. Ledoux, however, was still alive, and had not lost any of his courage.

Seeing that Tamango was the soul of the revolt, he hoped that if he could kill him short work might be made of his accomplices. So he sprang forward, sword in hand, calling to him at the top of his voice. Tamango lost no time in rushing to the encounter. The two commanders met in one of the gangways—one of those narrow passages leading aft from the quarter-deck. Tamango, holding his gun by the barrel, and using it as a club, was the first to strike. The white man dexterously avoided the blow: the butt end of the musket, falling violently on the planks, was smashed, and the weapon was dashed out of Tamango's hand. He stood defenceless, and Ledoux advanced with a diabolical grin. But before he had time to make use of his sword, Tamango, as agile as the panthers of his native country, sprang into his adversary's arms and seized the hand which held the sword. The one strained to hold the sword, the other to wrench it from him. During this desperate struggle both stumbled, but the black man fell undermost. Without a moment's hesitation Tamango hugged his adversary with all his strength, and bit his neck with such vehemence that the blood spurted out as it does under the teeth of a lion. The sword slipped from the weakened hand of the captain. Tamango seized it, sprang up, and, his mouth streaming with blood, yelled his triumph as he stabbed his dying enemy through and through.

The victory was complete. The few remaining sailors entreated the negroes to have pity on them, but all, even the interpreter who had never done them any harm, were mercilessly massacred. The lieutenant fell fighting heroically. He had withdrawn aft, behind one of those small cannons which turn on a pivot, and are loaded with grape-shot. With his left hand he worked the gun and with his right he used the sword so dexterously that he attracted a crowd of negroes round him. Then he fired the gun into their midst and paved a way with dead and dying. The next moment he was torn to pieces.

When the body of the last white man had been hacked to pieces and thrown overboard the negroes began to feel that their thirst for vengeance was satiated, and they gazed up at the ship's sails which were swollen by the fresh breeze, and seemed still to obey their oppressors and to carry the conquerors in spite of their triumph to the land of slavery.

"All our labour is lost!" they murmured in their despair. "Will the great fetish of the white men lead us back to our homes now that we have shed the blood of so many of his worshippers?"

Someone suggested that Tamango might be able to make the fetish obey. So they all began to shout for Tamango.

He was in no hurry to hear them. They found him standing in the fore cabin, one hand resting on the captain's bloody sword, the other stretched out to his wife Ayché, who was on her knees kissing it. But the joy of victory could not obliterate a strange look of anxiety which was visible in every line of his face. Less fatuous than the rest, he was better able to understand the difficulties of the situation.

At last he came upon deck, affecting a serenity which he did not feel. Urged by a hundred confused voices to change the course of the vessel, he stalked slowly towards the helm as if to postpone for a while the moment which would determine both for himself and for the others the extent of his power.

Not even the dullest negro on board had failed to notice the influence exercised on the movements of the ship by a certain wheel and the box fixed in front of it; but the whole mechanism was a profound mystery to them. Tamango examined the compass for some time, moving his lips as if he were reading the characters which were printed on it; then he put his hand to his head and assumed the pensive look of a man doing mental arithmetic. All the negroes stood round him, their mouths wide open, their eyes one stare, anxiously taking note of his slightest movement. At length, with that mixture of fear and confidence which ignorance inspires, he gave the guiding wheel a tremendous turn.

Like a noble steed which rears when some imprudent rider drives in his spurs, the good ship *Hope* plunged into the waves at this unwonted handling, as if she felt insulted and wished to sink together with her stupid pilot. The sails being now entirely at cross purposes with the helm, the ship heeled over so suddenly that it looked as if she were bound to founder. Her long yards soused into the sea; many of the niggers stumbled and some fell overboard. However, the ship

righted herself and stood proudly against the swell, as if to make one last effort to avoid destruction. But there came a sudden gust of wind, and, with a deafening crash, the two masts fell, snapped a few feet above the deck, which was strewn with wreckage and covered with a tangled network of ropes. The terrified negroes fled below the hatchway howling with fear, but as there was nothing left to catch the breeze, the vessel remained steady and merely rocked to and fro on the billows.

Presently the more daring amongst them came up again and began clearing away the wreckage which encumbered the deck. Tamango remained motionless, leaning on the binnacle, his face buried in his folded arms. Ayché, who was beside him, did not dare to speak. One by one the negroes approached him; they began to murmur, and soon a torrent of insults and abuse was let loose upon him.

"Traitor! impostor!" they cried, "you are the cause of all our ills: you sold us to the white men, you persuaded us to rebel, you boasted your wisdom, you promised to take us back to our homes. We trusted you, fools that we were! and now we have narrowly escaped destruction because you have offended the white man's fetish."

Tamango raised his head proudly, and the negroes who stood round him slunk back. He picked up two guns, beckoned to his wife to follow him, and strode through the group of men, who made way for him. He went to the bow of the vessel, where he constructed a kind of barricade of planks and barrels; behind this entrenchment he fixed the two muskets in such a way that the bayonets were menacingly prominent. There he sat down and they left him alone.

Some of the negroes were in tears; others raised their hands to the sky, and called on their own and the white man's fetishes; others knelt down by the compass and wondered at its ceaseless movements, entreating it to take them to their homes again; the remainder lay on the deck in a state of abject despair. Amongst these wretches were women and children shrieking from sheer terror, and a score of wounded men imploring the relief which no one dreamt of bringing them.

All of a sudden a negro appeared on deck, his face beaming with joy. He came to tell them that he had discovered where the white men stored their brandy; and his excitement and general demeanour clearly showed that he had already helped himself to some. This piece of news silenced for a while the cries of the distracted slaves. They rushed down to the steward's room and gorged the liquor. In about an hour's time they were all dancing and roaring on deck, giving vent to the excesses of brutish drunkenness. The noise of their singing and dancing mingled with the groans and sobs of the wounded. Night fell, and still the orgy continued.

Next morning, when they woke, despair again possessed them. During the night a great number of the wounded had died. The vessel was surrounded by floating corpses, and clouds were lowering over the heavy sea. They held a conference. Several experts in the art of magic, who had not dared speak of their knowledge before for fear of Tamango, now offered their services, and several potent incantations were tried. The failure of each attempt increased their despondency till at length they appealed to Tamango, who was still behind his barricade. After all, he was the wisest of them, and he alone could extricate them from the desperate condition into which he had brought them. An old man approached him with overtures of peace, and begged him to give them his advice. But Tamango, as inexorable as Coriolanus, turned a deaf ear to his entreaties. During the night, in the midst of the tumult, he had fetched a supply of biscuits and salt meat. To all appearance he had no intention of leaving the solitude of his retreat.

There was still plenty of brandy left. That, at all events, helped them to forget the sea, slavery and the approach of death. They went to sleep, and in their dreams saw Africa with its forests of gum trees, its thatched huts, and its baobabs, whose foliage shaded whole villages. The orgy of the day before was renewed, and continued for some time. They did nothing but howl and weep and tear their hair, or drink and sleep. Several died of drinking, others jumped into the sea or stabbed themselves.

One morning Tamango left his fort and advanced to the stump of the mainmast.

"Slaves!" he shouted, "the Spirit has appeared to me in a dream and revealed to me the means of helping you to return to your homes. You deserve to be abandoned to your fates, but I pity the women and children who are crying. I pardon you. Listen!"

All the negroes bowed their their heads submissively, and gathered round him.

"Only the white men," continued Tamango, "know the mystic formulas which guide these massive wooden houses; but we can steer without difficulty those small boats, which are like our own" (he pointed to the sloop and the other ship's boats). "Let us fill them with provisions, set out in them, and row in the direction of the wind. My Master and yours will make it blow in the direction of our homes."

They took his word for it. No plan could have been more reckless. Without any knowledge of the compass, ignorant as to their whereabouts, they could not do anything but row at random. His belief was that by rowing straight ahead they were certain to come, sooner or later, to a land inhabited by black men; for he had heard his mother say that white men lived in their ships, and that black men possessed the earth.

Soon afterwards everything was ready to be embarked, but only the sloop and one small boat were found to be serviceable. It was impossible to find room for the eighty negroes who were still

alive, so the sick and wounded had to be abandoned. The majority of them begged to be slain rather than be left.

After endless difficulties the two boats were got under way, so heavily laden that they might at any moment be swamped in such a choppy sea. Tamango and Ayché were in the sloop, which was soon left behind by the other boat—a mere cock-boat, and far less overcharged. The wailing of the poor wretches who had been left behind on board the brig was still audible when a big wave suddenly caught the sloop athwart and swamped her. In less than a minute she had disappeared. The smaller boat saw the catastrophe, and immediately the oars were plied with redoubled energy, for fear of having to pick up those who were shipwrecked. Nearly all who were in the sloop were drowned. Only a dozen or so managed to reach the vessel again; amongst whom were Tamango and Ayché. When the sun set they could see the other boat far away on the horizon; no one knows what became of it.

Why should I weary the reader with a revolting description of the tortures of famine? About a score of human beings, crowded together, now tossed about on a stormy sea, now scorched by the fierce heat of the sun, fought daily for what scanty remains of food there were—every scrap of biscuit entailing a fight.... The weaker died, not because the stronger killed him, but because he chose to let him expire. After a few days only two were still alive on board the good brig *Hope* —Ayché and Tamango.

One night the sea was rough, the wind blew high, and the darkness was so intense that one end of the ship could not be seen from the other. Ayché lay on a mattress in the captain's room and Tamango sat at her feet. They had not spoken a word for many hours.

"Tamango," murmured Ayché at length, "it is I who have brought all this suffering upon you."

"I do not suffer," he answered quickly, and threw the half-biscuit, which he still had left, on the mattress beside her.

"Keep it yourself," she said gently, returning the biscuit. "I am no longer hungry. Besides, why eat? Is not mine hour come?"

Tamango got tip without answering and staggered to the deck, where he sat down against the stump of the mast. His head lolled on his breast, and he began to whistle his tribal war song. Suddenly a loud cry reached his ear in spite of the noise of the tempest; a light flashed; other shouts followed, and a huge black ship glided swiftly past the brig—so close that Tamango could see her yards pass over his head. He only saw two faces in the light of a lantern which hung from a mast. They shouted again; then their vessel, swept along by the storm, disappeared into the darkness. Doubtless the men on watch had caught sight of the disabled hulk, but the violence of the tempest had prevented their tacking. The next moment Tamango saw the flash of a cannon and heard the report; then another flash, but no report; then he saw nothing more. On the morrow not a sail was visible on the horizon. Tamango threw himself down on his mattress and closed his eyes. His wife Ayché had died that night.

I do not know how long it was before an English frigate, the *Bellona*, sighted a dismasted vessel, to all appearances abandoned by her crew. They sent a sloop alongside and found a negress dead and a negro by her side, so haggard and so thin that he looked like a skeleton. He was unconscious, but there was still a breath left in him. The doctor took charge of him and did all he could for him, so that when they reached Kingston, Tamango had regained his health. He was asked to give an account of his adventures, and he told them all he could remember. The Jamaica planters suggested that he should be hung as a rebel, but the governor was a kind-hearted man and took an interest in the negro, whose crime was, after all, justifiable, since he had but acted in self-defence; and, besides, the men he had murdered were only Frenchmen. He was treated in the same way as the slaves who are found on board a captured slave trader. They set him at liberty—that is to say they made him work for the Government. And he earned threepence a day besides his keep. One day the colonel of the 75th caught sight of this splendid specimen of a man, and made him a drummer in his regimental band. Tamango learnt a little English, but hardly ever spoke. To make up for that he was always drinking rum or tafia. He died in the hospital of congestion of the lungs.

1829.

[1] Slave dealers used to style themselves *ebony* merchants.

[2] Each negro chief has his own.

THE GAME OF BACKGAMMON

The sails hung motionless, clinging to the masts; the sea was as smooth as glass; the heat was stifling and the calm discouraging.

During a sea voyage the resources of amusement open to passengers on board ship are soon

exhausted. Anyone who has spent four months together in a wooden house of one hundred and twenty feet in length knows this fact, alas! only too well. When you see the first lieutenant coming towards you you know that he will first begin talking about Rio de Janeiro, from whence he came; then of the famous Essling Bridge, which he saw made by the Marine Guards to which he belonged. After the fifteenth day you know exactly the expressions he is fond of, even the punctuation of his sentences and the different intonations of his voice. When did he ever miss dwelling sadly on the word "emperor" when he pronounced it for the first time in his recital?... He invariably added, "If you had only seen him then!!!" (three exclamation marks to denote his admiration). And the incident of the trumpeter's horse, and the ball that rebounded and carried away a cartridge-box which contained seven thousand five hundred francs in money and jewellery, etc., etc.! The second lieutenant is a great politician; he makes critical remarks every day on the last number of the *Constitutionnel* which he brought from Brest, or, if he leaves the sublime heights of politics to descend to literature, he sets you to rights on the last vaudeville he saw played. Good Lord! The Commissioner of the Navy has a very interesting story to relate. How he enchanted us the first time he told us his escape from the pontoon at Cadiz, but, by the twentieth repetition, upon my word, it is barely endurable!... And the ensigns and the midshipmen!... The recollection of their conversation makes my hair stand on end. Generally speaking, the captain is the least tedious person on board. In his position of despotic commander he is in a state of secret hostility against the whole staff; he annoys and oppresses at times, but there is a certain amount of pleasure to be gained by inveighing against him. If he is furiously angry with some of his subordinates, his superior tone is a pleasure to listen to, which is some slight consolation.

On board the vessel on which I was sailing the officers were the best fellows going, all good company, liking each other as brothers, but bored of each other all the same. The captain was the gentlest of men, and, what is very rare, was nothing of a busybody. He was always unwilling to exercise his authoritative power. But, in spite of all, the voyage seemed terribly long, especially when the calm set in which overtook us a few days only before we made land!...

One day, after dinner, which want of employment had made us spin out as long as it was humanly possible, we were all assembled on the bridge, watching the monotonous but ever majestic spectacle of a sunset over the sea. Some were smoking, others were re-reading for the twentieth time one of the thirty volumes which comprised our wretched library; all were yawning till the tears ran down their cheeks. One ensign, who was sitting by me, was amusing himself, with the gravity worthy of a serious occupation, by letting the poniard, worn ordinarily by naval officers in undress, fall, point downwards, on the planks of the deck. It was as amusing as anything else on board, and required skill to throw the point so that it should stick in the wood quite perpendicularly. I wanted to follow the ensign's example, and, not having a poniard with me, I tried to borrow the captain's, but he refused it me. He was singularly attached to that weapon, and it would have vexed him to see it put to such a futile use. It had formerly belonged to a brave officer who had been mortally wounded in the last war. I guessed a story would be forthcoming, nor was I mistaken. The captain began before he was asked for it, but the officers, who stood round us, and who knew the misfortunes of Lieutenant Roger by heart, soon beat a circumspect retreat. Here is the captain's story almost in his own words:

Roger was three years older than I when I first knew him; he was a lieutenant and I was an ensign. He was quite one of the best officers on our staff; he was, moreover, good-natured, talented, quick and well educated; in a word, he was a fascinating young fellow. But unfortunately he was rather proud and sensitive; this arose, I think, from the fact of his being an illegitimate child, and his fear that his birth might make people look down upon him; but, to tell the truth, the greatest of all his faults was a passionate and ever-present desire to take the lead wherever he was. His father, whom he had never seen, made him an allowance which would have been more than enough for his needs, had he not been the soul of generosity. All that he had was at the service of his friends. When he drew his quarter's pay, and met a friend with a sad and anxious face, he would say—

"Why, mate, what's the matter? You look as though you had difficulty in making your pockets jingle when you slap them; come, here is my purse, take what you want, and have dinner with me."

A very pretty young actress came to Brest named Gabrielle, and she quickly made conquest among the naval and army officers. She was not a perfect beauty, but she had a good figure, fine eyes, a small foot and a pleasant, saucy manner; these chings are all very delightful when one is voyaging between the latitudes of twenty and twenty-five years of age. She was, in addition, the most capricious of her sex, and her style of playing did not belie this reputation. Sometimes she played enchantingly, and one would have called her a *comédienne* of the highest order; on the following day she would be cold and lifeless in the very same piece: she would deliver her part as a child recites its catechism. But more than all else it was the story told of her which I am about to relate that interested our young men. It seems she had been kept in sumptuous style by a Parisian senator, who, it was said, committed all sorts of follies for her sake. One day this man put his hat on in her house; she begged him to take it off, and even complained that he showed a want of respect towards her. The senator burst out laughing, shrugged his shoulders and said, as he elaborately settled himself in his chair, "The least I can do is to make myself at home in the house of a girl whom I keep." Gabrielle's white hand smacked his face as soundly as though she had a navvy's hand, and she also paid him back for his words by throwing his hat to the other end of the room. From that moment there was a complete rupture between them. Bankers and

generals made considerable offers to the lady, but she refused them all and became an actress, so that she could, as she expressed it, live independently.

When Roger saw her and learnt her history, he decided that she was—must be his, and with the somewhat uncouth freedom with which we sailors are credited, he took the following methods to show her how much he was affected by her charms. He bought the rarest and loveliest flowers to be found in Brest, had them made into a bouquet which he tied with a beautiful rose-coloured ribbon, and in the knot he carefully placed a roll of twenty-five napoleons, all he possessed for the time being. I remember accompanying him behind the scenes during an interval between the acts. He paid Gabrielle a brief compliment upon the grace with which she wore her costume, offered her the bouquet and asked leave to call upon her. He managed to get through all this in about three words.

Whilst Gabrielle only saw the flowers and the handsome youth who offered them to her, she smiled upon him, accompanying her smile with a most gracious bow; but when she held the bouquet between her hands and felt the weight of the gold, her face changed more rapidly than the surface of the sea when roused by a tropical hurricane; and certainly it could scarcely have looked more evil, for she hurled the bouquet and the napoleons with all her strength at my poor friend's head, so that he carried the marks of it on his face for more than a week after. The manager's bell rang and Gabrielle went on and played wildly.

Covered with confusion, Roger picked up his bouquet and packet of gold, went to a café, offered the bouquet (but not the money) to the girl at the desk, and tried to forget his cruel mistress in a glass of punch. But he did not succeed, and, in spite of his vexation at not being able to show himself without a black eye, he fell madly in love with the enraged Gabrielle. He wrote her twenty letters a day, and such letters!—abject, tender, full of obsequious phrases that might have been addressed to a princess. The first were returned to him unopened, and the rest received no answer. Roger, however, kept up hope, until he discovered that the theatre orange-seller wrapped up his oranges in Roger's love-letters, which Gabrielle, with the very refinement of maliciousness, had given him. This was a terrible blow to our friend's pride; but his passion did not die out. He talked of asking the actress to marry him, and threatened to blow his brains out when we told him that the Minister for Marine Affairs would never give his consent.

While all this was going on the officers of a regiment of the line in the garrison at Brest wished to make Gabrielle repeat a vaudeville couplet, and she refused the encore out of pure caprice. The officers and the actress both remained so obstinate that it came to the former hooting until the curtain had to be dropped and the latter left the stage. You know what the pit of a garrison town is like. The officers plotted together to hiss her without intermission the next day and for a few days after, and not allow her to play a single part unless she made humble amends for her bad behaviour. Roger had taken no part in these proceedings; but he heard of the scandal which put the whole theatre in an uproar that very night, and also the plans for revenge which were being hatched for the morrow. He immediately made up his mind what he would do.

When Gabrielle made her appearance the next night an ear-splitting noise of hooting and catcalls rose from the officers' seats. Roger, who had purposely placed himself near the roisterers, got up and harangued the noisiest in such scathing language that the whole of their fury was soon turned on himself. He then drew his notebook from his pocket, and, with the utmost *sang-froid*, wrote down the names cried out to him from all sides; he would have arranged to fight with the whole regiment if a great many naval officers had not come up, out of loyalty to their order, and taken part against his adversaries. The hubbub was something frightful.

The whole garrison was confined for several days, but when we regained liberty, there was a terrible score to settle. There were threescore of us at the rendez-vous. Roger, alone, fought three officers in succession; he pilled one, and badly wounded the other two without receiving a scratch. I, as luck would have it, came off less fortunately; a cursed lieutenant, who had been a fencing master, gave me a neat thrust through the chest which nearly finished me. The duel, or rather battle, was a fine sight, I can tell you. The naval officers had gained the victory, and the regiment was obliged to leave Brest.

You may guess that our superior officers did not overlook the author of the quarrel. They placed a guard outside his door for a fortnight.

When his term of arrest was over I came out of hospital and went to see him. Judge my surprise when I entered his room and found him sitting at breakfast tête-à-tête with Gabrielle. They seemed to have been on friendly terms for some time, and already called each other thee and thou, and drank out of the same glass. Roger introduced me to his mistress as his dearest friend, and told her I had been wounded in the slight skirmish on her behalf. This charming young girl then condescended to kiss me, for all her sympathies were with fighters.

They spent three months together in perfect happiness, and never left each other for a moment. Gabrielle seemed to love him to distraction, and Roger declared that he had never known love before he met Gabrielle.

One day a Dutch frigate came into harbour. The officers gave us a dinner, and we drank deeply of all sorts of wines; but when the cloth was removed, we did not know what to do, for these gentlemen spoke very bad French. We began to play. The Dutchmen seemed to have plenty of money; and their first lieutenant especially offered to play such high stakes that none of us cared to take a hand with him. But Roger, who did not play as a rule, felt it incumbent upon him to

uphold the honour of his country in the matter. So he played for the stakes that the Dutch lieutenant fixed. At first he gained, then he lost, and after several ups and downs of gaining and losing they stopped without anything having been done on either side. We returned this dinner, and invited the Dutch officers. Again we played, and Roger and the lieutentant set to work afresh. In short, they played for several days, meeting either in cafés or on board ship; they tried all kinds of games, backgammon more than any, always increasing their wagers until they came to the point of playing for twenty-five napoleons each game. It was an enormous sum for poverty-stricken officers like us—more than two months' pay! At the week's end Roger had lost every penny he possessed, and more than three or four thousand francs which he had borrowed on all sides.

You will gather that Roger and Gabrielle had ended by sharing household and purse in common, that is to say that Roger, who had just received a large payment on account of his allowance, contributed ten or twenty times more than the actress. He always considered that this sum, large as was his share in it, belonged chiefly to his mistress, and he had only kept back for his own expenses about fifty napoleons. He was, however, obliged to draw from this reserve to go on playing, and Gabrielle did not make the slightest objection.

The house-keeping money went the same way as his pocket money. Very soon Roger was reduced to playing his last twenty-five napoleons. The game was long and hotly contested, and it was horrible to see the intense efforts Roger made to gain it. The moment came when Roger, who held the dice-box, had only one more chance left to win; I think he wanted to get six, four. The night was far advanced, and an officer who had been looking at their play had fallen asleep in an armchair. The Dutchman was tired out and drowsy; moreover, he had drunk too much punch. Roger alone was wide awake and a prey to the depths of despair. He trembled as he threw the dice. He threw them so roughly upon the board that the shock knocked a candle over on to the floor. The Dutchman turned his head first towards the candle, which had covered his new trousers with wax, then he looked at the dice. They showed six and four. Roger, who was as pale as death, received his twenty-five napoleons, and they went on playing. Chance again favoured my unlucky friend, who, however, made blunder upon blunder, and secured points as though he wanted to lose. The Dutch lieutenant lost his head, and doubled and quadrupled his stakes; he lost every time. I can see him now—a tall, fair man of a phlegmatic nature, whose face seemed made of wax. At last he got up, after he lost forty thousand francs, and paid it without his features betraying the least trace of emotion.

"We will not take into account what we have played for to-night," said Roger. "You were more than half asleep. I do not want your money."

"You are joking," replied the phlegmatic Dutchman; "I played well, but the dice were against me. I am quite capable of winning off you always. Good evening!"

And he went out.

We learnt next day that, made desperate by his losses, he had blown out his brains in his room, after drinking a bowl of punch.

The forty thousand francs that Roger had won from him were spread out on the table, and Gabrielle gazed at them with a smile of satisfaction.

"See how rich we are!" she said. "What shall we do with all this money?"

Roger did not answer her; he seemed stunned since the Dutchman's death.

"We can do a thousand delicious things," she went on. "Money gained so easily ought to be spent as lightly. Let us set up a carriage, and snap our fingers at the Maritime Prefect and his wife. I want some diamonds and some Cashmere shawls. Ask for a holiday, and let us go to Paris; we could never spend so much money here!"

She stopped to look at Roger, whose eyes were fixed on the ceiling; his head was leant on his hand, and he had not heard a word; he seemed to be a prey to the most miserable thoughts.

"What on earth's wrong with you, Roger?" she cried, leaning her hand on his shoulder. "You will make me pull faces at you presently. I cannot get a word out of you."

"I am very unhappy," he said at length, with a smothered sigh.

"Unhappy! Why, I do believe you regret having pinked that big *mynheer*."

He raised his head and looked at her with haggard eyes.

"What does it matter?" she went on. "Why mind if he did take the thing tragically and blew out his few brains? I don't pity losing players; and his money is better in our hands than in his. He would have wasted it in drinking and smoking, whilst we will do a thousand lovely things with it, each one nicer than the last."

Roger walked about the room with his head bent on his breast, his eyes half closed and filled with tears. "You would have been sorry for him if you had seen him."

"Don't you know," said Gabrielle to him, "that people who do not know how romantically sensitive you are might imagine you had been cheating?"

"And if it were the truth?" he cried in hollow tones, stopping before her.

"Bah!" she answered, smiling; "you are not clever enough to cheat at play."

"Yes, I cheated, Gabrielle; I cheated—wretch that I am!"

She understood from his agitation of mind that he spoke but too truly. She sat down on a couch and remained speechless for some time.

"I would much rather you had killed ten men than cheated at cards," she said at length in a very troubled voice.

There was a deathlike silence for half an hour. They both sat on the same sofa, and never looked at each other once. Roger got up first and wished her good night in a calm voice.

"Good night," she replied in cold and hard tones.

Roger has since told me that he would have killed himself that very day if he had not been afraid that his comrades would have guessed the reason for his suicide. He did not wish his memory to be disgraced.

Gabrielle was as gay as usual next day. She seemed, already, to have forgotten the confidences of the previous evening. But Roger became gloomy, capricious and morose. He avoided his friends, and scarcely left his rooms, often passing a whole day without saying a word to his mistress. I attributed his melancholy to an honourable, but excessive sensitiveness, and tried several times to console him; but he put me at a distance by affecting a supreme indifference towards his unhappy partner. One day he even inveighed against the Dutch nation in violent terms, and tried to make me believe that there was not a single honourable man in Holland. All the same, he tried secretly to find out the Dutch lieutenant's relatives; but no one could give him any information about them.

Six weeks after that unlucky game of backgammon Roger found a note in Gabrielle's rooms, written by an admirer who thanked her for the kind feeling she had shown him. Gabrielle was the very personification of untidiness, and the note in question had been left by her on her mantelpiece. I do not know whether she was unfaithful to Roger or not, but he believed her to be so, and his anger was frightful. His love and a remnant of pride were the only feelings which still attached him to life, and the strongest of these sentiments was thus suddenly destroyed. He overwhelmed the proud actress with insults; and was so violent that I do not know how he refrained from striking her.

"No doubt," he said to her, "this puppy gave you lots of money. It is the only thing you love. You would give yourself to the dirtiest of our sailors if he had anything to pay you with."

"Why not?" retorted the actress icily. "Yes, I would take payment from a sailor; but *I should not have stolen it!*"

Roger uttered a cry of rage. He tremblingly drew his sword, and for one second looked at Gabrielle with the eyes of a madman; then he collected himself with a tremendous effort, threw the weapon at her feet, and rushed from the room to prevent himself yielding to the temptation which beset him.

That same evening I passed his lodging at a late hour, and, seeing his light burning, I went in to borrow a book. I found him busy, writing. He did not disturb himself, and scarcely seemed to notice my presence in his room. I sat down by his desk and studied his features; they were so much altered that anyone else but I would hardly have recognised him. All at once I noticed a letter already sealed on his desk, addressed to myself. I immediately opened it. In it Roger announced to me his intention to put an end to himself, and gave me various instructions to carry out. While I read this, he went on writing the whole time without noticing me. He was bidding farewell to Gabrielle. You can judge of my astonishment, and of what I felt bound to say to him. I was thunderstruck by his decision.

"What! you want to kill yourself when you are so happy?"

"My friend," he said, as he hid his letter, "you know nothing about it; you do not know me; I am a rascal; I am so guilty that a prostitute has power to insult me; and I am so aware of my baseness that I have no power to strike her."

He then related the story of the game of backgammon, and all that you already know. As I listened I was as moved as he was. I did not know what to say to him; with tears in my eyes I pressed his hands, but I could not speak. Then the idea came to me to try and show him that he need not reproach himself with having intentionally caused the ruin of the Dutchman, and that, after all, he had only made him lose, by his ... cheating ... twenty-five napoleons.

"Then," he cried, with bitter irony, "I am a petty thief and not a great one. I, who was so ambitious, to be nothing but a scurvy little scoundrel!"

He shrieked with laughter.

I burst into tears.

Suddenly the door opened and Gabrielle rushed into his arms.

"Forgive me!" she cried, strangling him almost in her passion; "forgive me! I know it now; I love only you; and I love you better now than if you had not done what you blame yourself for. If you

like, I will steal; I have stolen before now.... Yes, I have stolen; I took a gold watch.... What worse could one do?"

Roger shook his head incredulously, but his face seemed to brighten.

"No, my poor child," he said, gently repulsing her. "I must kill myself; there is no other course for me. I suffer so greatly that I cannot bear my grief."

"Very well, then, if you intend to die, Roger, I shall die with you. What is life to me without you? I have plenty of courage; I have fired pistols; I shall kill myself like anyone else. Besides, I have played at tragedy and am used to it." At first there were tears in her eyes, but this last idea amused her, and even Roger could not help smiling with her. "You are laughing, my soldier-boy," she cried, clapping her hands and hugging him; "you will not kill yourself."

All the time she embraced him she was first crying, then laughing, then swearing like a sailor; for she was not, like many women, afraid of a coarse word.

In the meantime I possessed myself of Roger's pistols and poniard; then I turned to him and said —

"My dear Roger, you have a mistress and a friend who love you. Believe me, there can still be happiness for you in this life." I embraced him and went out, leaving him alone with Gabrielle.

I do not believe we should have succeeded in doing more than delaying his fatal design if he had not received an order from the Admiralty to set out as first lieutenant on board a frigate bound for a cruise in the Indian seas—if it could first cross the lines of the English fleet, which blockaded the port. It was a dangerous venture. I put it to him that it would be much better to die nobly by an English bullet than to put an inglorious end to his life himself, without rendering any service to his country. So he promised to live. He distributed half the forty thousand francs to maimed sailors or the widows and orphans of seamen; the rest he gave to Gabrielle, who at first vowed to him only to use the money for charitable purposes. She fully meant to keep her word, poor girl! but enthusiasm with her was short-lived. I have heard since that she gave some thousands of francs to the poor, but she spent the remainder on finery.

Roger and I boarded the fine frigate *La Galatée*; our men were brave, experienced, and well-drilled, but our commander was an idiot, who thought himself a Jean Bart because he could swear better than an army captain, because he murdered French, and because he had never studied the theory of his profession, the practice of which he understood only very indifferently. However, fate favoured us at the outset. We got well out of the roadstead—thanks to a gust of wind which compelled the blockading fleet to give us a wide berth—and we began our cruise by burning an English sloop and an East Indiaman off the coast of Portugal.

We were slowly sailing towards the Indian seas, hampered by contrary winds and our captain's bad handling of the ship, whose stupidity increased the danger of our cruise. Sometimes we were chased by superior forces, sometimes pursued by merchant vessels; we did not pass a single day without some fresh adventure. But neither the risky life he led nor the labours caused him by the irksome ship-duties devolving upon him could distract Roger from the sad thoughts which unceasingly haunted him. He who was once considered the most brilliant and active officer in our port now found it almost a burden to fulfil simply his duty. As soon as he was off duty he would shut himself in his cabin without either books or papers, and the unhappy man passed whole hours lying in his cot, for he could not sleep.

One day, noticing his depression, I ventured to say to him—

"Good gracious, my boy, you grieve over nothing! Granted you filched twenty-five napoleons from a big Dutchman, you show as much remorse as though you had taken more than a million. Now, tell me, when you loved the wife of the Prefect of ... did you mind at all? Nevertheless, she was worth more than twenty-five napoleons."

He turned over on his mattress without a word.

"After all," I continued, "your crime, since you persist in calling it so, had an honourable motive and arose from a lofty mind."

He turned his head and looked at me furiously.

"Yes, for if you had lost what would have become of Gabrielle? She—poor girl!—would have sold her last garment for you.... If you had lost she would have been reduced to misery.... It was for her, out of love to her, you cheated. There are people who die for love ... will kill themselves for it.... You, my dear Roger, did more. For a man of our order it takes more courage to ... steal, to put it baldly, than to commit suicide."

("Now, perhaps," the captain interrupted his story to say, "I appear ridiculous to you. I assure you that my friendship for Roger endowed me with a timely eloquence that I am not equal to nowadays; and, devil take it, in saying what I did I spoke in good earnest, and I believe all I said. Ah, I was young then!")

Roger did not make any answer for a long time; then he held out his hand to me.

"My friend," he said, making a great effort over himself, "you think too well of me. I am a cowardly wretch. When I cheated the Dutchman my only thought was to win the twenty-five

napoleons, that was all. I never thought of Gabrielle, and that is why I despise myself.... I, to hold my honour in less esteem than twenty-five napoleons!... What baseness! Yes, I could be happy if I could tell myself I stole to keep Gabrielle from wretchedness.... No!... no! I did not think of her.... I was not in love at that moment.... I was a player.... I was a thief.... I stole money to possess it myself,... and the deed has so degraded me, and debased me, that I now have no more courage left nor love.... I can see it; I do not think any longer of Gabrielle.... I am a broken-down man."

He was so wretched, that if he had asked me to hand him his pistols to kill himself I believe I should have given them to him.

One Friday, that day of ill omen, he discovered that a big English frigate, the *Alcestis*, was chasing us. She carried fifty-eight guns, and we but thirty-eight. He put on all sail to escape from her, but her pace was faster than ours, and she gained on us every minute. It was very evident that before night we should be obliged to engage in an unequal battle. Our captain called Roger to his cabin, where they consulted together for more than a quarter of an hour. Roger came up on the deck again, took me by the arm, and drew me aside.

"In two hours' time," he said, "we shall be engaged. That rash man who struts the quarter-deck has lost his wits. He has two courses to choose from: the first, and the most honourable, would be to let the enemy come up to us, then to board the ship determinedly with a hundred or so of our best men; the other course, which is not bad, but rather cowardly, is to lighten ourselves by throwing some of our guns overboard. Then we could make for the near coast of Africa, which we shall soon find to larboard. The English captain would soon be obliged to give up the chase, for fear of grounding; but our ... captain is neither coward nor hero. He will let himself be destroyed by gunshots a good distance off, and after some hours' fight he will honourably lower his flag. So much the worse for you. The Portsmouth pontoons will be your fate. I have no desire to see them."

"Possibly," I said, "our first shots will damage the enemy suiliciently to compel her to abandon the chase."

"Listen, I do not mean to be taken prisoner; I shall kill myself. It is time I ended it all. If by ill luck I am only wounded, give me your word of honour that you will throw me overboard. It is the proper death-bed for a good sailor."

"What nonsense!" I exclaimed. "What a charge to make me undertake!"

"You will be fulfilling the duty of a true friend. You know I shall have to die. I have only consented not to take my own life in the hope of being killed; you must remember that. Come, promise me this; if you refuse, I shall go and ask this service from the boatswain's mate, who will not refuse me."

After reflecting for some time, I said to him—

"I give you my word to do what you wish, provided that you are mortally wounded, with no hope of recovery. In that case I consent to spare you further suffering."

"I shall be mortally wounded or I shall be killed outright."

He held out his hand to me, and I shook it firmly. After that he was calmer, and even a kind of martial cheerfulness shone in his face. Towards three o'clock in the afternoon the enemy's guns began to play in our rigging. We then clewed up some of our sails, crossed the bows of the *Alcestis*, and started a rattling fire, which the English returned vigorously. After about an hour's fight our captain, who did nothing methodically, wanted to try to board the enemy; but we had already many dead and wounded, and the remainder of our crew had lost heart. Our rigging, besides, had suffered severely, and our masts were badly damaged. Just as we were taking in sail, to approach the English vessel, our large mast, which had nothing to stay it, fell with a horrible noise. The *Alcestis* took advantage of the confusion into which this accident threw us. She came broadside up to our stern and opened fire upon us within half a pistol range of us; she riddled shot through our unfortunate frigate fore and aft, and we were only in a position to point two small guns at her. At that moment I was standing near Roger, who was busy trying to cut the shrouds which still held the fallen mast. I felt my arm pressed forcibly; I turned round and saw him laid flat on the deck covered with blood. He had received a charge of grape-shot in the stomach.

"What can we do, lieutenant?" cried the captain, running up.

"Nail our flag to this piece of mast and sink the ship."

The captain left him at that, for he did not in the least relish the advice.

"Come," said Roger, "remember your promise."

"It is nothing," I said; "you will get over it."

"Throw me overboard!" he cried, and he swore fearfully and seized me by my coat-tails; "you see well enough that I cannot recover. Throw me into the sea; I do not want to see our flag taken."

Two sailors came up to carry him below.

"To your guns, you knaves!" he cried with all his strength: "use grape-shot, and aim on the deck. And as for you, if you fail to keep your word I will curse you and think of you as the most

cowardly and vile of men!"

His wound was certainly mortal. I saw the captain call a midshipman and give him the order to lower the flag.

"Give me a shake of the hand," I said to Roger.

And at that moment our flag was lowered....

"Captain, there is a whale to larboard!" interrupted an ensign, running to us.

"A whale?" cried the captain joyfully and leaving his story unfinished. "Quick! launch the longboat and the yawl, too! All longboats into the water! Bring the harpoons and ropes!" ...

I never knew how poor Lieutenant Roger died.

1830.

THE ETRUSCAN VASE

Auguste Saint-Clair was not at all a favourite in Society, the chief reason being that he only cared to please those who took his own fancy. He avoided the former and sought after the latter. In other respects he was absent-minded and indolent. One evening, on coming out of the Italian Opera, the Marquise A—— asked him his opinion on the singing of Mlle. Sontag. "Yes, Madam," Saint-Clair replied, smiling pleasantly, and thinking of something totally different. This ridiculous reply could not be set down to shyness, for he talked with great lords and noted men and women and even with Society women with as much ease as though he were their equal. The Marquise put down Saint-Clair as a stupid, impertinent boor.

One Monday he had an invitation to dine with Madam B——. She paid him a good deal of attention, and on leaving her house, he remarked that he had never met a more agreeable woman. Madam B—— spent a month collecting witticisms at other people's houses, which she dispensed in one evening at her own. Saint-Clair called upon her again on the Thursday of the same week. This time he grew a little tired of her. Another visit decided him never to enter her salon again. Madam B—— gave out that Saint-Clair was an ill-bred young man, and not good form.

He was naturally tender-hearted and affectionate, but at an age when lasting impressions are taken too easily. His too demonstrative nature had drawn upon him the sarcasm of his comrades. He was proud and ambitious, and stuck to his opinion like an obstinate child. Henceforth he made a point of hiding any outward sign of what might seem discreditable weakness. He attained his end, but the victory cost him dear. He learnt to hide his softer feelings from others, but the repression only increased their force a hundredfold. In Society he bore the sorry reputation of being heartless and indifferent; and, when alone, his restless imagination conjured up hideous torments—all the worse because unshared.

How difficult it is to find a friend! Difficult! Is it possible to find two men anywhere who have not a secret from each other? That Saint-Clair had little faith in friendship was easily seen. With young Society people his manner was cold and reserved. He asked no questions about their secrets; and most of his actions and all his thoughts were mysteries to them. A Frenchman loves to talk of himself; therefore Saint-Clair was the unwilling recipient of many confidences. His friends—that is to say, those whom he saw about twice a week—complained of his indifference to their confidences. They felt that indiscretion should be reciprocal; for, indeed, he who confides his secret to us unasked generally takes offence at not learning ours in return.

"He keeps his thoughts to himself," grumbled Alphonse de Thémines one day.

"I could never place the least confidence in that deuced Saint-Clair," added the smart colonel.

"I think he is half a Jesuit," replied Jules Lambert. "Someone swore to me that he had met him twice coming out of St. Sulpice. Nobody knows what he thinks about. I must say I never feel at ease with him."

They separated. Alphonse encountered Saint-Clair in the Boulevard Italien. He was walking with his eyes on the ground, not noticing anyone. Alphonse stopped him, took his arm, and, before they had reached the Rue de la Paix, he had related to him the whole history of his love affairs with Madam ——, whose husband was so jealous and so violent.

The same evening Jules Lambert lost his money at cards. After that he thought he had better go and dance. While dancing, he accidentally knocked against a man, who had also lost his money and was in a very bad temper. Sharp words followed, and a challenge was given and taken. Jules begged Saint-Clair to act as his second, and, at the same time, borrowed money from him, which he was never likely to return.

After all, Saint-Clair was easy enough to live with. He was no one's enemy but his own; he was

obliging, often genial, rarely tiresome; he had travelled much and read much, but never obtruded his knowledge or his experiences unasked. In personal appearance he was tall and well made; he had a dignified and refined expression—almost always too grave, but his smile was pleasing and very attractive.

I am forgetting one important point. Saint-Clair paid attention to all women, and sought their society more than that of men. It was difficult to say whether he was in love; but if this reserved being felt love, the beautiful Countess Mathilde de Coursy was the woman of his choice. She was a young widow, at whose house he was often seen. To prove their friendship there was the evidence first of the almost exaggerated politeness of Saint-Clair towards the Countess, and *vice versâ*; then his habit of never pronouncing her name in public, or if obliged to speak of her, never with the slightest praise; also, before Saint-Clair was introduced to her, he had been passionately fond of music, and the Countess equally so of painting. Since they had become acquainted their tastes had changed. Lastly, when the Countess visited a health resort the previous year, Saint-Clair followed her in less than a week.

My duty as novelist obliges me to reveal that early one morning in the month of July, a few moments before sunrise, the garden gate of a country house opened, and a man crept out with the stealthiness of a burglar fearing discovery. This country house belonged to Madam de Coursy, and the man was Saint-Clair. A woman, muffled in a cape, came to the gate with him, stood with her head out and watched him as long as she could, until he was far along the path which led by the park wall. Saint-Clair stopped, looked round cautiously, and signed with his hand for the woman to go in. The clearness of a summer dawn enabled him to distinguish her pale face. She stood motionless where he had left her. He went back to her, and took her tenderly in his arms. He meant to compel her to go in; but he had still a hundred things to say to her. Their conversation lasted ten minutes, till at last they heard the voice of a peasant going to his work in the fields. One more kiss passed between them, the gate was shut, and Saint-Clair with a bound reached the end of the footpath. He followed a track evidently well known to him, and ran along, striking the bushes with his stick and almost jumping for joy. Sometimes he stopped, or sauntered slowly, looking at the sky, which was flushed in the east with purple. In fact, anyone meeting him would have taken him for an escaped lunatic. After half an hour's walk he reached the door of a lonely little house which he had rented for the season. He let himself in with a key, and then, throwing himself on the couch, he fell into a day-dream, with vacant eyes and a happy smile playing on his lips. His mind was filled with bright reflections. "How happy I am!" he kept repeating. "At last I have met a heart that understands mine.... Yes, I have found my ideal.... I have gained at the same time a friend and a lover.... What depth of soul!... What character!... No, she has never loved anyone before me." How soon vanity creeps into human affairs!" She is the loveliest woman in Paris," he thought, and his imagination conjured up all her charms. "She has chosen me before all the others. She had the flower of Society at her feet. That colonel of hussars, gallant, good-looking and not too stout; that young author, who paints in water-colours so well, and who is such a capital actor; that Russian Lovelace, who has been in the Balkan campaign and served under Diébitch; above all, Camille T——, who is brilliantly clever, has good manners and a fine sabre-cut across his forehead.... She has dismissed them all for me!..." Then came the refrain—"Oh, how happy I am! how happy I am!" and he got up and opened the window, for he could scarcely breathe. First he walked about; then he tossed on his couch.

A happy lover is almost as tedious as an unhappy one. One of my friends, who is generally in one or other of these conditions, found that the only way of getting any attention was to give me an excellent breakfast, over which he could unburden himself on the subject of his amours. When the coffee was finished he was obliged to choose a totally different topic of conversation.

As I cannot give breakfast to all my readers, I make them a present of Saint-Clair's ecstasies. Besides, it is impossible always to live in cloudland. Saint-Clair was tired; he yawned, stretched his arms, saw that it was broad day and at last slept. When he awoke he saw by his watch that he had hardly time to dress and rush off to Paris, to attend a luncheon-party of several of his young friends.

They had just uncorked another bottle of champagne. I leave my readers to guess how many had preceded it. It is sufficient to know that they had reached that stage which comes quickly enough at a young men's dinner-party, when everybody speaks at once, and when the steady heads get anxious for those who cannot carry so much.

"I wish," said Alphonse de Thémines, who had never missed a chance of talking about England —"I wish that it was the custom in Paris, as it is in London, for each one to propose a toast to his mistress. If it were we should find out for whom our friend Saint-Clair sighs." And, while uttering these words, he filled up his own glass and those of his neighbours.

Saint-Clair felt slightly embarrassed, but was about to reply when Jules Lambert prevented him.

"I heartily approve this custom," he said, raising his glass; "and I adopt it. To all the milliners of Paris, with the exception of those past thirty, the one-eyed and the lame."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the anglomaniacs.

Saint-Clair rose, glass in hand.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have not such a large heart as has our friend Jules, but it is more constant—a constancy all the more faithful since I have been long separated from the lady of my thoughts. Nevertheless I am sure that you will approve of my choice, even if you are not already my rivals. To Judith Pasta, gentlemen! May we soon welcome back the first *tragédienne* of Europe."

Thémines was about to criticise the toast, but was interrupted by acclamation. Saint-Clair having parried this thrust, believed himself safe for the rest of the day.

The conversation turned first on theatres. From the criticism of the drama they wandered to political topics. From the Duke of Wellington they passed to English horses. From English horses to women, by a natural connection of ideas; for, to young men, a good horse first, and then a beautiful mistress, are the two most desirable objects.

Then they discussed the means of acquiring these coveted treasures. Horses are bought, women also are bought; only we do not so talk of them. Saint-Clair, after modestly pleading inexperience in this delicate subject, gave as his opinion that the chief way to please a woman is to be singular, to be different from others. But he did not think it possible to give a general prescription for singularity.

"According to your view," said Jules, "a lame or hump-backed man would have a better chance of pleasing than one of ordinary make."

"You push things too far," retorted Saint-Clair, "but I am willing to accept all the consequences of my proposition. For example, if I were hump-backed, instead of blowing out my brains I would make conquests. In the first place, I would try my wiles on those who are generally tender-hearted; then on those women—and there are many of them—who set up for being original—eccentric, as they say in England. To begin with, I should describe my pitiful condition, and point out that I was the victim of Nature's cruelty. I should try to move them to sympathy with my lot, I should let them suspect that I was capable of a passionate love. I should kill one of my rivals in a duel, and I should pretend to poison myself with a feeble dose of laudanum. After a few months they would not notice my deformity, and then I should be on the watch for the first signs of affection. With women who aspire to originality conquest is easy. Only persuade them that it is a hard-and-fast rule that a deformed person can never have a love affair, they will immediately then wish to prove the opposite."

"What a Don Juan!" cried Jules.

"As we have not had the misfortune of being born deformed," said Colonel Beaujeu, "we had better get our legs broken, gentlemen."

"I fully agree with Saint-Clair," said Hector Roquantin, who was only three and a half feet high. "We constantly see beautiful and fashionable women giving themselves to men whom you fine fellows would never dream of."

"Hector, just ring the bell for another bottle, will you?" said Thémines casually.

The dwarf got up and everyone smiled, recalling the fable of the fox without a tail.

"As for me," said Thémines, renewing the conversation, "the longer I live, the more clearly I see that the chief singularity which attracts even the most obdurate, is passable features"—and he threw a complaisant glance in a mirror opposite—"passable features and good taste in dress," and he filliped a crumb of bread off his coat.

"Bah!" cried the dwarf, "with good looks and a coat by Staub, there are plenty of women to be had for a week at a time, but we should be tired of them at the second meeting. More than that is needed to win what is called love.... You must...."

"Stop!" interrupted Thémines. "Do you want an apt illustration? You all know what kind of man Massigny was. Manners like an English groom, and no more conversation than his horse.... But he was as handsome as Adonis, and could tie his cravat like Brummel. Altogether he was the greatest bore I have ever met."

"He almost killed me with weariness," said Colonel Beaujeu. "Only think, I once had to travel two hundred leagues with him!"

"Did you know," asked Saint-Clair, "that he caused the death of poor Richard Thornton, whom you all knew?"

"But," objected Jules, "I thought he was assassinated by brigands near Fondi?"

"Granted; but Massigny was at all events an accomplice in the crime. A party of travellers, Thornton among them, had arranged to go to Naples together to avoid attacks from brigands. Massigny asked to be allowed to join them. As soon as Thornton heard this, he set out before the others, apparently to avoid being long with Massigny. He started alone, and you know the rest."

"Thornton took the only course," said Thémines; "he chose the easiest of two deaths. We should all have done the same in his place." Then, after a pause, "You grant me," he went on, "that

Massigny was the greatest bore on earth?"

"Certainly," they all cried with one accord.

"Don't let us despair," said Jules; "let us make an exception in favour of ... especially when he divulges his political intrigues."

"You will next grant me," continued Thémines, "that Madam de Coursy is as clever a woman as can be found anywhere."

A moment's silence followed. Saint-Clair looked down and fancied that all eyes were fixed on himself.

"Who disputes it?" he said at length, still bending over his plate apparently to examine more closely the flowers painted in the china.

"I maintain," said Jules, raising his voice—"I maintain that she is one of the three most fascinating women in Paris."

"I knew her husband," said the Colonel, "he often showed me her charming letters."

"Auguste," interrupted Hector Roquantin, "do introduce me to the Countess. They say you can do anything with her."

"When she returns to Paris at the end of autumn,..." murmured Saint-Clair, "I—I believe she does not entertain visitors in the country."

"Will you listen to me?" exclaimed Thémines.

Silence was restored. Saint-Clair figetted upon his chair like a prisoner before his judges.

"You did not know the Countess three years ago because you were then in Germany, Saint-Clair," went on Alphonse de Thémines, with aggravating coolness. "You cannot form any idea, therefore, of her as she was then; lovely, with the freshness of a rose, and as light-hearted and gay as a butterfly. Perhaps you do not know that among all her many admirers Massigny was the one she honoured with her favours? The most stupid and ridiculous of men turned the head of the most fascinating amongst women. Do you suppose that a deformed person could have done as much? Nonsense; believe me, with a good figure and a first-rate tailor, only boldness in addition is needed."

Saint-Clair was in a most awkward position. He longed to fling back the lie direct in the speaker's face, but was restrained from fear of compromising the Countess. He would have liked to have said something to defend her, but he was tongue-tied. His lips trembled with rage, and he tried to find some indirect means of forcing a quarrel, but could not.

"What," exclaimed Jules, with astonishment, "Madam de Coursy gave herself to Massigny? Frailty, thy name is woman!"

"The reputation of a woman being of such small moment, it is, of course, allowable to pull it to pieces for the sake of a little sport," observed Saint-Clair in a dry and scornful tone, "and—"

But as he spoke he remembered with dismay a certain Etruscan vase that he had noticed a hundred times upon the mantelpiece in the Countess's house in Paris. He knew that it was a gift from Massigny, who had brought it back with him from Italy; and—overwhelming coincidence!—it had been taken by the Countess from Paris to her country house. Every evening when Mathilde took the flowers out of her dress she put them in this Etruscan vase.

Speech died upon his lips. He could neither see nor think of anything but of that Etruscan vase.

"How absurd," cries a critic, "to suspect his mistress from such a trifle!"

"Have you ever been in love, my dear critic?"

Thémines was in too good a humour to take offence at the tone Saint-Clair had used when speaking to him, and replied lightly and with great good nature—

"I can only repeat what I heard in Society. It passed as a true story while you were in Germany. However, I scarcely know Madam de Coursy. It is eighteen months since I was at her house. Very likely I am wrong, and the story was a fabrication of Massigny's. But let us return to our discussion, for whether my illustration be false or not does not affect my point. You all know that the cleverest woman in France, whose works—"

The door opened, and Théodore Néville came in. He had just returned from Egypt.

"Théodore, you have soon come back!" He was overwhelmed with questions.

"Have you brought back a real Turkish costume?" asked Thémines. "Have you got an Arabian horse and an Egyptian groom?"

"What sort of man is the Pasha?" said Jules. "When will he make himself independent? Have you seen a head cut off with a single stroke of the sabre?"

"And the *aimées*," said Roquantin. "Are the Cairo women beautiful?"

"Did you meet General L——?" asked Colonel Beaujeu. "Has he organised the army of the Pasha?

Did Colonel C—— give you a sword for me?"

"And the Pyramids? The cataracts of the Nile? And the statue of Memnon? Ibrahim Pasha?" etc. They all talked at once; Saint-Clair only brooded on the Etruscan vase.

Théodore sat cross-legged. He had learnt that habit in Egypt, and did not wish to lose it in France. He waited till his questioners were tired, and then spoke as fast as he could to save himself from being easily interrupted.

"The Pyramids! upon my word they are a regular humbug. They are not so high as I expected. Strasburg Cathedral is only four yards lower. I passed by the antiquities. Do not talk to me about them. The very sight of hieroglyphics makes me faint. There are plenty of travellers who worry themselves over these things! My object was to study the nature and manners of all the strange people that jostle against each other in the streets of Alexandria and of Cairo. Turks, Bedouins, Copts, Fellahs, Môghrebins. I drew up a few hasty notes when I was in the quarantine hospital. What infamous places they are! I hope none of you fellows are nervous about infection! I smoked my pipe calmly in the midst of three hundred plague-stricken people. Ah! Colonel, you would admire the well-mounted cavalry out there. I must show you some superb weapons that I have brought back. I have a *djerid* which belonged to a famous Mourad Bey. I have a *yataghan* for you, Colonel, and a *khandjar* for Auguste. You must see my *metchlà* and *bournous* and *khaick*. Do you know I could have brought back any number of women with me? Ibrahim Pasha has such numbers imported from Greece that they can be had for nothing.... But I had to think of my mother's feelings.... I talked much with the Pasha. He is a thoroughly intelligent and unprejudiced man. You would hardly credit it, but he knows everything about our affairs. Upon my honour, he knows the smallest secrets of our Cabinet. I gleaned much valuable information from him on the state of parties in France.... Just now he is taken up with statistics. He subscribes to all our papers. Would you believe it?—he is a pronounced Bonapartist, and talks of nothing but Napoleon. 'Ah! what a great man *Bounabardo* was!' he said to me; 'Bounabardo,' that is how he pronounces Bonaparte."

"Giourdina, meaning Jourdain," murmured Thémines.

"At first," continued Théodore, "Mohamed Ali was extremely reserved with me. All the Turks are very suspicious, you know, and he took me for a spy or a Jesuit, the devil he did! He had a perfect horror of Jesuits. But, after several visits, he recognised that I was an unprejudiced traveller, anxious to inform myself at first hand of Eastern manners, customs and politics. Then he unbosomed himself and spoke freely to me. At the third and last audience he granted me I ventured to ask His Excellency why he did not make himself independent of the Porte. 'By Allah!' he replied, 'I wish it indeed, but I fear the Liberal papers which govern your country would not support me if I proclaimed the independence of Egypt.' He is a fine old man, with a long white beard. He never smiles. He gave us some first-rate confections; but the gift that pleased him most of all I offered him was a collection of costumes of the Imperial Guard by Charlet."

"Is the Pasha of a romantic turn of mind?" asked Thémines.

"He does not trouble himself much about literature; but you know, of course, that Arabian literature is entirely romantic. They have a poet called Melek Ayatalnefous-Ebn-Esraf, who has recently published a book of Meditations, compared with which Lamartine's read like classic prose. I took lessons in Arabic directly I got to Cairo, in order to read the Koran. I did not need to have many lessons before I was able to judge of the supreme beauty of the prophet's style, and of the baldness of all our translations. Look here, would you like to see Arabian handwriting? This word in gold letters is *Allah*, which means God."

As he spoke he showed them a very dirty letter, which he took out of a scented silk purse.

"How long were you in Egypt?" asked Thémines.

"Six weeks."

And the traveller proceeded to hold forth on everything from beginning to end. Saint-Clair left soon after his arrival, and went in the direction of his country house. The impetuous gallop of his horse prevented him from thinking consecutively, but he felt vaguely that his happiness in life had gone for ever, and that it had been shattered by a dead man and an Etruscan vase.

After reaching home he threw himself on the same couch upon which he had dreamed for so long and so deliciously, and analysed his happiness the evening before. His most cherished dream had been that his mistress was different from other women, that she had not loved nor ever would love anyone but himself. Now this exquisite dream must perish in the light of a sad and cruel reality. "I have had a beautiful mistress, but nothing more. She is clever; she is therefore all the more to be blamed for loving Massigny!... I know she does love me now ... with her whole soul ... as she can love. But to be loved in the same fashion as Massigny has been loved!... She has yielded herself up to my attentions, my importunities, my whims. But I have been deceived. There has been no sympathy between us. Whether her lover were Massigny or myself was equally the same to her. He is handsome, and she loves him for his good looks. She amuses herself with me for a time. 'I may as well love Saint-Clair,' she says to herself, 'since the other is dead! And if Saint-Clair dies, or I tire of him, who knows?'

"I firmly believe the devil listens invisible behind a tortured wretch like myself. The enemy of man-kind is tickled by the spectacle, and as soon as the victim's wounds begin to heal, the devil is

waiting to reopen them."

Saint-Clair thought he heard a voice murmur in his ears—

"The peculiar honour
Of being the successor...."

He sat up on the couch and threw a savage glance round him. How glad he would have been to find someone in his room! He would have torn him limb from limb without any hesitation.

The clock struck eight. At eight-thirty the Countess expected him. Should he disappoint her? Why, indeed, should he ever see Massigny's mistress again? He lay down again on the couch and shut his eyes. "I will try to sleep," he said. He lay still for half a minute, then he leapt to his feet and ran to the clock to see how the time was going. "How I wish it were half-past eight!" he thought. "It would be too late then for me to start." If only he were taken ill. He had not the courage to stop at home unless he had an excuse. He walked up and down his room, then he sat down and took a book, but he could not read a syllable. He sat down in front of his piano, but had not enough energy to open it. He whistled; then he looked out of his window at the clouds, and tried to count the poplars. At length he looked at the clock again, and saw that he had not succeeded in whiling away more than three minutes. "I cannot help loving her," he burst out, grinding his teeth and stamping his feet; "She rules me, and I am her slave, just as Massigny was before me. Well, since you have not sufficient courage to break the hated chain, poor wretch, you must obey."

He picked up his hat and rushed out.

When we are carried away by a great passion it is some consolation to our self-love to look clown from the height of pride upon our weakness. "I certainly am weak," he said to himself; "but what if I wish to be so?"

As he walked slowly up the footpath which led to the garden gate, he could see in the distance a white face standing out against the dark background of trees. She beckoned to him with her handkerchief. His heart beat violently, and his knees trembled under him; he could not speak, and he had become so nervous that he feared lest the Countess should read his ill-humour.

He took the hand she held out to him, and kissed her brow, because she threw herself into his arms. He followed her into her sitting-room in silence, though scarce able to suppress his bursting sighs.

A single candle lighted the Countess's room. They sat down, and Saint-Clair noticed his friend's coiffure; a single rose was in her hair. He had given her, the previous evening, a beautiful English engraving of Leslie's "Duchess of Portland" (whose hair was dressed in the same fashion), and Saint-Clair had merely remarked to the Countess, "I like that single rose better than all your elaborate coiffures." He did not like jewels, and inclined to the opinion of a noble lord who once remarked coarsely, "The devil has nothing left to teach women who overdress themselves and coil their hair fantastically." The night before, while playing with the Countess's pearl necklace (he always would have something between his hands when talking), Saint-Clair had said, "You are too pretty, Mathilde, to wear jewels; they are only meant to hide defects." To-night the Countess had stripped herself of rings, necklaces, earrings and bracelets, for she stored up his most trivial remarks. He noticed, above everything else in a woman's toilet, the shoes she wore; and, like many other men, he was quite mad on this point. A heavy shower had fallen at sunset, and the grass was still very wet; in spite of this the Countess walked on the damp lawn in silk stockings and black satin slippers.... Suppose she were to take cold?

"She loves me," said Saint-Clair to himself.

He sighed at his folly, but smiled at Mathilde in spite of himself, tossed between his sorry mood and the gratification of seeing a pretty woman, who had sought, by those trifles which have such priceless value in the eyes of lovers, to please him.

The Countess was radiant with love, playfully mischievous and bewitchingly charming. She took something from a Japanese lacquered box and held it out to him in her little firmly closed hand.

"I broke your watch the other night," she said; "here it is, mended."

She handed the watch to him and looked at him tenderly, and yet mischievously, biting her lower lip as though to prevent herself from laughing. Oh, what beautiful white teeth she had! and how they gleamed against the ruby red of her lips! (A man looks exceedingly foolish when he is being teased by a pretty woman, and replies coldly.)

Saint-Clair thanked her, took the watch and was about to put in his pocket.

"Look at it and open it," she continued. "See if it is mended all right. You, who are so learned, you, who have been to the Polytechnic School, ought to be able to tell that."

"Oh, I didn't learn much there," said Saint-Clair.

He opened the case in an absent-minded way, and what was his surprise to find a miniature portrait of Madam de Coursy painted on the interior of the case? How could he sulk any longer? His brow cleared; he thought no longer of Massigny; he only remembered that he was by the side of a beautiful woman, and that this woman loved him.

"The lark, that harbinger of dawn," began to sing, and long bands of pale light stretched across the eastern clouds. At such an hour did Romeo say farewell to Juliet, and it is the classic hour when all lovers should part.

Saint-Clair stood before a mantelpiece, the key of the garden gate in his hand, his eyes intently fixed on the Etruscan vase, of which we have already spoken. In the depths of his soul he still bore it a grudge, although he was in a much better humour. The simple explanation occurred to his mind that Thémines might have lied about it. While the Countess was wrapping a shawl round her head in order to go to the garden gate with him he began to tap the detested vase with the key, at first gently, then gradually increasing the force of his blows until it seemed as though he would soon smash it to atoms.

"Oh, do be careful!" Mathilde exclaimed. "You will break my beautiful Etruscan vase!"

She snatched the key out of his hands.

Saint-Clair was very angry, but he resigned himself and turned his back on the chimney-piece to avoid temptation. Opening his watch, he began to examine the portrait that had just been given him.

"Who painted it?" he asked.

"Monsieur R——, and it was Massigny who introduced him to my notice. (After Massigny had been in Rome he discovered that he had exquisite taste in art, and constituted himself the Macænas of all young painters.) I really think the portrait is like me, though it is a little too flattering."

Saint-Clair had a burning desire to fling the watch against the wall, to break it beyond all hope of mending. He controlled himself, however, and put the watch in his pocket. Then he noticed that it was daylight, and, entreating Mathilde not to come out with him, he left the house and crossed the garden with rapid strides, and was soon alone in the country.

"Massigny! Massigny!" he burst forth with concentrated rage. "Can I never escape him?... No doubt the artist who painted this portrait painted another for Massigny.... What a fool I am to imagine for a moment that I am loved with a love equal to my own!... just because she put aside her jewels and wore a rose in her hair!... Jewels! why, she has a chest full.... Massigny, who thought of little else save a woman's toilette, was a lover of jewellery!... Yes, she has a gracious nature, it must be granted; she knows how to gratify the tastes of her lovers. Damn it! I would rather a hundred times that she were a courtesan and gave herself for money. Just because she was my mistress and unpaid I thought she loved me indeed."

Soon another still more unhappy idea presented itself. In a few weeks' time the Countess would be out of mourning, and Saint-Clair had promised to marry her as soon as her year of widowhood was over. He had promised. Promised? No. He had never spoken of it, but such had been his intention and the Countess had understood it so. But for him this was as good as an oath. Last night he would have given a throne to hasten the time for acknowledging his love publicly; now the very thought of marrying the former mistress of Massigny filled him with loathing.

"Nevertheless, I owe it to her to marry her," he said to himself, "and it shall be done. No doubt she thinks, poor woman, I heard all about her former *liaison*; it seems to have been generally known. Besides, she did not then know me.... She cannot understand me; she thinks that I am only such another lover as Massigny."

Then he said to himself, and not without a certain pride—

"For three months she has made me the happiest man living; such happiness is worth the sacrifice of my life."

He did not go to bed, but rode about among the woods the whole of the morning. In one of the pathways of the woods of Verrières he saw a man mounted on a fine English horse, who called him immediately by his name while he was still far off. It was Alphonse de Thémines. To a man in Saint-Clair's state of mind solitude is particularly desirable, and this encounter with Thémines changed his bad humour into a furious temper. Thémines did not notice his mood, or perhaps took a wicked pleasure in thwarting it. He talked and laughed and joked without noticing that he did not receive any response. Saint-Clair soon tried to turn his horse aside into a narrow track, hoping the bore would not follow him; but it was of no use, bores do not leave their prey so easily. Thémines pulled the bridle in the same direction, increased his horse's pace to keep by Saint-Clair's side and complacently continued the conversation.

I have said that the path was a narrow one. The two horses could hardly walk abreast. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that even so good a horseman as Thémines should graze against Saint-Clair's foot as he walked along with him. This put the finishing touch to his anger, and he could not contain himself any longer. He rose in his stirrups and struck Thémines' horse sharply across the nose with his whip.

"What the devil is the matter with you, Auguste?" cried Thémines. "Why do you strike my horse?"

"Why do you pursue me?" roared Saint-Clair.

"Have you lost your senses, Saint-Clair? You forget to whom you are talking."

"I know quite well that I am talking to a puppy."

"Saint-Clair!... you must be mad, I think.... Listen to me. To-morrow you will either apologise to me, or you will account for your insolent conduct."

"To-morrow, then, sir—"

Thémines stopped his horse; Saint-Clair pushed his on, and very soon disappeared among the trees.

He was calmer now. He was silly enough to believe in presentiments. He felt sure he would be killed on the morrow, and that would be a suitable ending to his condition. Only one more day of anxieties and torments to endure. He went home and sent a note by his servant to Colonel Beaujeu. He wrote several letters, after which he dined with a good appetite, and was promptly at the little garden gate by 8.30.

"What is the matter with you to-day, Auguste?" said the Countess. "You are unusually lively, and yet your gaiety does not move me to laugh. Last night you were just a trifle dull, and I was the gay one! We have changed parts to-day. I have a racking headache."

"Dear one, I admit it. Yes, I was very tedious yesterday, but to-day I have been out, I took exercise, and I feel quite excited."

"On the other hand, I overslept myself this morning, and rose late. I had bad dreams."

"Ah! dreams? Do you believe in dreams?"

"What nonsense!"

"I believe in them. I am sure that you had a dream which foretold some tragic event."

"Good heavens! I never remember my dreams. Once I recollect ... that I saw Massigny in my dream; so, you see, it was not very entertaining."

"Massigny! But I should have thought you would have been pleased at seeing him again!"

"Poor Massigny!"

"Why 'poor Massigny'?"

"Please tell me, Auguste, what is wrong with you to-night. Your smile is perfectly diabolic, and you seem to be making game of yourself."

"Ah! now you are treating me as badly as your old dowager friends treat me."

"Yes, Auguste, you wear the same expression to-day that you put on before people whom you do not like."

"That is unpardonable in me. Come, give me your hand."

He kissed her hand with ironical gallantry, and they gazed at each other studiously for a minute. Saint-Clair was the first to drop his eyes.

"How difficult it is," he exclaimed, "to live in this world without being thought ill of! One ought really never to talk of anything but the weather and hunting, or eagerly to discuss with your old friends the reports of their benevolent societies."

He picked up a paper from the table near him.

"Come, here is your lace-cleaner's bill. Let us discuss that, sweetheart; then you cannot say I am ill-tempered."

"Really, Auguste, you amaze me...."

"This handwriting puts me in mind of a letter I found this morning. I must explain that I have fits of untidiness occasionally, and I was arranging my papers. Well, then, I found a love-letter from a dressmaker with whom I fell in love at sixteen. She had a trick of writing each word most fantastically, and her style was equal to her writing. Well, I was foolish enough then to be vexed that my mistress could not write as well as Madame de Sévigné, and I left her abruptly. In reading over this letter to-day I see that this dressmaker really did love me."

"Really! a woman whom you kept?"

"In line style on fifty francs a month. But I could not afford more, as my guardian only allowed me a little money at a time, for he said that youths who had money ruined themselves and others."

"What became of this woman?"

"How should I know?... Probably she died in a hospital."

"Auguste,... if that were true you would not speak so flippantly."

"Well, then, to tell you the truth, she is married to a respectable man, and when I came of age I gave her a small dowry."

"How good of you!... But why do you try to make yourself out so evil?"

"Oh, I am good enough.... The more I think of it the more I persuade myself that this woman really did care for me.... But on the other hand, it is difficult to discern true feeling under such a ridiculous expression of it."

"You ought to have shown me your letter. I should not have been jealous.... We women have finer tact than you, and we can tell at a glance, from the style of a letter, whether the writer is sincere, or feigning a passion he does not really feel."

"But what a number of times you have allowed yourself to be taken in by fools and rogues!"

As he spoke he looked at the Etruscan vase with a threatening glance, to which his voice responded, but Mathilde went on without noticing anything.

"Come, now, all you men wish to pose as Don Juans. You fancy you are making dupes when often you have encountered only Doña Juana, who is much more cunning than yourselves."

"I perceive that with your superior wit you ladies scent out rakes in every place. I doubt not also that our friend Massigny, who was both a stupid and a coxcomb, became, when dead, spotless and a martyr."

"Massigny? He was not a fool; then too there are silly women to be found. I must tell you a story about Massigny. But surely have I not told it you already?"

"Never," replied Saint-Clair tremblingly.

"Massigny fell in love with me after his return from Italy. My husband knew him and introduced him to me as a man of taste and culture. Those two were just made for each other. Massigny was most attentive to me from the first; he gave me some water-colour sketches which he had bought from Schroth, as his own paintings, and talked of music and art in the most divertingly superior manner. One day he sent me an incredibly ridiculous letter. He said, among other things, that I was the best woman in Paris; therefore he wished to be my lover. I showed the letter to my cousin Julie. We were then both very silly, and we resolved to play him a trick. One evening we had several visitors, among them being Massigny. My cousin said to me, 'I am going to read you a declaration of love which I received this morning.' She took the letter and read it amidst peals of laughter.... Poor Massigny!..."

Saint-Clair fell on his knees uttering a cry of joy. He seized the Countess's hand and covered it with tears and kisses. Mathilde was surprised beyond measure, and thought at first he had gone mad. Saint-Clair could only murmur, "Forgive me! forgive me!" When he rose to his feet he was radiant; he was happier than on the day when Mathilde had said to him for the first time, "I love you."

"I am the guiltiest and most stupid of men," he cried; "for two days I have misjudged you ... and never given you a chance to clear yourself...."

"You suspected me?... And of what?"

"Oh! idiot that I was!... they told me you had loved Massigny, and—"

"Massigny!" and she began to laugh; then soon quickly growing more earnest, "Auguste," she said, "how could you be so foolish as to harbour such suspicions, and so hypocritical as to hide them from me?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I implore you to forgive me."

"Of course I forgive you, beloved ... but let me first swear...."

"Oh! I believe you, I believe you; do not say any more about it."

"But in Heaven's name what put such an improbable notion in your head?"

"Nothing, nothing in the world except my accursed temper ... and ... would you believe it? that Etruscan vase which I knew Massigny had given you."

The Countess clasped her hands together in amazement, and then she burst into shouts of laughter.

"My Etruscan vase! my Etruscan vase!"

Saint-Clair was obliged to join in the laughter himself, although great tears rolled down his cheeks. He seized Mathilde in his arms. "I will not let you go," he said, "until you pardon me."

"Yes, I forgive you, though you are so foolish," she replied, kissing him tenderly. "You make me very happy to-day; it is the first time I have seen you shed tears, and I thought that you could not weep."

Then she struggled from his embrace, and, snatching the Etruscan vase, broke it into a thousand

pieces on the floor. It was a valuable and unique work, painted in three colours, and represented the fight between a Lapithe and a Centaur.

For several hours Saint-Clair was the happiest and the most ashamed of men.

"Well," said Roquantin to Colonel Beaujeu, when he met him in the evening at Tortoni's, "is this news true?"

"Too true, my friend," answered the Colonel sadly.

"Tell me, how did it come about?"

"Oh! just as it should. Saint-Clair began by telling me he was in the wrong, but that he wished to draw Thémines' fire before begging his pardon. I could do no other than accede. Thémines wished to draw lots who should fire first. Saint-Clair insisted that Thémines should. Thémines fired; and I saw Saint-Clair turn round once and then fall stone dead. I have often remarked, in the case of soldiers when they have been shot, this strange turning round which precedes death."

"How very extraordinary!" said Roquantin. "But Thémines, what did he do?"

"Oh, what is usual on these occasions: he threw his pistol on the ground remorsefully, with such force that he broke the hammer. It was an English pistol of Manton's. I don't believe there is a gun-maker in Paris who could make such another."

The Countess shut herself up in her country house for three whole years without seeing anyone; winter and summer, there she lived, hardly going out of her room. She was waited upon by a mulatto woman who knew of the attachment between Saint-Clair and herself. She scarcely spoke a word to her day after day. At the end of three years her cousin Julie returned from a long voyage. She forced her way into the house and found poor Mathilde thin and pale, the very ghost of the beautiful and fascinating woman she had left behind. By degrees she persuaded her to come out of her solitude, and took her to Hyères. The Countess languished there for three or four months, and then died of consumption brought on by her grief—so said Dr. M——, who attended her.

1830.

THE VENUS OF ILLE

Ἰλεὼς ἦν δ᾽ ἐγὼ, ᾽έστω ὁ ἀνδρίας
καὶ ἤπιος, ὁύτως ἀνδρεῖος ὤν.

ΛΟΥΚΙΑΝΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΨΕΥΔΗΣ.

I descended the last hillside at Canigou, and, although the sun had already set, I could distinguish the houses of the little town of Ille, in the plain, towards which my steps were turned.

"You know," I said to the Catalanian who had been my guide since the previous day—"no doubt you know where M. de Peyrehorade lives?"

"Do I know it!" he exclaimed. "I know his house as well as I know my own; and if it wasn't so dark I would point it out to you. It is the prettiest in Ille. M. de Peyrehorade is a rich man; and he is marrying his son to a lady even richer than himself."

"Is the marriage to take place soon?" I asked.

"Very soon; probably the violinists are already ordered for the wedding. Perhaps it will be to-night, or to-morrow, or the day after, for all I know. It will be at Puygarrig; for the son is to marry Mademoiselle de Puygarrig. It will be a very grand affair!"

I had been introduced to M. de Peyrehorade by my friend M. de P., who told me he was a very learned antiquarian and of extreme good nature. It would give him pleasure to show me all the ruins for ten leagues round. So I was looking forward to visit with him the district surrounding Ille, which I knew to be rich in monuments belonging to ancient times and the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I now heard for the first time, would upset all my plans. I said to myself, I should be a kill-joy; but I was expected, and as M. de P. had written to say I was coming, I should have to present myself.

"I will bet you, Monsieur," said my guide to me, when we were in the plain—"I will bet you a cigar that I can guess why you are going to M. de Peyrehorade's."

"But that is not a difficult thing to guess," I replied, holding out a cigar to him. "At this hour, after traversing six leagues amongst the Canigou hills, the grand question is supper."

"Yes, but to-morrow?... Wait, I will bet that you have come to Ille to see the statue. I guessed that when I saw you draw pictures of the Saints at Serrabona."

"The statue! What statue?" The word had excited my curiosity.

"What! did no one tell you at Perpignan that M. de Peyrehorade had found a statue in the earth?"

"Did you mean a statue in terra-cotta, or clay?"

"Nothing of the kind. It is actually in copper, and there is enough of it to make heaps of coins. It weighs as much as a church bell. It is deep in the ground, at the foot of an olive tree that we dug up."

"You were present, then, at the find?"

"Yes, sir. M. de Peyrehorade told Jean Coll and me, a fortnight ago, to uproot an old olive tree which had been killed by the frost last year, for there was a very severe frost, you will remember. Well, then, whilst working at it with all his might, Jean Coll gave a blow with his pickaxe, and I heard bimm!... as though he had struck on a bell. 'What is that?' I said. He picked and picked again, and a black hand appeared, which looked like the hand of a dead man coming out of the ground. I felt frightened; I went to the master and said to him: 'There are dead folk, master, under the olive tree; I wish you would send for the priest.' 'What dead folk?' he asked. He came, and had no sooner seen the hand than he cried out, 'An antique statue! an antique statue!' You might have thought he had discovered a treasure. And then he set to with pickaxe and hands, and worked hard; he did almost as much work as the two of us together."

"And what did you find in the end?"

"A huge black woman, more than half naked, saving your presence, sir, all in copper, and M. de Peyrehorade told us that it was an idol of pagan times ... perhaps as old as Charlemagne!"

"I see what it is ... some worthy Virgin in bronze which belonged to a convent that has been destroyed."

"The Blessed Virgin! Well, I never!... I should very soon have known if it had been the Blessed Virgin. I tell you it is an idol; you can see that plainly from its appearance. It stares at you with its great white eyes.... You might have said it was trying to put you out of countenance. It was enough to make one ashamed to look at her."

"White eyes were they? No doubt they are inlaid in the bronze; it might perhaps be a Roman statue."

"Roman! that's it. M. de Peyrehorade said that it was Roman. Ah! I can see you are as learned as he is."

"Is it whole and in good preservation?"

"Oh, it is all there, sir. It is much more beautiful and better finished than the painted plaster bust of Louis Philippe, which is at the town hall. But for all that the idol's face is not very nice to look at. She looks wicked ... and she is so, too."

"Wicked! What mischief has she done you?"

"No mischief to me exactly; but I will tell you. We were down on all fours to raise her up on end, and M. de Peyrehorade was also tugging at the rope, although he had no more strength than a chicken, good man! With much trouble he got her straight. I picked up a tile to prop her up, when, good Lord! she fell upside down all in a heap. 'Look out there below!' I said, but I was not quick enough, for Jean Coll had not time to draw his leg out...."

"And was it hurt?"

"His poor leg was broken as clean as a pole. Goodness! when I saw it I was furious. I wanted to break up the idol with my pickaxe, but M. de Peyrehorade would not let me. He gave some money to Jean Coll, who, all the same, has been in bed the whole fortnight since it happened, and the doctor says that he will never walk with that leg again so well as with the other. It is a sad pity; he was our best runner, and, after M. de Peyrehorade's son, he was the cleverest tennis player. M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was dreadfully sorry, for it was Coll against whom he played. It was fine to see them send the balls flying. Whizz! whizz! they never touched the ground."

And so we chatted till we reached Ille, and I very soon found myself in the presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still hale and active; he was powdered, had a red nose, and his manner was jovial and bantering. When he had opened M. de P.'s letter he installed me in front of a well-appointed table and presented me to his wife and son as an illustrious archaeologist, whose desire it was to raise the province of Roussillon from obscurity, in which it had been left by the neglect of the learned.

Whilst I was eating with a good appetite—for nothing makes one so hungry as mountain air—I examined my hosts. I have said a word or two about M. de Peyrehorade; I should add that he was vivacity itself. He talked and ate, got up, ran to his library to bring me books, showed me engravings, and poured out drinks for me; he was never still for two minutes. His wife was rather too stout, like most Catalanian women over forty, and she seemed to me a regular provincial, solely taken up with the cares of her household. Although the supper was ample for six people at

least, she ran to the kitchen, had pigeons killed and dozens of them fried, besides opening I don't know how many pots of preserves. In a trice the table was loaded with dishes and bottles, and I should assuredly have died of indigestion if I had even tasted all that was offered me. However, at each dish that I refused there were fresh excuses. They were afraid I did not get what I liked at Ille—there are so few means of getting things in the provinces, and Parisians are so hard to please!

M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade stirred no more than a statue in the midst of his parents' comings and goings. He was a tall young man of twenty-six, with beautiful and regular features, but they were wanting in expression. His figure and athletic build quite justified the reputation he had gained in the country as an indefatigable tennis player. He was that evening exquisitely dressed, exactly like the latest fashion plate. But he seemed to me to be uneasy in his garments; he was as stiff as a post in his velvet collar, and could not turn round unless with his whole body. His fat and sunburnt hands, with their short nails, contrasted strangely with his costume. They were the hands of a labouring man appearing below the sleeves of a dandy. For the rest, he only addressed me once throughout the whole evening, and that was to ask me where I had bought my watch-chain, although he studied me from head to foot very inquisitively in uncapacity as a Parisian.

"Ah, now, my honoured guest," said M. de Peyrehorade to me when supper drew to its conclusion, "you belong to me. You are in my house, and I shall not give you any rest until you have seen all the curiosities among our mountains. You must learn to know our Roussillon and to do it justice. You have no idea what we can show you—Phœnician, Celtic, Roman, Arabesque and Byzantine monuments. You shall see them all—lock, stock and barrel. I will take you everywhere, and will not let you off a single stone."

A fit of coughing compelled him to stop. I took advantage of it to tell him I should be greatly distressed if I disturbed him during the interesting event about to take place in his family. If he would kindly give me the benefit of his valuable advice about the excursion I ought to take, I should be able to go without putting him to the inconvenience of accompanying me....

"Ah, you are referring to this boy's marriage!" he exclaimed, interrupting me. "That is all nonsense. It takes place the day after to-morrow. You shall celebrate the wedding with us; it will take place quietly, for the bride is in mourning for an aunt, whose heiress she is. Therefore there is to be neither fête nor ball.... It is a pity.... You would have seen our Catalanian women dance.... They are pretty, and you might perhaps have been tempted to follow Alphonse's example. One marriage, they say, leads to others.... On Saturday, after the young people are married, I shall be at liberty, and we will set out. I ask your forgiveness for the irksomeness of a provincial wedding. To a Parisian blasé with fêtes ... and a wedding without a ball too! However, you will see a bride ... such a bride ... you must tell me what you think of her.... But you are not a frivolous man, and you take no notice of women. I have better things than women to show you. I am going to show you something! I have a fine surprise for you to-morrow."

"Ah," I replied, "it is not easy to have a treasure in your house without the public knowing all about it. I think I can guess the surprise you have in store for me. You are thinking of your statue. I am quite prepared to admire it, for my guide's description if it has roused my curiosity."

"Ah! he told you about the idol, for that is what they call my beautiful Venus Tur—but I will not talk of it. To-morrow, as soon as it is daylight, you shall see her, and you shall tell me if I am not right in considering her a *chef-d'œuvre.* Upon my word, you could not have arrived at a better time! There are inscriptions which poor ignorant I explain after my own fashion ... but a savant from Paris!... You will probably laugh at my interpretation, for I have written a treatise on it.... I—an old provincial antiquarian—I am going to venture.... I mean to make the press groan. If you would be so good as to read and correct it, I should be hopeful.... For example, I am curious to know how you would translate this inscription on the pedestal: '*CAVE*' ...—but I do not want to ask you anything yet! To-morrow, to-morrow! Not a single word about the Venus to-day."

"You are quite right, Peyrehorade," said his wife, "to stop talking about your idol; you ought to see that you are preventing the gentleman from eating. Why, he has seen far more beautiful statues in Paris than yours. There are dozens of them in the Tuileries, and in bronze too."

"Just look at her ignorance—the blessed ignorance of the provinces!" interrupted M. de Peyrehorade. "Fancy, comparing a splendid antique statue to the flat figures of Coustou!

> "'How irreverently of my affairs
> The gods are pleased to talk!'

"Do you know my wife wanted to have my statue melted down to make a bell for our church? She would have been its godmother—one of Myro's *chef-d'œuvres*."

"*Chef-d'œuvre! chef-d'œuvre!* a fine *chef-d'œuvre* it is to break a man's leg!"

"Look here, wife," said M. de Peyrehorade in a determined voice, as he extended his right leg towards her, clad in a fine silk stocking, "if my Venus had broken this leg I should not have minded."

"Good gracious! Peyrehorade, how can you talk like that? Fortunately, the man is going on well.... And yet I cannot bring myself to look at the statue which did such an evil thing as that. Poor Jean Coll!"

"Wounded by Venus, sir," said M. de Peyrehorade, laughing loudly. "The rascal complains of

being wounded by Venus!

"'Veneris nec praemia nôris.'

Who has not suffered from the wounds of Venus?"

M. Alphonse, who understood French better than Latin, winked with an understanding air, and looked at me as though to say, "Do you understand that, you Parisian?"

Supper ended at last. For an hour I had not been able to eat any more. I was tired, and could not hide my frequent yawns. Madam de Peyrehorade saw it first, and said that it was time to retire. Then began fresh apologies for the poor entertainment I should find. I should not be comfortable as in Paris; in the country things are so different! I must make allowances for the people of Roussillon. It was in vain I protested that after a journey among the mountains a bundle of straw would seem a delicious bed. They still begged me to pardon their poor rustic servants if they did not behave as well as they should. At last, accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade, I reached the room put apart for my use. The staircase, the top steps of which were of wood, led to the centre of a corridor, out of which opened several rooms.

"To the right," said my host, "is the set of rooms that I intend for the future Madam Alphonse. Your room is at the end of the passage opposite. You will understand," he added, with a look which he meant to be sly—"you will readily understand that newly married people wish to be by themselves. You are at one end of the house and they at the other."

We entered a very handsomely furnished room, where the first object that caught my eye was a bed seven feet long, six broad, and such a height that one needed a stool to get into it. My host pointed out the position of the bell, and satisfied himself that the sugar-bowl was full, and the smelling-bottles of eau de Cologne in their proper places on the toilette table; then he asked me repeatedly if I had all I wanted, wished me good-night and left me alone.

The windows were shut. Before undressing, I opened one to breathe the cool night air, which was delicious after such a lengthy supper. In front was Canigou Mountain, which is at all times beautiful, but to-night it seemed the fairest in the world, lighted up as it was by a splendid moon. I stood a few minutes to contemplate its marvellous outline, and was just going to close my window when, lowering my gaze, I saw the statue on a pedestal about forty yards from the house. It was placed in a corner of the quick-set hedge which separated a little garden from a large, perfectly level court, which, I learnt later, was the tennis ground for the town. This ground had been M. de Peyrehorade's property, but he had given it to the public at his son's urgent entreaties.

From my distance away it was difficult to make out the form of the statue; I could only judge of its height, which I guessed was about six feet. At that moment two town larrikins passed along the tennis court, close to the hedge, whistling the pretty Roussillon air, "Montagnes régalades." They stopped to look at the statue, and one of them even apostrophised her in a loud voice. He spoke the Catalanian dialect, but I had been long enough in the province of Roussillon to be able to understand almost all he said.

"Chi-ike, huzzy!" (the Catalanian expression was more forcible than that). "Look here," he said, "you broke Jean Coll's leg for him! If you belonged to me I would have broken your neck."

"Bah! what with?" asked the other. "She is made of copper, and so hard that Stephen broke his file over it, trying to cut into it. It is copper from before the Flood, and harder than anything I can think."

"If I had my cold chisel" (apparently he was a locksmith's apprentice) "I would jolly soon scoop out her big white eyes; it would be like cracking a couple of nutshells for the kernels. I would do it for a bob."

They moved a few paces further off.

"I must just wish the idol good night," said the tallest of the apprentices, stopping suddenly.

He stooped, and probably picked up a stone. I saw him stretch out his arm and throw something, and immediately after I heard a resounding blow from the bronze. At the same moment the apprentice raised his hand to his head and yelled out in pain.

"She has thrown it back at me!" he cried.

And then the two scamps took to flight as fast as they could. The stone had evidently rebounded from the metal, and had punished the rascal for the outrage done to the goddess.

I shut the window and laughed heartily.

Yet another vandal punished by Venus! Would that all destroyers of our ancient monuments could have their heads broken like that!

And with this charitable wish I fell asleep.

It was broad day when I awoke. Near my bed on one side stood M. de Peyrehorade in a dressing-gown; on the other a servant sent by his wife with a cup of chocolate in his hand.

"Come now, Parisian, get up! How lazy you people from the capital are!" said my host, while I

hastily dressed myself. "It is eight o'clock, and you still in bed. I got up at six o'clock. I have been upstairs three times; I listened at your door on tiptoe, but there was no sign of life at all. It is bad for you to sleep too much at your age. And my Venus waiting to be seen! Come, take this cup of Barcelona chocolate as fast as you can ... it is quite contraband. You can't get such chocolate in Paris. Take in all the nourishment you can, for when you are before my Venus no one will be able to tear you away."

I was ready in five minutes; that is to say, I was only half shaved, wrongly buttoned and scalded by the chocolate which I had swallowed boiling hot. I went downstairs into the garden and was soon in front of a wonderfully fine statue. It was indeed a Venus of extraordinary beauty. The top part of her body was bare, just as the ancients usually depicted their great deities; her right hand, raised up to her breast, was bent, with the palm inwards, the thumb and two first fingers extended, whilst the other two were slightly curved. The other hand was near the hips, and held up the drapery which covered the lower part of the body. The attitude of this statue reminded me of that of the Morra player, which, for some reason or other, goes by the name of Germanicus. Perhaps they wished to depict the goddess playing at the game of Morra.

However that might be, it is impossible to conceive anything more perfect than the body of this Venus; nothing could be more harmonious or more voluptuous than its outlines, nothing more graceful or dignified than its drapery. I expected some work of the Lower Empire, and I beheld a masterpiece of the most perfect period of sculpture. I was specially struck with the exquisite truth of form, which gave the impression that it had been moulded by nature itself, if nature ever produces such perfect specimens.

The hair, which was raised off the forehead, looked as though it might have been gilded at some time. The head was small, like those of nearly all Greek statues, and bent slightly forward. As to the face, I should never be able to express its strange character; it was of quite a different type from that of any other antique statue I could recall to mind. It was not only the calm and austere beauty of the Greek sculptors, whose rule was to give a majestic immobility to every feature. Here, on the contrary, I noticed with astonishment that the artist had purposely expressed ill-nature to the point even of wickedness. Every feature was slightly contracted: the eyes were rather slanting, the mouth turned up at the corners, and the nostrils somewhat inflated. Disdain, irony, cruelty, could be traced on a face which was, notwithstanding, of incredible beauty. Indeed, the longer one looked at this wonderful statue, the more did the distressing thought obtrude itself that such marvellous beauty could be united with an utter absence of goodness.

"If the model ever existed," I said to M. de Peyrehorade, "and I doubt if Heaven ever produced such a woman, how I pity her lovers! She would delight to make them die of despair. There is something ferocious in her expression, and yet I never saw anything so beautiful."

"'It is Venus herself gloating over her prey,'"

cried M. de Peyrehorade, pleased with my enthusiasm.

That expression of fiendish scorn was perhaps enhanced by the contrast shown by her eyes, which were encrusted with silver, and shone brilliantly with the greenish-black colour that time had given to the whole statue. Those brilliant eyes produced a kind of illusion which recalled lifelike reality. I remembered what my guide had said, that she made those who looked at her lower their eyes. It was quite true, and I could hardly restrain an impulse of anger against myself for feeling rather ill at ease before that bronze face.

"Now that you have admired it minutely, my dear colleague in antiquarian research," said my host, "let us, by your leave, open a scientific conference. What say you to that inscription, which you have not yet noticed?"

He showed me the pedestal of the statue, and I read on it these words:—

CAVE AMANTEM

"Quid dicis, doctissime?" he asked me, rubbing his hands together. "Let us see if we can hit on the meaning of this *CAVE AMANTEM*."

"But," I answered, "it has two meanings. It can be translated: 'Beware of him who loves thee; mistrust thy lovers.' But in that sense I do not know whether *CAVE AMANTEM* would be good Latin. Looking at the lady's diabolic expression, I would rather believe that the artist intended to put the spectator on his guard against her terrible beauty; I would therefore translate it: 'Beware if *she* loves thee.'"

"Humph!" said M. de Peyrehorade; "yes, that is an admissible interpretation; but, without wishing to displease you, I prefer the first translation, and I will tell you why. You know who Venus's lover was?"

"There were several."

"Yes, but the chief one was Vulcan. Should one not rather say, 'In spite of all thy beauty and thy scornful manner, thou shalt have for thy lover a blacksmith, a hideous cripple'? What a profound moral, Monsieur, for flirts!"

I could hardly help smiling at this far-fetched explanation.

"Latin is a difficult tongue, because of its concise expression," I remarked, to avoid contradicting

my antiquarian friend outright; and I stepped further away to see the statue better.

"One moment, colleague," said M. de Peyrehorade, seizing me by the arm, "you have not seen everything. There is still another inscription. Climb up on the pedestal and look at the right arm." And saying this, he helped me up.

I held on to the neck of the Venus unceremoniously, and began to make myself better acquainted with her. I only looked at her for a moment, right in the face, and I found her still more wicked, and still more beautiful. Then I discovered that there were some written characters in an ancient, running hand, it seemed to me, engraved on the arm. With the help of spectacles I spelt out the following, whilst M. de Peyrehorade repeated every word as soon as pronounced, with approving gesture and voice. It read thus:—

VENERI TVRBVL ...
EVTYCHES MYRO
IMPERIO FECIT.

After the word *TVRBVL* in the first line, I thought some letters had been effaced; but *TVRBVL* was perfectly legible.

"What do you say to that?" asked my host, radiantly smiling with malice, for he knew very well that I could not easily extricate myself from this *TVRBVL*.

"I cannot explain that word yet," I said to him; "all the rest is easy. By his order Eutyches Myro made this great offering to Venus."

"Good. But what do you make of *TVRBVL*? What is *TVRBVL*?"

"*TVRBVL* puzzles me greatly; I cannot think of any epithet applied to Venus which might assist me. Stay, what do you say to *TVRBVLENTA*? Venus, who troubles and disturbs.... You notice I am all the time thinking of her malignant expression. *TVRBVLENTA* would not be at all a bad epithet for Venus," I added modestly, for I was not myself quite satisfied with my explanation.

"Venus the turbulent! Venus the broiler! Ah! you think, then, that my Venus is a Venus of the pot-house? Nothing of the kind, Monsieur. She is a Venus belonging to the great world. And now I will expound to you this *TVRBVL*.... You will at least promise not to divulge my discovery before my treatise is published. I shall become famous, you see, by this find.... You must leave us poor provincial devils a few ears to glean. You Parisian savants are rich enough."

From the top of the pedestal, where I still perched, I solemnly promised that I would never be so dishonourable as to steal his discovery.

"*TVRBVL* ... Monsieur," he said, coming nearer and lowering his voice for fear anyone else but myself should hear, "read *TVRBVLNERÆ*."

"I do not understand any better."

"Listen carefully. A league from here, at the base of the mountain, is a village called Boulternère. It is a corruption of the Latin word *TVRBVLNERA.* Nothing is commoner than such an inversion. Boulternère, Monsieur, was a Roman town. I have always been doubtful about this, for I have never had any proof of it. The proof lies here. This Venus was the local goddess of the city of Boulternère; and this word Boulternère, which I have just shown to be of ancient origin, proves a still more curious thing, namely that Boulternère, after being a Roman town, became a Phœnician one!"

He stopped a minute to take breath, and to enjoy my surprise. I had to repress a strong inclination to laugh.

"Indeed," he went on, "*TVRBVLNERA* is pure Phœnician. *TVR* pronounce *TOUR.... TOUR* and *SOUR*, are they not the same word? *SOUR* is the Phœnician name for Tyre. I need not remind you of its meaning. *BVL* is Baal, Bâl, Bel, Bul, slight differences in pronunciation. As to *NERA*, that gives me some trouble. I am tempted to think, for want of a Phœnician word, that it comes from the Greek *νηρός*—damp, marshy. That would make it a hybrid word. To justify *νηρός* I will show you at Boulternère how the mountain streams there form poisonous swamps. On the other hand, the ending *NERA* might have been added much later, in honour of Nera Pivesuvia, the wife of Tetricus, who may have done some benevolent act to the city of Turbul. But, on account of the marshes, I prefer the derivation from *νηρός*."

He took a pinch of snuff with a satisfied air.

"But let us leave the Phœnicians and return to the inscription. I translate, then: 'To the Venus of Boulternère Myro dedicates by his command this statue, the work of his hand.'"

I took good care not to criticise his etymology, but I wanted, on my own account, to put his penetrative faculties to the proof, so I said to him: "Wait a bit, Monsieur, Myro dedicated something, but I do not in the least see that it was this statue."

"What!" he exclaimed, "was not Myro a famous Greek sculptor? The talent would descend to his family; and one of his descendants made this statue. Nothing can be clearer."

"But," I replied, "I see a little hole in the arm. I fancy it has been used to hold something, perhaps a bracelet, which this Myro gave to Venus as an expiatory offering, for Myro was an unlucky

lover. Venus was incensed against him, and he appeased her by consecrating a golden bracelet. You must remember that *fecit* is often used for *consecravit*. The terms are synonymous. I could show you more than one instance if I had access to Gruter or, better still, Orellius. It is natural that a lover should behold Venus in his dreams, and that he should imagine that she commanded him to give her statue a golden bracelet. Myro consecrated a bracelet to her.... Then the barbarians, or perhaps some sacrilegious thief—"

"Ah! it is easily seen that you are given to romancing," cried my host, lending his hand to help me down. "No, Monsieur, it is a work after the School of Myro. Only look at the work, and you will agree."

Having made it a rule never to contradict pig-headed antiquarians outright, I bowed my head as though convinced, and said—

"It is a splendid piece of work."

"Ah! my God!" exclaimed M. de Peyrehorade, "here is yet another mark of vandalism! Someone has thrown a stone at my statue!"

He had just seen a white mark a little below the breast of the Venus. I noticed a similar mark on the fingers of the right hand, which at first I supposed had been scraped by the stone in passing, or perhaps a fragment of it might have broken off by the shock and rebounded upon the hand. I told my host the insult that I had witnessed and the prompt punishment which had followed. He laughed heartily, and compared the apprentice to Diomede, wishing he might see all his comrades changed into white birds, as the Greek hero did.

The breakfast bell interrupted this famous interview; and, as on the previous evening, I was forced to eat as much as four people. Then M. de Peyrehorade's tenants came to see him, and, whilst he gave them audience, his son took me to see a carriage which he had bought for his *fiancée* at Toulouse, and, of course, I admired it properly. After that I went with him to the stables, where he kept me half an hour praising his horses and telling me their pedigrees and the prizes he had won at the country races. At last he spoke of his future bride, by a sudden transition from the grey mare that he intended for her.

"We shall see her to-day. I wonder if you will think her pretty. You are so difficult to please in Paris; but everybody here and at Perpignan thinks her lovely. The best of it is she is very wealthy. Her aunt, who lived at Prades, left her all her money. Oh, I am going to be ever so happy!"

I was deeply shocked to see a young man much more affected by the dowry than by the beautiful looks of his bride-to-be.

"Are you learned in jewellery?" continued M. Alphonse. "What do you think of this ring which I am going to give her to-morrow?"

So saying, he drew from the first joint of his little finger a large ring blazing with diamonds, formed by the clasping of two hands: a most poetic idea, I thought. It was of ancient workmanship, but I guessed that it had been retouched when the diamonds were set. Inside the ring was engraved in gothic letters: "*Sempr' ab ti*" ("Ever thine").

"It is a lovely ring," I said; but added, "the diamonds have taken from its original character somewhat."

"Oh, it is much prettier as it is now," he replied, smiling. "There are one thousand two hundred francs' worth of diamonds in it. My mother gave it me. It was an old family ring ... from the days of chivalry. It was worn by my grandmother, who had it from her grandmother. Goodness knows when it was made!"

"The custom in Paris," I said, "is to give a very plain ring, usually made of two different metals, say, gold and platinum. For instance, the other ring which you have on that finger would be most suitable. This one is so large, with its diamonds and hands in relief, that no glove would go over it."

"Oh, Madam Alphonse can arrange that as she likes. I think she will be pleased enough to have it. Twelve hundred francs on one's finger is very pleasing. That little ring," he added, looking with a satisfied expression at the plain ring which he held in his hand, "was given me one Shrove Tuesday by a woman in Paris, when I was staying there two years ago. Ah! that is the place to enjoy oneself in!..." And he sighed regretfully.

We were to dine at Puygarrig that day, at the house of the bride's parents; we drove in carriages, and were soon at the Castle, which was about a league and a half from Ille. I was introduced and received like one of the family. I will not talk of the dinner, nor of the conversation which took place, and in which I had but little part. M. Alphonse, who sat by the side of his future bride, whispered in her ear every quarter of an hour. She hardly raised her eyes, and blushed modestly every time her intended spoke to her, though she replied without embarrassment.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig was eighteen years of age, and her lithe, delicate figure was a great contrast to the bony limbs of her sturdy lover. She was more than beautiful: she was enchanting. I admired the perfect naturalness of all her replies. Her expression was kindly, but nevertheless was not devoid of a light touch of maliciousness which reminded me, do what I would, of my host's Venus. While making this comparison to myself I wondered if the superior beauty which

undoubtedly belonged to the statue was not largely owing to her tigerish expression, for strength, even when accompanied by evil passions, always induces wonder and a sort of involuntary admiration.

What a pity, I reflected, as we left Puygarrig, that such a charming person should be so rich, and that her dowry should be the cause of her being sought by a man so unworthy of her!

Whilst on the return to Ille I found it difficult to know what to talk of to Madam de Peyrehorade, with whom I thought I ought to converse.

"You are very strong-minded people here in Roussillon," I exclaimed, "to have a wedding on a Friday. In Paris we are more superstitious; no man dare take a wife on that day."

"Oh, please don't talk of it," she said; "if it had depended only on me, I would certainly have chosen another day. But Peyrehorade wanted it, and would not give way. It troubles me, however. Suppose some misfortune should happen? There must be something in it, else why should everybody be afraid of a Friday?"

"Friday," her husband cried, "is the day dedicated to Venus. An excellent day for a wedding. You will notice, my dear colleague, that I only think of my Venus. What an honour! It was on that account I chose Friday. To-morrow, if you are willing, we will offer her a small sacrifice before the ceremony—two ringdoves and incense, if I can find any."

"For shame, Peyrehorade!" interrupted his wife, who was scandalised in the highest degree. "Offer incense to an idol! It would be an abomination! What would be said about you through the countryside?"

"At all events," said M. de Peyrehorade, "you will let me put a wreath of roses and lilies on her head?

"'Manibus date lilia plenis.

You see, monsieur, the charter is but a vain thing. We have no religious freedom."

The arrangements for the morrow were regulated in the following manner. Everyone had to be ready and dressed for the wedding at ten o'clock prompt. After taking chocolate we were to be driven to Puygarrig. The civil marriage was to take place at the village registry, and the religious ceremony in the Castle chapel. After that there would be luncheon. Then we were to spend the time as we liked until seven o'clock, when we were all to return to M. de Peyrehorade's house, where the two families would sup together. The remainder of the time would naturally be spent in eating as much as possible, as there would be no dancing.

Ever since eight o'clock I had sat before the Venus, pencil in hand, beginning over again for the twentieth time the head of the statue, without being able to seize the expression. M. de Peyrehorade came and went, giving me advice and repeating his Phœnician derivations. Then he placed some Bengal roses on the pedestal of the statue, and addressed to it, in a tragi-comical air, vows for the couple about to live under his roof. He went in to see about his toilette towards nine o'clock, and at the same time M. Alphonse appeared, well groomed, in a new suit, white gloves, patent-leather shoes, chased buttons and a rose in his button-hole.

"You must take my wife's portrait," he said, leaning over my drawing; "she, too, is pretty."

Then began on the tennis ground, to which I have already referred, a game which at once attracted M. Alphonse's attention. I was tired, and in despair at being unable to reproduce that diabolical face, so I soon left my drawing to watch the players. There were among them several Spanish muleteers who had come the night before. They were men from Aragon and from Navarre, almost all clever players. Although the local players were encouraged by the presence and advice of M. Alphonse, they were very soon beaten by these new champions. The patriotic onlookers were filled with concern, and M. Alphonse looked at his watch. It was still only half-past nine. His mother was not ready yet. He hesitated no longer, threw off his coat, asked for a vest, and challenged the Spaniards. I looked at him with amusement and in some surprise.

"The honour of our country must be upheld," he said.

Then I saw how very handsome he was. He was roused to passion. The toilette, which had just now filled his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else, was completely forgotten. A few minutes before he hardly dared turn his head, for fear of spoiling his cravat. Now he thought nothing of his curled hair or of his beautifully got up frilled shirt. And his *fiancée*! I really believe that, if necessary, he would have adjourned the wedding. I saw him hastily put on a pair of sandals, turn up his sleeves, and with a self-satisfied manner range himself at the head of the vanquished party, like Cæsar when he rallied his soldiers at Dyrrachium. I leapt the hedge and took up a position comfortably under the shade of a nettle tree in such a way as to be able to see both camps.

Contrary to general expectation, M. Alphonse missed the first ball; true, it grazed the ground, and bound with surprising force near one of the players from Aragon, who seemed the head of the Spaniards.

He was a man of about forty, strong, yet spare in appearance; he stood six feet high, and his olive skin was of almost as deep a tint as the bronze of the Venus.

M. Alphonse threw his racquet on the ground in a furious rage.

"It is this cursed ring!" he cried, "which pressed into my finger and made me miss a sure thing."

With some difficulty he took off his diamond ring, and I went nearer to take it, but he forestalled me, ran to the Venus, slipped the ring on its fourth finger, and retook his position at the head of his townsmen.

He was pale, but cool and determined. From that time he made no more fouls, and the Spaniards were completely beaten. The enthusiasm of the spectators was a fine sight: some uttered shrieks of delight and threw their caps in the air: others shook hands with him and called him the pride of their countryside. If he had repulsed an invasion, I doubt if he would have received heartier or more sincere congratulations. The disappointment of the vanquished added still more to the brilliance of his victory.

"We must have another match, my fine fellow," he said to the muleteer from Aragon in a condescending tone; "but I must give you odds."

I would have preferred M. Alphonse to be more modest, and I was almost sorry for his rival's humiliation.

The Spanish giant felt the insult keenly; I saw him go pale under his tanned skin. He looked miserably at his racquet and ground his teeth; then, in a choking voice he said, "Me lo pagarás." [1]

The voice of M. de Peyrehorade interrupted his son's triumph; my host was extremely astonished not to find him superintending the preparation of the new carriage, and was even more surprised to see him with racquet in hand, flushed from the game.

M. Alphonse ran to the house, bathed his face and hands, put on his new coat again and his patent-leather shoes, and five minutes after we were in full trot on the road to Puygarrig. All the tennis players of the town and a large crowd of spectators followed us with shouts of joy. The stout horses which drew us could hardly keep ahead of these dauntless Catalanians.

We were at Puygarrig, and the procession was forming into order to walk to the registry when M. Alphonse suddenly put his hand up to his head and whispered to me—

"What a blunder! I have forgotten the ring! It is on Venus's finger, devil take her! Do not tell my mother, whatever happens. Perhaps she will not notice the omission."

"You could send someone for it," I said.

"No! my servant has stayed behind at Ille. I dare hardly trust these fellows here with twelve hundred francs of diamonds. What a temptation that will be to someone! Besides, what would the people here think of my absent-mindedness? They would make fun of me. They would call me the husband of the statue.... If only no one steals it! Fortunately, the idol frightens the young rascals. They dare not go within arm's length of her. Well, it doesn't matter, I have another ring."

The two ceremonies, civil and religious, were accomplished with suitable state. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig received the ring which had belonged to a Paris milliner, little thinking that her *fiancé* had sacrificed another's love-token to her. Then we sat down and drank, ate and sang for long enough. I was sorry the bride had to bear the coarse jollity which went on all around her; however, she took it with a better face than I should have thought possible, and her embarrassment was neither awkward nor affected. Possibly courage springs up under occasions that need it.

The banquet broke up Lord knows when—somewhere about four o'clock. The men went for a walk in the park, which was a magnificent one, or watched the peasants of Puygarrig dance on the Castle lawn, decked in their gala dresses.

In this way we passed several hours. In the meantime the women thronged round the bride, who showed them her wedding presents. Then she changed her toilette, and I noticed that she covered up her beautiful hair with a cap and a hat with feathers in it, for wives are most particular to don as quickly as possible those adornments which custom has forbidden them to wear when they are still unmarried.

It was nearly eight o'clock when we were ready to go back to Ille. But there was a pathetic scene first between Mademoiselle de Puygarrig and her aunt, who had been a mother to her, and was of advanced age and very religious: she had not been able to go to the town with us. At her departure she gave her niece a touching sermon on her wifely duties, which resulted in a flood of tears and endless embracings. M. de Peyrehorade compared this parting to the Rape of the Sabines. However, we got off at last, and during the journey everyone exerted himself to cheer up the bride and make her laugh, but in vain.

At Ille supper awaited us; and *what* a supper! If the morning's coarse revel had shocked me, I was still more disgusted by the quips and jokes which circled round the bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom, who had disappeared for an instant before sitting down to supper, was pale and as chilly as an iceberg. He drank the old wine of Collioure constantly, which is almost as strong as brandy. I was on one side of him, and felt I must warn him—

"Do take care. They say this wine—"

I don't know what silly thing I said to him to show myself in harmony with the merry-makers.

"When they get up from the table I have something to say to you," he whispered, pushing my knee.

His solemn tone surprised me. I looked at him more attentively, and noticed a strange alteration in his features.

"Do you feel ill?" I asked.

"No."

And he began to drink again.

In the meantime, in the midst of cries and clapping hands, a child of eleven, who had slipped under the table, showed to the company a pretty white and rose-coloured ribbon which she had just taken from the bride's ankle. They called it her garter. It was soon cut into bits and distributed among the young people, who decorated their button-holes with it, according to a very old custom which is still preserved in a few patriarchal families. This made the bride blush to the whites of her eyes. But her confusion reached its height when M. de Peyrehorade, after calling for silence, sang some Catalanian verses to her, which he said were impromptus. I give the sense so far as I understood it.

"What is the matter with me, my friends? Has the wine I have taken made me see double? There are two Venuses here...."

The bridegroom turned round suddenly and looked scared, which set everybody laughing.

"Yes," continued M. de Peyrehorade, "there are two Venuses under my roof. One I found in the earth, like a truffle; the other came down to us from the heavens to share her girdle with us."

He meant, of course, her garter.

"My son, choose between the Roman and the Catalanian Venus which you prefer. The rascal took the Catalanian, the better part, for the Roman is black and the Catalanian is white. The Roman is cold, and the Catalanian sets on fire all who come near her."

This conclusion excited such an uproar of noisy applause and loud laughter that I thought the roof would fall on our heads. There were but three grave faces at the table—those of the wedded pair and mine. I had a splitting headache; for besides, I know not why, a marriage always makes me feel melancholy. This one disgusted me rather, too.

The last couplets were sung by the deputy-mayor, and, I may say, they were very broad; then we went into the salon to witness the departure of the bride, who would soon be conducted to her chamber, as it was nearly midnight.

M. Alphonse drew me aside into the recess of a window, and said, as he turned his eyes away from me—

"You will laugh at me ... but I do not know what is the matter with me.... I am bewitched, devil take it!"

My first thought was that he fancied he was threatened with some misfortune of the nature of those referred to by Montaigne and Madame de Sévigné: "The whole realm of love is filled with tragic stories."

I thought to myself that this kind of mishap only happens to men of genius.

"You have drunk too much Collioure wine, my dear M. Alphonse," I said. "I warned you."

"That may be. But this is something much more terrible."

His voice was broken, and I thought he was quite drunk.

"You know my ring?" he continued, after a pause.

"Yes. Has it been taken?"

"No."

"Therefore you have it?"

"No—I—I could not get it off the finger of that devil of a Venus."

"Nonsense! you did not pull hard enough."

"Yes, I did.... But the Venus ... has clenched her finger."

He looked at me fixedly with a haggard expression, and leant against the framework to keep himself from falling.

"What a ridiculous tale!" I said. "You pushed the ring on too far. To-morrow you must use pincers, only take care not to injure the statue.

"No, I tell you. The finger of Venus has contracted and bent up; she closed her hand, do you hear?... She is my wife apparently, because I gave her my ring.... She will not give it back."

I shivered suddenly, and for a moment my blood ran cold. Then the deep sigh he gave sent a breath of wine into my face and all my emotion disappeared.

"The wretched man is completely drunk," I thought.

"You are an antiquarian, Monsieur," the bridegroom added in dismal tones; "you know all about such statues.... There is perhaps some spring, some devilish catch, I do not know of. If you would go and see."

"Willingly," I said. "Come with me."

"No, I would rather you went by yourself."

So I left the salon.

The weather had changed during supper, and rain began to fall heavily. I was going to ask for an umbrella, when I stopped short and reflected. "I should be a great fool," I said to myself, "to go and verify the tale of a tipsy man! Perhaps, besides, he intended to play some stupid joke on me to amuse the country people; and at the least I should be wet through to the skin and catch a bad cold."

I cast a glance on the dripping statue from the door, and went up to my room without returning to the salon. I went to bed, but sleep was long in coming. All the scenes that had occurred during the day returned to my mind. I thought of that beautiful, innocent young girl given up to a drunken brute. "What a detestable thing," I said to myself, "is a marriage of convenience! A mayor puts on a tricoloured sash, and a priest a stole, and behold, the noblest of girls may be dedicated to the Minotaur. What can two beings who do not love each other say at such a moment, a moment that lovers would buy at the price of life itself? Can a wife ever love a man whom she has once discovered is coarse-minded? First impressions can never be obliterated, and I am certain M. Alphonse deserves to be hated."

During my monologue, which I abridge considerably, I had heard much coming and going about the house, doors open and shut, and carriages go away; then I thought I could hear the light steps of several women upon the staircase proceeding to the end of the passage opposite my room. It was probably the procession leading the bride to bed. Then they went downstairs again, and Madam de Peyrehorade's door shut. "How unhappy and strangely ill at ease that poor girl must feel!" I said to myself. I turned over on my bed in a bad temper. A bachelor cuts but a poor figure at a house where there is a wedding going on.

Silence had reigned for a long while, when it was interrupted by heavy steps coming up the stairs. The wooden stairs creaked loudly.

"What a clumsy lout!" I cried. "I bet he will fall down stairs."

Then all became quiet again. I took up a book to change the current of my thoughts. It was a treatise on the Statistics of the Department, embellished with a preface by M. de Peyrehorade on the "Druidical Monuments of the Arrondissement of Prades." I fell into a doze at the third page.

I slept badly and waked several times. It must have been five in the morning, and I had been awake more than twenty minutes when the cock began to crow. Day had dawned. Then I distinctly heard the same heavy steps and the same creaking of the stairs that I had heard before I went to sleep. It struck me as very strange. I tried amidst my yawning to guess why M. Alphonse should rise so early; I could not think of any reason at all likely. I was going to close my eyes again when my attention was afresh excited by strange trampings, which were soon intermingled with the ringing of bells and the banging of doors, and then I could distinguish confused cries.

The drunken bridegroom must have set fire to the house! And at this reflection I leapt out of bed.

I dressed rapidly and went into the corridor. From the opposite end proceeded cries and wailings, and one piercing cry sounded above all the others—"My son! my son!" Evidently some accident had happened to M. Alphonse. I ran to the bridal-chamber; it was full of people. The first sight which met my eyes was the young man, half-dressed, stretched across the bed, the wood of which was broken. He was livid and motionless, and his mother wept and cried by his side. M. de Peyrehorade was busy rubbing his son's temples with eau de Cologne and holding smelling salts under his nose. Alas! his son had been dead a long time. Upon a couch at the other end of the room was the bride in the grip of terrible convulsions. She uttered inarticulate cries, and two strapping servants had the greatest difficulty in holding her down.

"My God!" I exclaimed, "what has happened?"

I went to the bedside and raised the body of the unfortunate young man; he was already cold and stiff. His clenched teeth and black face denoted the most frightful agony. It could be easily seen that his death had been violent and his agony terrible. There was, however, no trace of blood on his clothes. I opened his shirt and found a livid mark on his breast, which extended down his sides and back. One would have thought he had been strangled by a band of iron. My foot stumbled on something hard which was under the rug; I stooped and saw the diamond ring.

I led M. de Peyrehorade and his wife away into their room; then I had the bride carried out.

"You have a daughter left," I said to them; "you must give all your care to her." I then left them to

themselves.

There seemed to me no doubt that M. Alphonse had been the victim of an assassination, and the perpetrators must have found some means to get into the bride's room during the night. Those bruises, however, on the chest and the circular direction of them puzzled me much, for neither a stick nor a bar of iron could have produced them. Suddenly I recollected to have heard that in Valence the bravoes use long leather bags full of fine sand to smother people whom they want to kill. Soon, too, I remembered the muleteer from Aragon and his threat, though I could hardly think that he would take such a terrible vengeance on a light jest.

I went into the house and hunted all over for any traces of their having broken into the house, but I found none whatever. I went to the garden to see if the assassins had got in from there, but I could not find any sure indication. Last night's rain had, moreover, so soaked the ground that it would not have retained the clearest imprint. But I noticed, notwithstanding, several deep footmarks in the earth; they were in two contrary directions, but in the same line, beginning at the corner of the hedge next to the tennis ground and ending at the front door to the house. These might have been the footmarks made by M. Alphonse when he went to look for his ring on the statue's finger. On the other side the hedge at that spot was not so thick, and it must have been here that the murderers made their escape. Passing and repassing in front of the statue, I stopped short a second to look at it. I confess that this time I could not look at its expression of ironical wickedness without fear, and my head was so full of the ghastly scenes I had just witnessed that I seemed to be looking at an infernal divinity which gloated over the misfortunes that had fallen on the house.

I regained my room and remained there until noon. Then I went down and asked for news of my host and hostess. They were a little calmer. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig—or rather the widow of M. Alphonse—had regained consciousness; she had even spoken to the magistrate of Perpignan, then on a tour of inspection in Ille, and this magistrate had taken down her statement. He asked me for mine. I told him what I knew, and did not conceal my suspicions regarding the muleteer from Aragon. He gave orders for his instant arrest.

"Have you learnt anything from Madam Alphonse?" I asked the magistrate, when my deposition had been taken down and signed.

"That unhappy young lady has gone mad," he said, with a sad smile; "mad, completely mad. See what she told me:—

"'She had been in bed,' she said, 'for some moments with the curtains drawn, when the bedroom door opened and someone came in.' Now Madam Alphonse lay on the side of the bed, with her face turned to the wall. She did not stir, supposing it to be her husband. In a second the bed creaked as though it were burdened with an enormous weight. She was terribly frightened, but dared not turn round. Five minutes, or perhaps ten—she could not tell how long—passed. Then she made an involuntary movement, or else the other person who was in the bed made one, and she felt the touch of something as cold as ice—these are her very words. She sat up in the bed, trembling in every limb. Shortly after the door opened again, and someone entered, who said, 'Good night, my little wife,' and soon after the curtains were drawn. She heard a stifled cry. The person who was in bed by her side sat up, and seemed to stretch out its arms in front. Then she turned her head round ... and saw, so she says, her husband on his knees by the bed, with his head as high as the pillow, in the arms of a green-looking giant who was strangling him with all its might. She said—and she repeated it to me over and over twenty times, poor lady!—she said that she recognised ... Can you guess? The bronze statue of Venus belonging to M. de Peyrehorade.... Since it came into the country everybody dreams of it, but I will proceed with the story of the unhappy mad girl. She lost consciousness at this sight, and probably for some time her reason. She cannot in any way tell how long she remained in a faint. When she came to she saw the phantom again—or the statue, as she persists in calling it—motionless, its legs and the lower half of the body in the bed, the bust and arms stretched out before it, and between its arms her lifeless husband. A cock crew, and then the statue got out of the bed, dropped the dead body, and went out. Madam Alphonse hung on to the bell, and you know the rest."

They brought in the Spaniard; he was calm, and defended himself with much coolness and presence of mind. He did not attempt to deny the remark I heard; he explained it by pretending that he meant nothing by it, but that on the following day, when he was more rested, he would have won a tennis match against his victor. I remember that he had added—

"A native of Aragon does not wait for his revenge till to-morrow when he is insulted. Had I thought M. Alphonse meant to insult me, I should have immediately stabbed him with my knife to the heart."

His shoes were compared with the footmarks in the garden; but his shoes were much larger than the marks.

Finally, the innkeeper with whom the man had lodged averred that he had spent the whole of that night in rubbing and doctoring one of his sick mules.

Moreover, this man from Aragon was quite noted and well known in the countryside, to which he came annually to trade. He was therefore released with many apologies.

I had forgotten the deposition of a servant who had been the last to see M. Alphonse alive. He saw him go upstairs to his wife, and he had called the man and asked him in an anxious manner if

he knew where I was. Then M. Alphonse heaved a sigh, and stood for a moment in silence, adding afterwards—

"Well, the devil must have carried him off too!"

I asked this man if M. Alphonse had his diamond ring on when he spoke to him. The servant hesitated before he replied; then he said that he thought not, that at all events it had not attracted his attention. "If he had worn that ring," he added, correcting himself, "I should certainly have noticed it, because I believed that he had given it to Madam Alphonse."

Whilst I interrogated this man I felt a little of the superstitious terror that Madam Alphonse's deposition had spread throughout the house. The magistrate looked at me and smiled, and I refrained from pressing my questions any further.

A few hours after the funeral of M. Alphonse I prepared to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was to take me to Perpignan. In spite of his state of feebleness the poor old man would accompany me to the gate of his grounds. He walked to it in silence, hardly able to drag himself along even with the help of my arm. Just as we were parting I cast a last glance at the Venus. I could see plainly that my host, although he did not share the terrors and hatred that his family felt for it, would like to get rid of the object that would ever afterwards remind him of a frightful disaster. I resolved to try and persuade him to put it in a museum. I was hesitating to begin the subject when M. de Peyrehorade mechanically turned his head in the direction in which he saw me looking so attentively. He saw the statue, and immediately burst into tears. I embraced him, and, without venturing to say a single word, I stepped into the carriage.

Since my departure I have never learnt that anything was discovered to throw light on this mysterious catastrophe.

M. de Peyrehorade died some months after his son. He bequeathed me his manuscripts in his will, which some day I may publish. But I have not been able to find the treatise relating to the inscriptions on the Venus.

P.S.—My friend M. de P. has just written to me from Perpignan to tell me that the statue no longer exists. After her husband's death, the first thing Madam de Peyrehorade did was to have it melted down and made into a bell, and in this fresh form it is used in the church at Ille. But, adds M. de P., it would seem that an evil fate pursues those who possess that piece of bronze. Since that bell began to ring in Ille the vines have twice been frost-bitten.

1837.

[1] "But you will pay for it."

LOKIS

FROM THE MS. OF PROFESSOR WITTEMBACH

I

"Théodore," said Professor Wittembach, "please give me that manuscript-book, bound in parchment, which is laid on the second shelf above my writing-desk—no, not that one, but the small octavo volume. I copied all the notes of my journal of 1866 in it—at least those that relate to Count Szémioth."

The Professor put on his glasses, and, amid profound silence, read the following:—

"LOKIS,"

with this Lithuanian proverb as a motto:

"Miszka su Lokiu,
Abu du tokiu."[1]

When the first translation of the Holy Scriptures into the Lithuanian language appeared in London, I published in the *Scientific and Literary Gazette* of Kœnigsberg, an article wherein, while rendering full justice to the efforts of the learned interpreter and to the pious motives of the Bible Society, I pointed out several slight errors, and showed, moreover, that this version could only be useful to one portion of the Lithuanian people.

Indeed, the dialect from which they translated is hardly intelligible to the inhabitants of the districts where the *Jomaïtic* tongue, commonly called *Jmoude,* is spoken, namely, in the Palatinate of Samogitia. This language is, perhaps, nearer akin to the Sanskrit than to High Lithuanian. In spite of the furious criticisms which this observation drew down upon me from a certain well-known professor of the Dorpat University, it so far enlightened the members of the Committee of the Bible Society that they lost no time in making me a flattering offer to direct and

supervise an edition of the Gospel of St. Matthew into Samogitian. I was too much occupied at the time with my researches in Trans-Uralian dialects to undertake a more extended work comprising all four of the Gospels. Deferring my marriage with Mlle. Gertrude Weber, I went to Kowno (*Kaunas*) for the purpose of collecting all the linguistic records, whether printed or in MSS., of Jmoude, that I could lay hands on. I did not overlook, of course, old ballads (*daïnos*), tales, or legends (*pasakos*) which would furnish me with material for a Jomaïtic vocabulary, a work which must necessarily precede that of translation.

I had been given a letter of introduction to the young Count Michel Szémioth, whose father, I was told, had come into the possession of the famous *Catechismus Samogiticus* of Father Lawiçki. It was so rare that its very existence had been disputed, particularly by the Dorpat professor to whom allusion has been already made. In his library I should find, according to the information given me, an old collection of *daïnos*, besides ballads in old Prussian. Having written to Count Szémioth to lay the object of my visit before him, I received a most courteous invitation to spend as much time at his Castle of Médintiltas as my researches might need. He ended his letter by very gracefully saying that he prided himself upon speaking Jmoude almost as well as his peasants, and would be only too pleased to help me in what he termed so important and interesting an undertaking. Besides being one of the wealthiest landowners in Lithuania, he was of the same evangelical faith of which I had the honour to be a minister. I had been warned that the Count was not without a certain peculiarity of character, but he was very hospitable, especially towards all who had intellectual tastes. So I set out on my journey to Médintiltas.

At the Castle steps I was met by the Count's steward, who immediately led me to the rooms prepared for me.

"M. le Comte," he said, "is most sorry not to be able to dine with you to-day. He has a bad headache, a malady he is unfortunately subject to. If you do not prefer to dine in your room you can dine with the Countess's doctor, Dr. Frœber. Dinner will be ready in an hour; do not trouble to dress for it. If you have any orders to give, there is the bell."

He withdrew, making me a profound salute.

The room was of immense size, comfortably furnished, and decorated with mirrors and gilding. One side of it looked out upon a garden, or rather the park belonging to the Castle, and the other upon the principal entrance. Notwithstanding the statement that there was no need to dress, I felt obliged to get my black coat out of my trunk, and was in my shirt-sleeves busy unpacking my simple luggage when the sound of carriage wheels attracted me to the window which looked on the court. A handsome barouche had just come in. It contained a lady in black, a gentleman, and a woman dressed in the Lithuanian peasant costume, but so tall and strong-looking that at first I took her for a man in disguise. She stepped out first; two other women, not less robust in appearance, were already standing on the steps. The gentleman leant over the lady dressed in black, and, to my great surprise, unbuckled a broad leather belt which held her to her seat in the carriage. I noticed that this lady had long white hair, very much dishevelled, and that her large, wide-opened eyes were vacant in expression. She looked like a waxen figure. After having untied her, her companion spoke to her very respectfully, hat in hand; but she appeared not to pay the slightest attention to him. He then turned to the servants and made a slight sign with his head. Immediately the three women took hold of the lady in black, lifted her out as though she were a feather, and carried her into the Castle, in spite of her efforts to cling to the carriage. The scene was witnessed by several of the house servants, who did not appear to think it anything extraordinary.

The gentleman who had directed the proceedings drew out his watch, and asked how soon dinner would be ready.

"In a quarter of an hour, doctor," was the reply.

I guessed at once that this was Dr. Frœber, and that the lady in black was the Countess. From her age I concluded she was the mother of Count Szémioth, and the precautionary measures taken concerning her told me clearly enough that her reason was affected.

Some moments later the doctor himself came to my room.

"As the Count is indisposed," he said to me, "I must introduce myself to you. I am Dr. Frœber, at your service, and I am delighted to make the acquaintance of a savant known to all readers of the *Scientific and Literary Gazette* of Kœnigsberg. Have you been properly waited on?"

I replied to his compliments as well as I could, and told him that if it was time to go down to dinner I was ready to accompany him.

When we were in the dining-hall, a major-domo brought us liqueurs and several piquant and highly spiced dishes on a silver salver to induce appetite, after a northern custom.

"Allow me, sir, in my office as doctor, to recommend a glass of that *Starka*, a true Cognac brandy casked forty years ago. It is a queen of liqueurs. Take a Drontheim anchovy; nothing is better for opening and preparing the digestive organs, the most important functions of the body.... And now to table. Why do we not speak in German? You come from Kœnigsberg, I from Memel; but I took my degree at Jéna. We shall be more at ease in that way, and the servants, who only know Polish and Russian, will not understand us."

We ate at first in silence; then, after having taken our first glass of Madeira, I inquired of the

doctor if the Count were often inconvenienced by the indisposition which deprived us of his presence that night.

"Yes and no," was the doctor's answer. "It depends upon what expeditions he takes."

"How so?"

"When he takes the road to Rosienie, for instance, he comes back with headache, and in a savage temper."

"I have been to Rosienie myself without such an experience."

"It depends, Professor," he replied, laughing, "on whether you are in love."

I sighed, thinking of Mlle. Gertrude Weber.

"Does the Count's *fiancée*, then, live at Rosienie?" I said.

"Yes, in that neighbourhood; but I cannot say whether she is affianced to him. She is a real flirt, and will drive him off his head, so that he will be in his mother's state."

"Indeed, then her ladyship is ... an invalid?"

"She is mad, my dear sir, mad; and I was even madder to come here!"

"Let us hope that your able attentions will restore her to reason."

The doctor shook his head, and looked attentively at the colour of the glass of Bordeaux which he held in his hand.

"The man you see before you, Professor, was once surgeon-major in the Kalouga regiment. At Sevastopol we cut off arms and legs from morning till night; not to speak of bombs which came down among us as thick as flies on a galled horse. But, though I was then ill-lodged and ill-fed, I was not so bored as I am here, where I eat and drink of the best, am lodged like a prince, and paid like a Court physician.... But liberty, my dear sir!... As you can guess, with this she-dragon I have not a moment to call my own."

"Has she been under your care for long?"

"Less than two years; but she has been insane at least twenty-seven, since before the birth of the Count. Did no one tell you this either at Rosienie or Kowno? Listen, then, for it is a case on which I should like some day to write an article for the *Medical Journal* of St. Petersburg. She went mad from fear...."

"From fear? How was such a thing possible?"

"She had a fright. She is of the house of Keystut.... Oh, there are no *mésalliances* in this house. We descend from the Gédymin.... Well, Professor, two or three days after her marriage, which took place in the castle where we are dining (I drink to your health ...), the Count, the father of the present one, went out hunting. Our Lithuanian ladies are regular amazons, you know. The Countess accompanied him to the hunt.... She stayed behind, or got in advance of the huntsmen,... I do not know which,... when, all at once, the Count saw the Countess's little Cossack, a lad of twelve or fourteen, come up at full gallop.

"'Master!' he said, 'a bear has carried off the Countess.'

"'Where?' cried the Count.

"'Over there,' replied the boy-Cossack.

"All the hunt ran towards the spot he pointed out, but no Countess was to be seen. Her strangled horse lay on one side, and on the other her lambs-wool cloak. They searched and beat the wood on all sides. At last a huntsman cried out, 'There is the bear!' and, sure enough, the bear crossed a clearing, dragging the Countess, no doubt for the purpose of devouring her undisturbed, into a thicket, for these beasts are great gourmands; they like to dine at ease, as the monks. Married but a couple of days, the Count was most chivalrous. He tried to fling himself upon the bear, hunting knife in his fist; but, my dear sir, a Lithuanian bear does not let himself be run through like a stag. By good fortune the Count's gun-bearer, a queer, low fellow, so drunk that morning as to be unable to tell a rabbit from a hare, fired his rifle, more than a hundred paces off, without taking care whether the bullet hit the beast or the lady...."

"And he killed the bear?"

"Stone dead. It takes a tipsy man to hit like that. There are also predestined bullets, Professor. There are sorcerers here who sell them at a moderate price.... The Countess was terribly torn, unconscious, of course, and had one leg broken. They carried her home, and she recovered consciousness, but her reason had gone. They took her to St. Petersburg for a special consultation of four doctors, who glittered with orders. They said that Madam was *enceinte*, and that a favourable turn might be expected after her delivery. She was to be kept in fresh air in the country, and given whey and codéine. Each physician received about a hundred roubles. Nine months later the Countess gave birth to a fine, healthy boy, but where was the 'favourable turn'? Ah, yes, indeed ... there was nothing but redoubled frenzy. The Count showed her her son. In novels that never fails to produce a good effect. 'Kill it! kill the beast!' she yelled; a little longer,

and she would have wrung his neck. Ever since there have been phases of stupid imbecility, alternating with violent mania. There is a strong suicidal tendency. We are obliged to strap her down to make her take fresh air, and it takes three strong servants to hold her in. Nevertheless, Professor, I ask you to note this fact, when I have exhausted my Latin on her without making her obey me, I have a resort that quietens her. I threaten to cut off her hair. I fancy she must have had very beautiful hair at one time. Vanity! It is the sole human feeling left. Is it not odd? If I could experiment upon her as I chose, I might perhaps be able to cure her."

"By what method?"

"By thrashing her. I cured in that way twenty peasant women in a village where the terrible Russian madness (the *hurlement*[2]) had broken out. One woman begins to howl, then her companion follows, and in three days' time the whole village is howling mad. I put an end to it by flogging them. (Take a little chicken, it is very tender.) The Count would never allow me to try the experiment."

"What! you wanted him to consent to your atrocious treatment?"

"Oh, he had known his mother so little, and besides it was for her good; but tell me, Professor, have you ever held that fear could drive anyone mad?"

"The Countess's situation was frightful ... to find herself in the claws of a savage beast!"

"All the same, her son does not take after her. A year ago he was in exactly the same predicament, but, thanks to his coolness, he had a marvellous escape."

"From the claws of a bear?"

"A she-bear, the largest seen for some time. The Count wanted to attack her, boar-spear in hand, but with one back stroke she parried the blade, clutched the Count, and felled him to the ground as easily as I could upset this bottle. He cunningly feigned death.... The bear smelt and sniffed him, then, instead of tearing him to pieces, she gave him a lick with her tongue. He had the presence of mind not to move, and she went on her way."

"She thought that he was dead. I have been told that these animals will not eat a dead body."

"We will endeavour to believe that is so, and abstain from making personal investigation of the question. But, apropos of fear, let me tell you what happened at Sevastopol. Five or six of us were sitting behind the ambulance of the famous bastion No. 5, round a pot of beer which had been brought us. The sentry cried, 'A shell!' and we all lay flat on our stomachs. No, not all of us: a fellow named ... but it is not necessary to give his name ... a young officer who had just come to us, remained standing up, holding his glass full, just when the shell burst. It carried off the head of my poor comrade André Speranski, a brave lad, and broke the pitcher, which, fortunately, was nearly empty. When we got up after the explosion we saw, in the midst of the smoke, that our friend had swallowed his last mouthful of beer just as though nothing had happened. We dubbed him a hero. The following day I met Captain Ghédéonof coming out of the hospital. 'I dine with you fellows to-day,' he said, 'and to celebrate my return I will stand the champagne.' We sat down to the table, and the young officer of the beer was there. He did not wait for the champagne. A bottle was being uncorked near him, and fizz! the cork hit him on the temple. He uttered a cry and fainted away. Believe me, my hero had been devilishly afraid the first time, and his drinking the beer instead of getting out of the way showed that he had lost the control of his mind, and only unconscious mechanical movements remained to him. Indeed, Professor, the human mechanism—"

"Sir," said a servant who had just come into the room, "Jdanova says that the Countess will not take her food."

"Devil take her!" growled the doctor. "I must go to her. When I have made my she-dragon eat, Professor, if agreeable to you, we will take a hand at *préférence* or at *douratchki*."

I expressed my regret that I was ignorant of the games, and, when he had gone to see the invalid, I went up to my room and wrote to Mlle. Gertrude.

II

It was a warm night, and I had left open the window overlooking the park. I did not feel ready for sleep after I finished my letter, so I set to work to rehearse the irregular Lithuanian verbs, and to look into Sanskrit to find the origins of their different irregularities. In the middle of my absorbing labours a tree close to my window shook violently. I could hear the dead branches creak, and it seemed as though some heavy animal were trying to climb it. Still engrossed with the bear stories that the doctor had told me, I got up, feeling rather uneasy, and saw, only a few feet from my window, a human head among the leaves of the tree, lit up plainly by the light from my lamp. The vision only lasted a second, but the singular brilliance of the eyes which met my gaze struck me more than I could say. Involuntarily I took a step backwards; then I ran to the window and demanded in severe tones what the intruder wanted. Meanwhile he climbed down quickly, and, seizing a large branch between both hands, he swung himself off, jumped to the

ground, and was soon out of sight. I rang the bell and told the adventure to a servant who answered it.

"Sir," he said, "you must be mistaken."

"I am certain of what I tell you," I replied. "I am afraid there is a burglar in the park."

"It is impossible, sir."

"Well, then, is it someone out of the house?" The servant opened his eyes wide without replying, and in the end asked me if I wanted anything. I told him to fasten my window, and I went to bed.

I slept soundly, neither dreaming of bears nor of thieves. In the morning, while I was dressing, someone knocked at my door. I opened it and found myself face to face with a very tall and finely built young man in a Bokhara dressing-gown, holding in his hand a long Turkish pipe.

"I come to beg your pardon, Professor," he said, "for having welcomed such a distinguished guest so badly. I am Count Szémioth."

I hastened to say that, on the contrary, my humble thanks were due to him for his most courteous hospitality, and inquired if he had lost his headache.

"Very nearly," he said. "At all events, until the next crisis," he added, with a melancholy expression. "Are you comfortable here? You must not forget that you are among barbarians; it would be difficult to think otherwise in Samogitia."

I assured him I was most comfortably entertained. All the time I was speaking I could not prevent myself from studying him with a very impolite curiosity; there was something strange in his look which reminded me, in spite of myself, of the man whom I had seen climbing the tree the night before....

"But what probability," I said to myself, "is there that Count Szémioth would climb trees by night?"

His forehead was high and well—developed, although rather narrow. His features were large and regular, but his eyes were too close together, and I did not think that, measured from one lacrymal gland to the other, there was the width of an eye, the canon of Greek sculptors. His glance was piercing. Our eyes met several times, in spite of ourselves, and we looked at each other with some embarrassment. All at once the Count burst out laughing.

"You recognise me!" he said.

"Recognise you?"

"Yes, you detected me yesterday playing a scoundrelly part."

"Oh! Monsieur le Comte!"

"I had passed a suffering day shut up in my bedroom. As I was somewhat better at night I went for a walk in the garden. I saw your light and yielded to curiosity.... I ought to have told you who I was, and introduced myself properly, but I was in such a ridiculous situation.... I was ashamed, and so I fled.... Will you excuse me for having disturbed you in the midst of your work?"

He said all this with a would-be playful air; but he blushed, and was evidently confused. I did my best to reassure him that I did not retain any unpleasant impression from our first interview, and, to change the subject, I asked him if he really possessed the Samogitic Catechism of Father Lawiçki.

"It may be so; but, to tell you the truth, I do not know much about my father's library. He loved old and rare books. I hardly read anything beyond modern works; but we will look for it, Professor. You wish us, then, to read the Gospel in Jmoudic?"

"Do you not consider, M. le Comte, that a translation of the Scriptures into the language of this country is very desirable?"

"Certainly; nevertheless, if you will permit me a slight remark, I can tell you that amongst the people who know no other language than the Jmoudic, there is not a single person who can read."

"Perhaps so, but I ask permission of Your Excellency[3] to point out that the greatest obstacle in the way of learning to read is the absence of books. When the Samogitic countries have a printed text they will wish to read it, and will learn to read. This has already happened in the case of many savage races ... not that I wish to apply such a term to the people of this country.... Furthermore," I went on, "is it not a deplorable thing that a language should disappear, leaving no trace behind? Prussian became a dead language thirty years ago, and the last person who knew Cornic died the other day."

"Sad," interrupted the Count. "Alexander Humboldt told my father he had met with a parrot in America that was the only living thing which knew several words of the language of a tribe now entirely wiped out by small-pox. Will you allow me to order our tea here?"

While we drank tea the conversation turned upon the Jmoudic tongue. The Count found fault with the way Germans print Lithuanian, and he was right.

"Your alphabet," he said, "does not lend itself to our language. You have neither our J, nor our L, V, or Ë. I have a collection of *daïnos* published last year at Kœnigsberg, and I had immense trouble to understand the words, they are so queerly formed."

"Your Excellency probably speaks of Lessner's *daïnos*?"

"Yes, it is very vapid poetry, do you not think?"

"He might perhaps have selected better. I admit that, as it is, this collection has but a purely philological interest; but I believe if careful search were made one would succeed in collecting the most perfect flowers of your folk-poetry."

"Alas! I doubt it very much, in spite of my patriotic desires."

"A few weeks ago a very fine ballad was given me at Wilno—an historical one.... It is a most remarkable poem.... May I read it? I have it in my bag."

"With the greatest pleasure."

He buried himself in an armchair, after asking permission to smoke.

"I can't understand poetry unless I smoke," he said.

"It is called *The Three Sons of Boudrys*."

"*The Three Sons of Boudrys*?" exclaimed the Count, with a gesture of surprise.

"Yes, Boudrys, as Your Excellency knows better than I, is an historic character."

The Count looked at me fixedly with that odd gaze of his. It was almost indefinable, both timid and ferocious, and produced an almost painful impression until one grew accustomed to it. I hurriedly began to read to escape it.

> "THE THREE SONS OF BOUDRYS.
>
> "In the courtyard of his castle old Boudrys called together his three sons—three genuine Lithuanians like himself.
>
> "'My children,' he said to them, 'feed your war horses, and get ready your saddles; sharpen your swords and your javelins. It is said that at Wilno war has broken out between the three quarters of the globe. Olgerd will march against Russia; Skirghello against our neighbours, the Poles; Keystut will fall upon the Teutons.[4] You are young, strong and bold; go and fight; and may the gods of Lithuania protect you! This year I shall not go to war, but I wish to counsel you. There are three of you, and three roads are open to you.
>
> "'One of you must accompany Olgerd to Russia, to the borders of Lake Ilmen, under the walls of Novgorod. Ermine skins and embroidered stuffs you will find there in plenty, and among the merchants as many roubles as there are blocks of ice in the river.
>
> "'The second must follow Keystut in his incursion. May he scatter the cross-bearing rabble! Amber is there as common as is the sea sand; their cloths are without equal for sheen and colour; their priests' vestments are ornamented with rubies.
>
> "'The third shall cross the Niémen with Skirghello. On the other side he will find base implements of toil. He must choose good lances and strong buckles to oppose them, and he will bear away a daughter-in-law.
>
> "'The women of Poland, my sons, are the most beautiful of all our captives—sportive as kittens and as white as cream. Under their black brows their eyes sparkle like stars. When I was young, half a century ago, I brought away captive from Poland a beautiful girl who became my wife. She has long been dead, but I can never look at her side of the hearth without remembering her.'
>
> "He blessed the youths, who already were armed and in the saddle. They set out. Autumn came, then winter ... but they did not come back, and the old Boudrys believed them to be dead.
>
> "There came a snowstorm, and a horseman drew near, who bore under his black bourka[5] a precious burden.
>
> "'Is it a sackful of roubles from Novgorod?' asked Boudrys.
>
> "'No, father. I am bringing you a daughter-in-law from Poland.'
>
> "In the midst of the snowstorm another horseman appeared. His bourka was also distended with a precious burden.
>
> "'What have you, my child; yellow amber from Germany?'
>
> "'No, father. I bring you a daughter-in-law from Poland.'
>
> "The snow fell in squalls. A horseman advanced hiding a precious burden under his bourka.... But before he had shown his spoil Boudrys had invited his friends to a third

wedding."

"Bravo! Professor," cried the Count; "you pronounce Jmoude to perfection. But who told you this pretty *daïna*?"

"A young lady whose acquaintance I had the honour to make at Wilno, at the house of Princess Katazyna Paç."

"What is her name?"

"The *panna* Iwinska."

"Mlle. Ioulka!"[6] exclaimed the Count. "The little madcap! I might have guessed it. My dear Professor, you know Jmoude and all the learned tongues; you have read every old book, but you have let yourself be taken in by a young girl who has only read novels. She has translated to you, more or less correctly, in Jmoudic, one of Miçkiewicz's dainty ballads, which you have not read because it is no older than I am. If you wish it I will show it to you in Polish, or, if you prefer, in an excellent Russian translation by Pouchkine."

I confess I was quite dumbfounded. How the Dorpat professor would have chuckled if I had published as original the *daïna* of the "Sons of Boudrys"!

Instead of being amused at my confusion, the Count, with exquisite politeness, hastened to turn the conversation.

"So you have met Mlle. Ioulka?" said he.

"I have had the honour of being presented to her."

"What do you think of her? Speak quite frankly."

"She is a most agreeable young lady."

"So you are pleased to say."

"She is exceedingly pretty."

"Oh!"

"Do you not think she has the loveliest eyes in the world?"

"Yes."

"A complexion of the most dazzling whiteness?... I was reminded of a Persian *ghazel*, wherein a lover extols the fineness of his mistress's skin. 'When she drinks red wine,' he said, 'you see it pass down her throat.' The *panna* Iwinska made me think of those Persian lines."

"Mlle. Ioulka may possibly embody that phenomenon; but I do not know if she has any blood in her veins.... She has no heart.... She is as white and as cold as snow!"

He rose and walked round the room some time without speaking, as though to hide his emotion; then, stopping suddenly—

"Pardon me," he said, "we were talking, I believe, of folk-poetry...."

"We were, Your Excellency."

"After all it must be admitted that she translated Miçkiewicz very prettily.... 'Frolicsome as a kitten,... white as cream,... eyes like stars,' ... that is her own portrait, do you not agree?"

"Absolutely, Your Excellency."

"With reference to this roguish trick ... a very ill-judged one, to be sure,... the poor child is bored to death by an old aunt. She leads the life of a nun."

"At Wilno she went into society. I saw her at the ball given by the officers of the—regiment."

"Ah, yes! the society of young officers suits her exactly. To laugh with one, to backbite with another, and to flirt with all of them.... Will you come and see my father's library, Professor?"

I followed him to a long gallery, lined with many handsomely bound books, which, to judge from the dust which covered their edges, were rarely opened. What was my delight to find that one of the first volumes I pulled out of a glass case was the *Catechismus Samogiticus*! I could not help uttering a cry of pleasure. It seemed as though some mysterious power were exerting its influence unknown to us.... The Count took the book, and, after he had turned over the leaves carelessly, wrote on the fly-leaf: "*To Professor Wittembach, from Michael Szémioth*." I did not know how to express my great gratitude, and I made a mental resolution that after my death this precious book should be the ornament of my own University library.

"If you like to consider this library your workroom," said the Count, "you shall never be disturbed here."

III

After breakfast the following day the Count proposed that I should take a walk with him. The object in view was to visit a *kapas* (the name given by the Lithuanians to tumuli, called by the Russians *kourgâne*), a very noted one in that country, because formerly poets and magicians (they are one and the same thing) gathered there on certain special occasions.

"I have a very quiet horse to offer you," he said. "I regret that I cannot take you by carriage, but, upon my word, the road we go by is not fit for carriages."

I would rather have stopped in the library taking my notes, but I could not express any wish contrary to that of my generous host, and I accepted. The horses were waiting for us at the foot of the steps in the courtyard, where a groom held a dog in leash.

"Do you know much about dogs, Professor?" said the Count, stopping for a minute and turning to me.

"Hardly anything, Your Excellency."

"The Staroste of Zorany, where I have property, sent me this spaniel, of which he thinks highly. Allow me to show him to you." He called to the groom, who came up with the dog. He was indeed a beautiful creature. The dog was quite used to the man, and leapt joyfully and seemed full of life; but when within a few yards of the Count he put his tail between his legs and hung back terrified. The Count patted him, and at this the dog set up a dismal howl.

"I think he will turn out a good dog with careful training," he said, after having examined him for some time with the eye of a connoisseur. Then he mounted his horse.

"Professor," he said, "when we were in the avenue leading from the château, you saw that dog's fear. Please give me your honest opinion. In your capacity of savant you must learn to solve enigmas.... Why should animals be afraid of me?"

"Really, Your Excellency does me the honour of taking me for an Œdipus, whilst I am only a simple professor of comparative philology. There might—"

"Observe," he interrupted me, "that I never beat either horses or dogs. I have a scruple against whipping a poor beast who commits a mistake through ignorance. But, nevertheless, you can hardly conceive the aversion that I inspire in dogs and horses. It takes me double the time and trouble to accustom them to me that it would other people. It took me a long time before I could subdue the horse you are riding, but now he is as quiet as a lamb."

"I believe, Your Excellency, that animals are physiognomists, and detect at once if people whom they see for the first time like them or not. I expect you only like animals for the services they render you; on the other hand, many people have an instinctive partiality for certain beasts, and they find it out at once. Now I, for instance, have always had an instinctive liking for cats. They very rarely run away from me when I try to stroke them, and I have never been scratched by one."

"That is very likely," said the Count; "I cannot say I have a real affection for animals.... Human beings are so much more to be preferred. We are now coming into a forest, Professor, where the kingdom of beasts still flourishes—the *matecznik*, the womb, the great nursery of beasts. Yes, according to our national traditions, no one has yet penetrated its depths, no one has been able to reach to the heart of these woods and thickets, unless, always excepted, the poets and magicians have, who go everywhere. Here the beasts all live as in a Republic ... or under a Constitutional Government, I cannot tell which of the two. Lions, bears, elks, the *joubrs,* our wild oxen or aurochs, all live very happily together. The mammoth, which is preserved there, is thought highly of; it is, I believe, the Marshal of the Diet. They have a very strict police force, and if they decide that any beast is vicious they sentence him to banishment. It falls thus out of the frying-pan into the fire; it is obliged to venture into the region of man, and few escape."[7]

"A very curious legend," I exclaimed, "but, Your Excellency, you speak of the aurochs, that noble animal which Cæsar has described in his *Commentaries*, and which the Merovingian kings hunted in the forest of Compiègne. I am told they still exist in Lithuania—is that so?"

"Certainly. My father himself killed a *joubr*, having obtained permission from the Government. You can see the head in the large dining-hall. I have never seen one. I believe they are very scarce. To make amends we have wolves and bears here in abundance. To guard against a possible encounter with one of these gentlemen I have brought this instrument" (and he produced a Circassian tchékhole[8] which he carried in his belt), "and my groom carries in his saddle-box a double-barrelled rifle."

We began to penetrate into the forest. Soon the narrow track that we were following disappeared altogether. Every few moments we were obliged to ride round enormous trees whose low branches barred our passage. Several of these, which were dead of old age and fallen over, looked like bulwarks crowned with a line of *chevaux-de-frise* (impossible to scale). Elsewhere we encountered deep pools covered with water lilies and duckweed. Further on we came to a clearing where the grass shone like emeralds; but woe to those who ventured on it, for this rich and deceptive vegetation usually hides abysses of mud in which both horse and rider would disappear for ever.... The arduousness of the route had interrupted our conversation. All my

attention was taken up in following the Count, and I admired the imperturbable sagacity with which he guided his way without a compass, and always regained the right direction which had to be followed to reach the kapas. It was evident that he had frequently hunted in these wild forests.

At last we perceived the tumulus in the centre of a large clearing. It was very high and surrounded by a fosse still clearly recognisable in spite of the landslips. It looked as though it had recently been excavated. At the summit I noticed the remains of an erection built of stones, some of which bore traces of fire. A considerable quantity of ashes, mixed with pieces of charcoal, with here and there fragments of coarse crockery, attested that there had been a fire on the top of the tumulus for a considerable time. If one can put faith in popular tradition, human sacrifices had been offered several times in the kapas; but there is hardly any extinct religion to which these abominable rites have not been attributed, and I imagine one could justify a similar theory with regard to the ancient Lithuanians from historic evidence.

We came down from the tumulus to rejoin our horses, which we had left on the far side of the fosse, when we saw an old woman approaching us, leaning on a stick and holding a basket in her hand.

"Good day, gentlemen," she said to us as she came up, "I ask an alms for the love of God. Give me something for a glass of brandy to warm my poor body."

The Count threw her a coin, and asked what she was doing in the wood, so far from habitation. For sole answer she showed him her basket filled with mushrooms. Although my knowledge of botany was but limited, I thought several of the mushrooms looked like poisonous ones.

"My good woman," I said, "you are not going to eat those, I hope."

"Sir," the old woman replied, with a sad smile, "poor folk eat all the good God gives them."

"You are not acquainted with Lithuanian stomachs," the Count put in; "they are lined with sheet iron. Our peasants eat every kind of fungus they find, and are none the worse for them."

"At least prevent her from tasting the *agaricus necator* she has in her basket," I cried, and I stretched out my hand to take one of the most poisonous of the mushrooms, but the old woman quickly withdrew the basket.

"Take care," she said in a frightened tone; "they are protected ... *Pirkuns! Pirkuns!*"

"*Pirkuns*," I may explain in passing, is the Samogitian name for the divinity called by the Russians *Péroune*; it is the Jupiter *tonans* of the Slavs. If I was surprised when I heard the old woman invoke a pagan god, I was much more astonished to see the mushrooms heave up. The black head of a snake raised itself at least a foot out of the basket. I jumped back, and the Count spat over his shoulder after the superstitious custom of the Slavs, who believe that in this way they turn away misfortune, as did the ancient Romans. The old woman put the basket on the ground, and crouched by its side; then she held out her hand towards the snake, pronouncing some unintelligible words like an incantation. The snake remained quiet a moment, then it curled itself round the shrivelled arm of the old woman and disappeared in the sleeve of her sheepskin cloak, which, with a dirty chemise, comprised, I believe, all the dress of this Lithuanian Circe. The old woman looked at us with a little laugh of triumph, like a conjurer who has just executed a difficult trick. Her face wore that mixture of cunning and stupidity which is often noticeable in would-be witches, who are mostly scoundrels and dupes.

"Here you have," said the Count in German, "a specimen of local colour; a witch who tames snakes, at the foot of a kapas, in the presence of a learned professor and of an ignorant Lithuanian gentleman. It would make a capital subject for a picture of natural life by your countryman Knauss.... If you wish to have your fortune told, this is a good opportunity."

I replied that I did not encourage such practices.

"I would much rather," I added, "ask her if she knows anything about that curious superstition of which you spoke. Good woman," I said to her, "have you heard tell of a part of this forest where the beasts live in a community, independent of man's rule?"

The witch nodded her head in the affirmative, and she gave a low laugh, half silly, half malicious.

"I come from it," she said. "The beasts have lost their king. Noble, the lion, is dead; the animals are about to elect another king. If you go there perhaps they will make you king."

"What are you saying, mother?" and the Count burst into shouts of laughter. "Do you know to whom you are talking? Do you not know that this gentleman is.... (what the deuce do they call a professor in Jmoudic?) a great savant, a sage, a *waïdelote*?"[9]

The witch stared at him fixedly.

"I was mistaken," she said. "It is thou who ought to go there. Thou wilt be their king, not he; thou art tall, and strong, and hast claws and teeth."

"What do you think of the epigrams she levels at us?" said the Count. "Can you show us the way, mother?" he asked.

She pointed with her hand to a part of the forest.

"Indeed?" said the Count. "And how can you get across the marsh? You must know, Professor, that she pointed to an impassable swamp, a lake of liquid mud covered over with green grass. Last year a stag that I wounded plunged into this infernal marsh, and I watched him sink slowly, slowly.... In five minutes I saw only his horns, and soon he disappeared completely, two of my dogs with him."

"But I am not heavy," said the old woman, chuckling.

"I think you could cross the marsh easily on a broomstick."

A flash of anger shone in the old woman's eyes.

"Sir," she said, returning to the drawling and nasal twang of the beggar, "haven't you a pipe of tobacco to give a poor woman? Thou hadst better search for a passage through the swamp than go to Dowghielly," she added in a lower tone.

"Dowghielly!" said the Count, reddening, "what do you mean?"

I could not help noticing that this word produced a singular effect upon him. He was visibly embarrassed; he lowered his head in order to hide his confusion, and busied himself over opening the tobacco pouch which hung at the hilt of his hunting knife.

"No, do not go to Dowghielly," repeated the old woman. "The little white dove is not for thee, is she, *Pirkuns*?"

At that moment the snake's head appeared out of the collar of the old woman's cloak and stretched up to its mistress's ear. The reptile, trained doubtless to the trick, moved its jaws as though it spoke.

"He says I am right," said the old woman.

The Count gave her a handful of tobacco.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"I am the master of Médintiltas. Come and see me one of these days; I will give you tobacco and brandy."

The old woman kissed his hand and moved away with rapid strides. We soon lost sight of her. The Count remained thoughtful, tying and untying the fastenings of his bag, hardly conscious of what he was doing.

"Professor," he said to me after a somewhat long silence, "you will laugh at me. That old crone knew both me and the road which she showed me better than she pretended.... After all, there is nothing so very surprising in that. I am as well known in this countryside as the white wolf. The jade has seen me several times on the road to Dowghielly Castle.... A marriageable young lady lives there, so she concluded that I was in love.... Then some handsome boy has bribed her to tell me bad luck.... It is obvious enough. Nevertheless, ... in spite of myself, her words have affected me. I am almost frightened by them.... You have cause to laugh.... The truth is that I intended to go and ask for dinner at the Castle of Dowghielly, and now I hesitate.... I am a great fool. Come, Professor, you decide it. Shall we go?"

"In questions of marriage I never give advice," I said laughingly. "I take good care not to have an opinion."

We had come back to our horses.

"The horse shall choose for me," cried the Count, as he vaulted into the saddle and let the bridle lie slack.

The horse did not hesitate; he immediately entered a little footpath, which, after several turnings, descended into a metalled road which led to Dowghielly. Half an hour after we reached the Castle steps.

At the sound of our horses a pretty, fair head appeared at a window, framed between two curtains. I recognised the translator of Miçkiewicz, who had taken me in.

"You are welcome," she said. "You could not have come more apropos, Count Szémioth. A dress from Paris has just arrived for me. I shall be lovely past recognition."

The curtains closed again.

"It is certainly not for me that she is putting on this dress for the first time," muttered the Count between his teeth whilst mounting the steps.

He introduced me to Madam Dowghiello, the aunt of the *panna* Iwinska, who received me courteously and spoke to me of my last articles in the Kœnigsberg *Scientific and Literary Gazette*.

"The Professor has come to complain to you," said the Count, "of the malicious trick which Mademoiselle Julienne played on him."

"She is a child, Professor; you must forgive her. She often drives me to distraction with her follies. I had more sense at sixteen than she has at twenty, but she is a good girl at heart, and she has many good qualities. She is an admirable musician, she paints flowers exquisitely, and she speaks French, German and Italian equally well.... She embroiders."

"And she composes Jmoudic verses," added the Count, laughing.

"She is incapable of it," exclaimed Madam Dowghiello; and they had to explain her niece's mischievousness.

Madam Dowghiello was well educated, and knew the antiquities of her country. Her conversation was particularly agreeable to me. She read many of our German reviews, and held very sane views upon philology. I admit that I did not notice the time that Mademoiselle Iwinska took to dress, but it seemed long to Count Szémioth, who got up and sat down again, looked out of the window, and drummed on the pane with his fingers as a man who has lost patience.

At length, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, Mademoiselle Julienne appeared, wearing with exquisite grace a dress which would require more critical knowledge than mine to describe. She was followed by her French governess.

"Do I not look pretty?" she said to the Count, turning round slowly so that he could see her from all sides.

She did not look either at the Count or at me, but at her new dress.

"How is it, Ioulka," said Madam Dowghiello, "that you do not say good day to the Professor? He complains of you."

"Ah, Professor!" she cried, with a charming little pout. "What have I done? Have you come to make me do penance?"

"We shall punish ourselves, Mademoiselle, if we deprive ourselves of your presence," I answered. "I am far from complaining; on the contrary, I congratulate myself on having learnt, thanks to you, that the Lithuanian Muse has reappeared more brightly than ever."

She lowered her head, and, putting her hands before her face, taking care not to disarrange her hair, she said, in the tones of a child who has just stolen some sweetmeats—

"Forgive me; I will not do it again."

"I will only pardon you, my dear Pani," I said to her, "if you will fulfil a certain promise which you were good enough to make to me at Wilmo, at the house of the Princess Katazyna Paç."

"What promise?" she asked, raising her head and laughing.

"Have you forgotten so soon? You promised me that if we met in Samogitia you would let me see a certain country dance which you said was enchanting."

"Oh, the roussalka! I shall be charmed; and the very man I need is here."

She ran to a table loaded with music-books, and, turning over one hastily, put it on the piano stand.

"Mind, my dear, *allegro presto*," she said, addressing her governess. And she played the prelude herself, without sitting down, to show the time.

"Come here, Count Michel! you are too much of a Lithuanian not to be able to dance the roussalka; ... but dance like a peasant, you understand."

Madam Dowghiello in vain tried to object. The Count and I insisted. He had his motives, for his part in the dance was extremely agreeable, as we soon saw. The governess, after several attempts, said she thought she could play that kind of waltz, strange though it was; so Mademoiselle Iwinska, after moving some chairs and a table that were in the way, took hold of her partner by the collar of his coat and led him into the centre of the room.

"You must know, Professor, that I am a roussalka, at your service."

She made a low bow.

"A roussalka is a water nymph. There is one in each of the big pools of black water which adorn our forests. Do not go near! The roussalka comes out, lovelier even than I, if that be possible; she carries you to the bottom, where, very likely, she gobbles you up...."

"A real siren," I cried.

"He," continued Mademoiselle Iwinska, pointing to Count Szémioth, "is a very foolish young fisherman who exposes himself to my clutches, and, to make the pleasure last longer, I fascinate him by dancing round him for a time.... But, alas! to do it properly I want a sarafane.[10] What a pity! You must please excuse this dress, which has neither character nor local colour.... Oh! and I have slippers on. It is quite impossible to dance the roussalka with slippers on ... and heels on them too."

She picked up her dress, and, daintily shaking a pretty little foot at the risk of showing her leg, she sent the slipper flying to the end of the drawing-room. The other followed the first, and she

stood upon the parquetry floor in her silken stockings.

"We are quite ready," she said to the governess.

And the dance began.

The roussalka revolves and revolves round her partner; he stretches out his arms to seize her, but she slips underneath him and escapes. It is very graceful, and the music has movement and originality. The figure ends when the partner, believing that he has seized the roussalka, tries to give her a kiss, and she makes a bound, strikes him on the shoulder, and he falls dead at her feet.... But the Count improvised a variation, strained the winsome creature in his arms, and kissed her again and again. Mademoiselle Iwinska uttered a little cry, blushed deeply, and threw herself, pouting, into a couch, complaining that he had hugged her like the bear that he was. I saw that the comparison did not please the Count, for it brought to his mind the family misfortune, and his brow darkened. I thanked Mademoiselle Iwinska most warmly, and praised her dance, which seemed to me to have an antique flavour, and recalled the sacred dances of the Greeks. I was interrupted by a servant announcing General and Princess Véliaminof. Mademoiselle Iwinska leaped to the sofa for her shoes, hastily thrust in her little feet, and ran to meet the Princess, making successively two profound bows. I noticed that at each bow she adroitly drew on part of her slipper. The General brought with him two aides-de-camp, and, like us, had come to ask for hospitality. In any other country I imagine the mistress of the house would have been a little embarrassed to receive all at once six hungry and unexpected guests; but Lithuanian hospitality is so lavish that the dinner was not more than half an hour late, I think; there were too many pies, however, both hot and cold.

[1] "The two together make a pair"; word for word, Michon (Michael) with Lokis, both are the same. *Michaelium cum Lokide, ambo [duo] ipsissimi.*

[2] The Russian for one possessed is "a howler"; *klikoucha*, the root of which is *klik*, clamour, howling.

[3] *Siatelstvo*, "Your *shining light*"; the title used in addressing a count.

[4] The knights of the Teutonic order.

[5] Felt cloak.

[6] Julienne.

[7] See *Messire Thaddée*, by Miçkiewicz, and *Captive Poland*, by M. Charles Edmond.

[8] A Circassian gun-case.

[9] A bad translation of the word "professor." The *waïdelotes* were the Lithuanian bards.

[10] A peasant's skirt, without a bodice.

IV

The dinner was very lively. The General gave us a most interesting account of the dialects spoken in the Caucasus, some of which are Aryan, and others Turanian, although between the different peoples there is a remarkable uniformity in manners and customs. I had to talk of my travels because Count Szémioth congratulated me on the way I sat a horse, and said he had never met a minister or a professor who could have managed so easily such a journey as the one we had taken. I explained to him that, commissioned by the Bible Society to write a work on the language of the *Charruas*, I had spent three and a half years in the Republic of Uruguay, nearly always on horse-back, and living in the pampas among the Indians. This led me to relate how, when lost for three days in those boundless plains, without food or water, I had been reduced, like the *gauchos* who accompanied me, to bleed my horse and drink his blood.

All the ladies uttered a cry of horror. The General observed that the Kalmouks did the same in similar extremities. The Count asked me what the drink tasted like.

"Morally, it was most repugnant," I replied, "but, physically, I found it rather good, and it is owing to it that I have the honour of dining here to-day. Many Europeans, I mean white men, who have lived for a long time with the Indians, accustom themselves to it, and even get to like the taste. My good friend Don Fructuoso Rivero, President of the Republic, hardly ever missed a chance of gratifying it. I recollect one day, when he was going to Congress in full uniform, he passed a *rancho* where a young foal was being bled. He got off his horse to ask for a *chupon*, a suck; after which he delivered one of his most eloquent speeches."

"Your President is a hideous monster," cried Mademoiselle Iwinska.

"Pardon me, my dear Pani," I said to her, "he is a very distinguished person, with a most enlightened mind. He speaks several very difficult Indian dialects to perfection, specially the *Charrua*, the verbs of which take innumerable forms, according to whether its objective is direct or indirect, and even according to the social relations of the persons who speak."

I was about to give some very curious instances of the construction of the *Charrua* verb, but the Count interrupted me to ask what part of the horse they bled when they wanted to drink its

blood.

"For goodness' sake, my dear Professor," cried Mademoiselle Iwinska, with a comic expression of terror, "do not tell him. He is just the man to slay his whole stable, and to eat us up ourselves when he has no more horses left!"

Upon this sally the ladies laughingly left the table to prepare tea and coffee whilst we smoked. In a quarter of an hour they sent from the drawing-room for the General. We all prepared to go with him; but we were told that the ladies only wished one man at a time. Very soon we heard from the drawing-room loud bursts of laughter and clapping of hands.

"Mademoiselle Ioulka is up to her pranks," said the Count.

He was sent for next; and again there followed laughter and applause. It was my turn after his. By the time I had reached the room every face had taken on a pretended gravity which did not bode well. I expected some trick.

"Professor," said the General to me in his most official manner, "these ladies maintain that we have given too kind a reception to their champagne, and they will not admit us among them until after a test. You must walk from the middle of the room to that wall with your eyes bandaged, and touch it with your finger. You see how easy it is; you have only to walk straight. Are you able to keep a straight line?"

"I think so, General."

Mademoiselle Iwinska then threw a handkerchief over my eyes and tied it tightly behind.

"You are in the middle of the room," she said; "stretch out your hand.... That is right! I wager that you will not touch the wall."

"Forward, march!" called out the General.

There were only five or six steps to take. I advanced very cautiously, sure that I should encounter some cord or footstool treacherously placed in my path to trip me up, and I could hear stifled laughter, which increased my confusion. At length I believed I was quite close to the wall, when my outstretched finger suddenly went into something cold and sticky. I made a grimace and started back, which set all the onlookers laughing. I tore off my bandage, and saw Mademoiselle Iwinska standing near me holding a pot of honey, into which I had thrust my finger, thinking that I touched the wall. My only consolation was to watch the two aides-de-camp pass through the same ordeal, with no better result than I.

Throughout the evening Mademoiselle Iwinska never ceased to give vent to her frolicsome humour. Ever teasing, ever mischievous, she made first one, then another, the butt of her fun. I observed, however, that she more frequently addressed herself to the Count, who, I must say, never took offence, and even seemed to enjoy her allurements. But when, on the other hand, she began an attack upon one of the aides-de-camp, he frowned, and I saw his eyes kindle with that dull fire which was almost terrifying. "Frolicsome as a kitten and as white as cream." I thought in writing that verse Miçkiewicz must surely have wished to draw the portrait of the *panna* Iwinska.

V

It was very late before we retired to bed. In many of the great houses in Lithuania there is plenty of splendid silver plate, fine furniture, and valuable Persian carpets; but they have not, as in our dear Germany, comfortable feather beds to offer the tired guest. Rich or poor, nobleman or peasant, a Slav can sleep quite soundly on a board. The Castle of Dowghielly was no exception to this general rule. In the room to which the Count and I were conducted there were but two couches newly covered with morocco leather. This did not distress me much, as I had often slept on the bare earth in my travels, and I laughed a little at the Count's exclamations upon the barbarous customs of his compatriots. A servant came to take off our boots and to bring us dressing-gowns and slippers. When the Count had taken off his coat, he walked up and down awhile in silence; then he stopped in front of the couch, upon which I had already stretched myself.

"What do you think of Ioulka?" he said.

"I think she is bewitching."

"Yes, but such a flirt!... Do you believe she has any liking for that fair-haired little captain?"

"The aide-de-camp?... How should I tell?"

"He is a fop!... So he ought to please women."

"I deny your conclusion, Count. Do you wish me to tell you the truth? Mademoiselle Iwinska thinks far more how to please Count Szémioth than to please all the aides-de-camp in the army."

He blushed without replying; but I saw that my words had given him great pleasure. He walked about again for some time without speaking; then, after looking at his watch, he said—

"Good gracious! we must really go to sleep; it is very late."

He took his rifle and his hunting knife, which had been placed in our room, put them in a cupboard, and took out the key.

"Will you keep it?" he said; and to my great surprise he gave it to me. "I might forget it. You certainly have a better memory than I have."

"The best way not to forget your weapons would be to place them on that table near your sofa," I said.

"No.... Look here, to tell you the truth, I do not like to have arms by me when I am asleep.... This is the reason. When I was in the Grodno Hussars, I slept one night in a room with a companion, and my pistols were on the chair near me. In the night I was awakened by a report. I had a pistol in my hand; I had fired, and the bullet had passed within two inches of my comrade's head.... I have never been able to remember the dream I had."

I was a little disturbed by his anecdote. I was guarded against having a bullet through my head; but, when I looked at the tall figure of my companion, with his herculean shoulders and his muscular arms covered with black down, I could not help recognising that he was perfectly able to strangle me with his hands if he had a bad dream. I took care, however, not to let him see that I felt the slightest uneasiness. I merely put a light on a chair close to my couch, and began to read the *Catechism* of Lawiçki, which I had brought with me. The Count wished me good night, and lay down on his sofa, upon which he turned over five or six times; at last he seemed asleep, although he was doubled up like Horace's lover, who, shut up in a chest, touched his head with his bent knees.

" ...Turpi clausus in area,
Contractum genibus tangas caput...."

From time to time he sighed heavily, or made a kind of nervous rattle, which I attributed to the peculiar position in which he had chosen to sleep. An hour perhaps passed in this way, and I myself became drowsy. I shut my book, and settled myself as comfortably as was possible on my bed, when an odd giggling sound from my neighbour set me trembling. I looked at the Count. His eyes were shut; his whole body shuddered; from his half-opened lips escaped some hardly articulate words.

"So fresh!... so white!... The Professor did not know what he said.... Horse is not worth a straw.... What a delicious morsel!"

Then he began to bite the cushion, on which his head rested, with all his might, growling at the same time so loudly that he woke himself.

I remained quite still on my couch, and pretended to be asleep. Nevertheless, I watched him. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, sighed sadly, and remained for nearly an hour without changing his position, absorbed apparently in his reflections. I was, however, very ill at ease, and I inwardly vowed never again to sleep by the side of the Count. But in the long run weariness overcame disquiet, and when the servant came to our room in the morning, we were both in a profound sleep.

VI

We returned to Médintiltas after breakfast. When I found Dr. Frœber alone, I told him that I believed the Count was unwell, that he had had frightful dreams, was possibly a somnambulist and would be dangerous in that condition.

"I am aware of all that," said the doctor. "With an athletic organisation he is at the same time as nervous as a highly strung woman. Perhaps he gets it from his mother.... She has been devilishly bad to-day.... I do not believe much in stories of fright and longings of pregnant women; but one thing is certain, the Countess is mad, and madness can be inherited...."

"But the Count," I returned, "is perfectly sane: his mind is sound, he has much higher intelligence than, I admit, I should have expected; he loves reading...."

"I grant it, my dear sir, I grant it; but he is often eccentric. Sometimes he shuts himself up for several days; often he roams about at night. He reads unheard-of books.... German metaphysics ... physiology, and I know not what! Even yesterday a package of them came from Leipzig. Must I speak plainly? A Hercules needs a Hebe. There are some very pretty peasant girls here.... On Saturday evenings, when they have washed, you might mistake them for princesses.... There is not one of them but would be only too proud to distract my lord. I, at his age, devil take me!... No, he has no mistress; he will not marry, it is wrong. He ought to have something to occupy his mind."

The doctor's coarse materialism shocked me extremely, and I abruptly terminated the conversation by saying that I sincerely wished that Count Szémioth should find a wife worthy of him. I was surprised, I must admit, when I learnt from the doctor of the Count's taste for philosophical studies. It went against all my preconceived ideas that this officer of the Hussars,

this ardent sportsman, should read German metaphysics and engage himself in physiology. The doctor spoke the truth, however, as I had proof thereof even that very day.

"How do you explain, Professor," he said to me suddenly towards the close of dinner—"how do you explain the *duality* or the *twofold nature* of our being?"

And when he observed that I did not quite follow him, he went on—

"Have you never found yourself at the top of a tower, or even at the edge of a precipice, having at the same time a desire to throw yourself down into space, and a feeling of terror absolutely the reverse?"

"That can be explained on purely physical grounds," said the doctor; "first, the fatigue of walking up hill sends a rush of blood to the brain, which—"

"Let us leave aside the question of the blood, doctor," broke in the Count impatiently, "and take another instance. You hold a loaded firearm. Your best friend stands by. The idea occurs to you to put a ball through his head. You hold assassination in the greatest horror, but all the same, you have thought of it. I believe, gentlemen, that if all the thoughts which come into our heads in the course of an hour ... I believe that if all *your* thoughts, Professor, whom I hold to be so wise, were written down, they would form a folio volume probably, after the perusal of which there would not be a single lawyer who could successfully defend you, nor a judge who would not either put you in prison or even in a lunatic asylum."

"That judge, Count, would certainly not condemn me for having hunted, for more than an hour this morning, for the mysterious law that decides which Slavonic verbs take a future tense when joined to a preposition; but if by chance I had some other thought, what proof of it could you bring against me? I am no more master of my thoughts than of the external accidents which suggest them to me. Because a thought springs up in my mind, it cannot be implied that I have put it into execution, or even resolved to do so. I have never thought of killing anybody; but, if the thought of a murder comes into my mind, is not my reason there to drive it away?"

"You talk with great certainty of your reason; but is it always with us, as you say, to guide us? Reflection, that is to say, time and coolness are necessary to make the reason speak and be obeyed. Has one always both of these? In battle I see a bullet coming towards me; it rebounds, and I get out of the way; by so doing I expose my friend, for whose life I would have given my own if I had had time for reflection...."

I tried to point out to him our duty as men and Christians, the obligation we are under to imitate the warrior of the Scriptures, always ready for battle; at length I made him see that in constantly struggling against our passions we gain fresh strength to weaken and to overcome them. I only succeeded, I fear, in reducing him to silence, and he did not seem convinced.

I stayed but ten days longer at the Castle. I paid one more visit to Dowghielly, but we did not sleep there. As on the first occasion, Mlle. Iwinska acted like a frolicsome and spoilt child. She exercised a kind of fascination over the Count, and I did not doubt that he was very much in love with her. At the same time he knew her faults thoroughly, and was under no illusions. He knew she was a frivolous coquette, and indifferent to all that did not afford her amusement. I could see that he often suffered internally at seeing her so unreasonable; but as soon as she paid him some little attention his face shone, and he beamed with joy, forgetful of all else. He wished to take me to Dowghielly for the last time the day before my departure, possibly because whilst I could stay talking with the aunt, he could walk in the garden with the niece; but I had so much work to do I was obliged to excuse myself, however much he urged. He returned to dinner, although he had told us not to wait. He came to table, but could not eat. He was gloomy and ill-tempered all through the meal. From time to time his eyebrows contracted and his eyes assumed a sinister expression. When the doctor returned to the Countess, the Count followed me to my room, and told me all that was on his mind.

"I heartily repent," he exclaimed, "having left you to go and see that little fool who makes game of me, and only cares for fresh faces; but, fortunately, all is over between us; I am utterly disgusted, and I will never see her again...."

For some time he paced up and down according to his usual habit.

"You thought, perhaps, I was in love with her?" he went on. "That is what the silly doctor thinks. No, I have never loved her. Her merry look amused me. Her white skin gave me pleasure to look at.... That is all there is pleasing about her,... her complexion especially. She has no brains. I have never seen anything in her but just a pretty doll, agreeable to look at when one is tired and lacks a new book.... There is no doubt she is beautiful.... Her skin is marvellous!... The blood under that skin ought to be better than a horse's.... Do you not think so, Professor?"

And he laughed aloud, but his laugh was not pleasant to hear.

I said good-bye to him the next day, to continue my explorations in the north of the Palatinate.

VII

They lasted nearly two months, and I can say that there is hardly a village in Samogitia where I did not stop and where I did not collect some documents. I may here be allowed, perhaps, to take this opportunity of thanking the inhabitants of that province, and especially the Church dignitaries, for the truly warm co-operation they accorded me in my researches, and the excellent contributions with which they have enriched my dictionary.

After staying a week at Szawlé, I intended to embark at Klaypeda (the seaport which we call Memel) to return to my home, when I received the following letter from Count Szémioth, which was brought by one of his huntsmen:—

> "MY DEAR PROFESSOR,—Allow me to write to you in German, for I should commit too many errors in grammar if I wrote in Jmoudic, and you would lose all respect for me. I am not sure you have much of that as it is, and the news that I am about to communicate to you will probably not increase it. Without more ado, I am going to be married, and you will guess to whom. *Jove laughs at lovers' vows.* So said Pirkuns, our Samogitian Jupiter. It is, then, Mlle. Julienne Iwinska that I am to marry on the 8th of next month. You will be the kindest of men if you will come and assist at the ceremony. All the peasantry of Médintiltas and the neighbouring districts will come to devour several oxen and countless swine, and, when they are drunk, they will dance in the meadow, which, you will remember, lies on the right of the avenue. You will see costumes and customs worthy of your consideration. It will give me and also Julienne the greatest pleasure if you come, and I must add that your refusal would place us in a most awkward situation. You know that I belong to the Evangelical Communion, as does my betrothed; now, our minister, who lives about thirty leagues away, is crippled with gout, and I ventured to hope you would be so good as to act in his stead.
>
> "Believe me, my dear Professor,
>
> "Yours very devotedly,
>
> "MICHEL SZÉMIOTH."

At the end of the letter, in the form of a postscript, had been added in Jmoudic, in a pretty feminine handwriting:

> "I, the muse of Lithuania, write in Jmoudic. Michel is very impertinent to question your approval. There is no one but I, indeed, who would be so silly as to marry such a fellow as he. You will see, Professor, on the 8th of next month, a bride who may be called *chic*. That is not a Jmoudic word, it is French. But please do not be distracted during the ceremony."

Neither the letter nor the postscript pleased me. I thought the engaged couple showed an inexcusable levity concerning such a solemn occasion. However, how was I to decline? And yet I will admit that the promised pageant had its attractions for me. According to all appearance, I should not fail to find among the great number of gentlefolk, who would be gathered together at the Castle of Médintiltas, some learned people who would furnish me with useful information. My Jmoudic glossary was very good; but the sense of a certain number of words which I had learnt from the lips of the lowest of the peasants was still, relatively speaking, somewhat obscure to me. All these considerations combined were sufficiently strong to make me consent to the Count's request, and I replied that I would be at Médintiltas by the morning of the 8th.

How greatly had I occasion to repent of my decision!

VIII

On entering the avenue which led to the Castle I saw a great number of ladies and gentlemen in morning dress standing in groups on the steps of the entrance or walking about the paths of the park. The court was filled with peasants in their Sunday attire. The Castle bore a festive air; everywhere were flowers and wreaths, flags and festoons. The head servant led me to the room on the ground floor which had been assigned to me, apologising for not being able to offer me a better one; but there were so many visitors in the Castle that it had been impossible to reserve me the room I had occupied during my first visit, which had been given to the wife of the premier Marshal. My new chamber was, however, very comfortable; it looked on the park, and was below the Count's apartment. I dressed myself hastily for the ceremony, and put on my surplice, but neither the Count nor his betrothed made their appearance. The Count had gone to fetch her from Dowghielly. They should have come back a long time before this; but a bride's toilette is not a light business, and the doctor had warned the guests that as the breakfast would not take place till after the religious ceremony, those whose appetites were impatient would do well to fortify themselves at a sideboard, which was spread with cakes and all kinds of drinks. I remarked at the time that the delay excited ill-natured remarks; two mothers of pretty girls invited to the fête did not refrain from epigrams launched at the bride.

It was past noon when a salvo of cannon and muskets heralded her arrival, and soon after a state carriage entered the avenue drawn by four magnificent horses. It was easily seen by the foam

which covered their chests that the delay had not been on their part. There was no one in the carriage besides the bride, Madam Dowghiello and the Count. He got out and gave his hand to Madam Dowghiello. Mademoiselle Iwinska, with a gracefully coquettish gesture, pretended to hide under a shawl to avoid the curious looks which surrounded her on all sides. But she stood up in the carriage, and was just about to take the Count's hand when the wheelers, terrified maybe by the showers of flowers that the peasants threw at the bride, perhaps also seized with that strange terror which animals seemed to experience at the sight of Count Szémioth, pranced and snorted; a wheel struck the column at the foot of the flight of steps, and for a moment an accident was feared. Mademoiselle Iwinska uttered a little cry,... but all minds were soon relieved, for the Count snatched her in his arms and carried her to the top of the steps as easily as though she had been a clove. We all applauded his presence of mind and his chivalrously gallant conduct. The peasants yelled terrific hurrahs, and the blushing bride laughed and trembled simultaneously. The Count, who was not at all in a hurry to rid himself of his charming burden, evidently exulted in showing her picture to the surrounding crowd....

Suddenly a tall, pale, thin woman, with disordered dress and dishevelled hair, and every feature in her face drawn with terror, appeared at the top of the flight of stairs before anyone could tell from whence she sprang.

"Look at the bear!" she shrieked in a piercing voice, "look at the bear!... Get your guns!... He has carried off a woman! Kill him! Fire! fire!"

It was the Countess. The bride's arrival had attracted everybody to the entrance and to the courtyard or to the windows of the Castle. Even the women who kept guard over the poor maniac had forgotten their charge; she had escaped, and, without being observed by anyone, had come upon us all. It was a most painful scene. She had to be removed, in spite of her cries and resistance. Many of the guests knew nothing about the nature of her illness, and matters had to be explained to them. People whispered in a low tone for a long time after. All faces looked shocked. "It is an ill omen," said the superstitious, and their number is great in Lithuania.

However, Mlle. Iwinska begged for five minutes to settle her toilette and put on her bridal veil, an operation which lasted a full hour. It was more than was required to inform the people who did not know of the Countess's illness of the cause and of its details.

At last the bride reappeared, magnificently attired and covered with diamonds. Her aunt introduced her to all the guests, and, when the moment came to go into the chapel, Madam Dowghiello, to my great astonishment, slapped her niece on the cheek, in the presence of the whole company, hard enough to make those whose attention was not otherwise engaged to turn round. The blow was received with perfect equanimity, and no one seemed surprised; but a man in black wrote something on a paper which he carried, and several of the persons present signed their names with the most nonchalant air. Not until after the ceremony did I find the clue to the riddle. Had I guessed it I should not have failed to oppose the abominable custom with the whole weight of my sacred office as a minister of religion. It was to set up a case for divorce by pretending that the marriage only took place by reason of the physical force exercised against one of the contracting parties.

After the religious service I felt it my duty to address a few words to the young couple, confining myself to putting before them the gravity and sacredness of the bond by which they had just united themselves; and, as I still had Mlle. Iwinska's postscript on my mind, I reminded her that she was now entering a new life, no longer accompanied by childish pleasures and amusements, but filled with serious duties and grave trials. I thought that this portion of my sermon produced much effect upon the bride, as well as on everyone present who understood German.

Volleys of firing and shouts of joy greeted the procession as it came out of the chapel on its way to the dining-hall. The repast was splendid and the appetites very keen; at first no other sounds were audible but the clatter of knives and forks. Soon, however, warmed by champagne and Hungarian wines, the people began to talk and laugh, and even to shout. The health of the bride was drunk with enthusiastic cheers. They had scarcely resumed their seats when an old *pane* with white moustaches rose up.

"I am grieved to see," he said in a loud voice, "that our ancient customs are disappearing. Our forefathers would never have drunk this toast from glasses of crystal. We drank out of the bride's slipper, and even out of her boot; for in my time ladies wore red morocco boots. Let us show, my friends, that we are still true Lithuanians. And you, Madam, condescend to give me your slipper."

"Come, take it, Monsieur," replied the bride, blushing and stifling a laugh;... "but I cannot satisfy you with a boot."

The *pane* did not wait a second bidding; he threw himself gracefully on his knees, took off a little white satin slipper with a red heel, filled it with champagne, and drank so quickly and so cleverly that not more than half fell on his clothes. The slipper was passed round, and all the men drank out of it, but not without difficulty. The old gentleman claimed the shoe as a precious relic, and Madam Dowghiello sent for a maid to repair her niece's disordered toilette.

This toast was followed by many others, and soon the guests became so noisy that it did not become me to remain with them longer. I escaped from the table without being noticed and went outside the Castle to get some fresh air, but there, too, I found a none too edifying spectacle. The servants and peasants who had had beer and spirits to their hearts' content were nearly all of them already tipsy. There had been quarrelling and some heads broken. Here and there drunken

men lay rolling on the grass in a state of stupidity, and the general aspect of the fete looked much like a field of battle. I should have been interested to watch the popular dances quite close, but most of them were led by impudent gipsies, and I did not think il becoming to venture into such a hubbub. I went back, therefore, to my room and read for some time; then I undressed and soon fell asleep.

When I awoke the Castle clock was striking three o'clock. It was a fine night, although the moon was half shrouded by a light mist. I tried to go to sleep again, but I could not manage it. According to my usual habit when I could not sleep I thought to take up a book and read, but I could not find matches within reach. I got up and was going to grope about the room when a dark body of great bulk passed before my window and fell with a dull thud into the garden. My first impression was that it was a man, and I thought possibly it was one of the drunken men, who had fallen out of the window. I opened mine and looked out, but I could not see anything. I lighted a candle at last, and, getting back into bed, I had gone through my glossary again just as they brought me a cup of tea. Towards eleven o'clock I went to the salon, where I found many scowling eyes and disconcerted looks. I learnt, in short, that the table had not been left until a very late hour. Neither the Count nor the young Countess had yet appeared. At half-past eleven, after many ill-timed jokes, people began to grumble—at first below their breath, but soon aloud. Dr. Frœber took upon himself to send the Count's valet to knock at his master's door. In a quarter of an hour the man came back looking anxious, and reported to Dr. Frœber that he had knocked more than a dozen times without getting any answer. Madam Dowghiello, the doctor and I consulted together. The valet's uneasiness influenced me. We all three went upstairs with him and found the young Countess's maid outside the door very scared, declaring that something dreadful had happened, for Madam's window was wide open. I recollected with horror that heavy body falling past my window. We knocked loudly; still no answer. At length the valet brought an iron bar, and we forced the door.... No! courage fails me to describe the scene which presented itself to our eyes. The young Countess was stretched dead on her bed, her face horribly torn, her throat cut open and covered with blood. The Count had disappeared, and no one has ever heard news of him since.

The doctor examined the young girl's ghastly wound.

"It was not a steel blade," he exclaimed, "which did this wound.... It was a bite...."

The doctor closed his book, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"And is that the end of the story?" asked Adelaide.

"The end," replied the Professor in a melancholy voice.

"But," she continued, "why have you called it '*Lokis*'? Not a single person in it is so called."

"It is not the name of a man," said the Professor. "Come, Théodore, do you understand what '*Lokis*' means?"

"Not in the very least."

"If you were thoroughly steeped in the law of transformation from the Sanskrit into Lithuanian, you would have recognised in *lokis* the Sanskrit *arkcha*, or *rikscha*. The Lithuanians call *lokis* that animal which the Greeks called *ἄρκτος*, the Latins *ursus*, and the Germans *bär*.

"Now you will understand my motto:

> "Miszka su Lokiu,
> Abu du tokiu."

"You remember that in the romance of *Renard* the bear is called *damp Brun*. The Slavs called it Michel, which becomes Miszka in Lithuanian, and the surname nearly always replaces the generic name *lokis*. In the same way the French have forgotten their new Latin word *goupil*, or *gorpil*, and have substituted *renard*. I could quote you endless other instances...."

But Adelaide observed that it was late, and we ought to go to bed.

THE BLUE CHAMBER

To Madame de la Rhune

A young man was walking up and down the waiting-room of a railway station, in an agitated condition. He wore blue spectacles, and, although he had not a cold, he used his pocket-handkerchief incessantly. He held a little black bag in his left hand which, as I learnt later, contained a silk dressing-gown and a pair of Turkish pantaloons.

Every now and again he went to the door and looked into the street, then he drew out his watch and consulted the station clock. The train did not leave for an hour; but there are people who always imagine they will be late. This train was not for people in a pressing hurry; there were

very few first-class carriages on it. It was not an hour at which stock-brokers left, after business was finished, to go to their country homes for dinner. When travellers began to appear, a Parisian would have recognised from their bearing that they were either farmers, or small suburban tradesmen. Nevertheless, every time anyone came into the station, or a carriage drew up at the door, the heart of the young man with the blue spectacles became inflated like a balloon, his knees trembled, his bag almost fell from his hands, and his glasses off his nose, where, we may mention in passing, they were seated crookedly.

His agitation increased when, after a long wait, a woman appeared by a side door, from precisely the direction in which he had not kept a constant look-out. She was dressed in black with a thick veil over her face, and she held a brown morocco leather bag in her hand, containing, as I subsequently discovered, a wondrous morning-gown and blue satin slippers. The woman and the young man advanced towards each other looking to right and left, but never in front of them. They came up to one another, shook hands, and stood several minutes without speaking a word, trembling and gasping, a prey to one of those intense emotions for which I would give in exchange a hundred years of a philosopher's life.

"Léon," said the young woman, when she had summoned up courage to speak (I had forgotten to mention that she was young and pretty)—"Léon, what a happy thought! I should never have recognised you with those blue spectacles."

"What a happy thought!" said Léon. "I should never have known you under that black veil."

"What a happy thought!" she repeated. "Let us be quick and take our seats; suppose the train were to start without us!..." (and she squeezed his arm tightly). "No one will suspect us. I am now with Clara and her husband, on the way to their country house, where, *to-morrow*, I must say good-bye to her;... and," she added, laughing and lowering her head, "she left an hour ago; and to-morrow,... after passing *the last evening* with her,... (again she pressed his arm), to-morrow, in the morning, she will leave me at the station, where I shall meet Ursula, whom I sent on ahead to my aunt's.... Oh! I have arranged everything. Let us take our tickets.... They cannot possibly guess who we are. Oh! suppose they ask our names at the inn? I have forgotten them already...."

"Monsieur and Madame Duru."

"Oh no! Not Duru. There was a shoemaker called that at the pension."

"Dumont, then?"

"Daumont."

"Very well. But no one will ask us."

The bell rang, the door of the waiting-room opened, and the carefully veiled young woman rushed into a carriage with her youthful companion. The bell rang a second time, and the door of their compartment was closed.

"We are alone!" they exclaimed delightedly.

But, almost at the same moment, a man of about fifty, dressed completely in black, with a grave and bored expression, entered the carriage and settled himself in a corner. The engine whistled, and the train began to move. The two young people drew back as far as they could from their unwelcome neighbour and began to whisper in English as an additional precaution.

"Monsieur," said the other traveller, in the same tongue, and with a much purer British accent, "if you have secrets to tell to each other, you had better not tell them in English before me, for I am an Englishman. I am extremely sorry to annoy you; but there was only a single man in the other compartment, and I make it a rule never to travel alone with one man only.... He had the face of a Judas and this might have tempted him."

He pointed to his travelling-bag, which he had thrown in before him on the cushion.

"But I shall read if I do not go to sleep."

And, indeed, he did make a gallant effort to sleep. He opened his bag, drew out a comfortable cap, put it on his head, and kept his eyes shut for several minutes; then he reopened them with a gesture of impatience, searched in his bag for his spectacles, then for a Greek book. At length he settled himself to read, with an air of deep attention. While getting his book out of the bag he displaced many things piled up hap-hazard. Among others, he drew out of the depths of the bag a large bundle of Bank of England notes, placed it on the seat opposite him, and, before putting it back in the bag, he showed it to the young man, and asked him if there was a place in N—— where he could change bank-notes.

"Probably, as it is on the route to England."

N—— was the place to which the young people were going. There is quite a tidy little hotel at N ——, where people seldom stop except on Saturday evenings. It is held out that the rooms are good, but the host and his helpers are far enough away from Paris to indulge in this provincial vice. The young man whom I have already called by the name of Léon, had been recommended to this hotel some time previously, when he was minus blue spectacles, and, upon his recommendation, his companion and friend had seemed desirous of visiting it.

She was, moreover, at that time in such a condition of mind that the walls of a prison would have

seemed delightful, if they had enclosed Léon with her.

In the meantime the train journeyed on; the Englishman read his Greek book, without looking towards his companions, who conversed in that low tone that only lovers can hear. Perhaps I shall not astonish my readers when I tell them that these two were lovers in the fullest acceptation of the term, and what was still more deplorable, they were not married, because there were reasons which placed an obstacle in the way of their desire.

They reached N—-, and the Englishman got out first. Whilst Léon helped his friend to descend from the carriage without showing her legs, a man jumped on to the platform from the next compartment. He was pale, even sallow; his eyes were sunken and bloodshot, and his beard unkempt, a sign by which great criminals are often detected. His dress was clean, but worn almost threadbare. His coat, once black, but now grey at the back and by the elbows, was buttoned up to his chin, probably to hide a waistcoat still more shabby. He went up to the Englishman and put on a deferential tone.

"Uncle!" he said.

"Leave me alone, you wretch!" cried the Englishman, whose grey eyes flashed with anger; and he took a step forward to leave the station.

"Don't drive me to despair," replied the other, with a piteous and yet at the same time menacing accent.

"Will you be good enough to hold my bag for a moment?" said the old Englishman, throwing his travelling-bag at Léon's feet.

He then took the man who had accosted him by the arm, and led, or rather pushed, him into a corner, where he hoped they would not be overheard, and there he seemed to address him roughly for a moment. He then drew some papers from his pocket, crumpled them up, and put them in the hand of the man who had called him uncle. The latter took the papers without offering any thanks, and almost immediately took himself off and disappeared.

As there is but the one hotel in N—— it was not surprising that, after a short interval, all the characters of this veracious story met together there. In France every traveller who has the good fortune to have a well-dressed wife on his arm is certain to obtain the best room in any hotel; so firmly is it believed that we are the politest nation in Europe.

If the bedroom that was assigned to Léon was the best, it would be rash to conclude that it was perfect. It had a great walnut bedstead, with chintz curtains, on which was printed in violet the magic story of Pyramis and Thisbé. The walls were covered with a coloured paper representing a view of Naples and a multitude of people; unfortunately, idle and impertinent visitors had drawn moustaches and pipes to all the figures, both male and female, and many silly things had been scribbled in lead-pencil in rhyme and prose on the sky and ocean. Upon this background hung several engravings: "Louis Philippe taking the Oath of the Charter of 1830," "The first Interview between Julia and Saint-Preux," "Waiting for Happiness," and "Regrets," after M. Dubuffe. This room was called the Blue Chamber, because the two armchairs to left and right of the fireplace were upholstered in Utrecht velvet of that colour; but for a number of years they had been covered with wrappers of grey glazed calico edged with red braid.

Whilst the hotel servants crowded round the new arrival and offered their services, Léon, who, although in love, was not destitute of common sense, went to order dinner. It required all his eloquence and various kinds of bribes to extract the promise of a dinner by themselves alone. Great was his dismay when he learnt that in the principal dining-room, which was next his room, the officers of the 3rd Hussars, who were about to relieve the officers of of the 3rd Chasseurs at N—— , were going to join at a farewell dinner that very day, which would be a lively affair. The host swore by all his gods that, except a certain amount of gaiety which was natural to every French soldier, the officers of the Hussars and Chasseurs were known throughout the town for their gentlemanly and discreet behaviour, and that their proximity would not inconvenience madam in the least; the officers were in the habit of rising from table before midnight.

As Léon went back to the Blue Chamber but slightly reassured, he noticed that the Englishman occupied the other room next his. The door was open, and the Englishman sat at a table upon which were a glass and a bottle. He was looking at the ceiling with profound attention, as though he were counting the flies walking on it.

"What matter if they are so near," said Léon to himself. "The Englishman will soon be tipsy, and the Hussars will leave before midnight."

On entering the Blue Chamber his first care was to make sure that the communicating doors were tightly locked, and that they had bolts to them. There were double doors on the Englishman's side, and the walls were thick. The partition was thinner on the Hussars' side, but the door had a lock and a bolt. After all, this was a more effectual barrier to curiosity than the blinds of a carriage, and how many people think they are hidden from the world in a hackney carriage!

Assuredly the most opulent imagination could certainly never have pictured a more complete state of happiness than that of these two young lovers, who, after waiting so long, found themselves alone and far away from jealous and prying eyes, preparing to relate their past sufferings at their ease and to taste the delights of a perfect reunion. But the devil always finds

out a way to pour his drop of wormwood into the cup of happiness.

Johnson was not the first who wrote—he took it from a Greek writer—that no man could say, "To-day I shall be happy." This truth was recognised at a very remote period by the greatest philosophers, and yet is ignored by a certain number of mortals, and especially by most lovers.

Whilst taking a poorly served dinner in the Blue Chamber from some dishes filched from the Hussars' and the Chasseurs' banquet, Léon and his lover were much disturbed by the conversation in which the gentlemen in the neighbouring room were engaged. They held forth on abstruse subjects concerning strategy and tactics, which I shall refrain from repeating.

There were a succession of wild stories—nearly all of them broad and accompanied by shrieks of laughter, in which it was often difficult for our lovers not to join. Léon's friend was no prude; but there are things one prefers not to hear, particularly during a tête-à-tête with the man one loves. The situation became more and more embarrassing, and when they were taking in the officers' dessert, Léon felt he must go downstairs to beg the host to tell the gentlemen that he had an invalid wife in the room adjoining theirs, and they would deem it a matter of courtesy if a little less noise were made.

The noise was nothing out of the way for a regimental dinner, and the host was taken aback and did not know what to reply. Just when Léon gave his message for the officers, a waiter asked for champagne for the Hussars, and a maidservant for port wine for the Englishman.

"I told him there was none," she added.

"You are a fool. I have every kind of wine. I will go and find him some. Port is it? Bring me the bottle of ratafia, a bottle of quince and a small decanter of brandy."

When the host had concocted the port in a trice, he went into the large dining-room to execute Léon's commission, which at first, roused a furious storm.

Then a deep voice, which dominated all the others, asked what kind of a woman their neighbour was. There was a brief silence before the host replied—

"Really, gentlemen, I do not know how to answer you. She is very pretty and very shy. Marie-Jeanne says she has a wedding-ring on her finger. She is probably a bride come here on her honeymoon, as so many others come here."

"A bride?" exclaimed forty voices. "She must come and clink glasses with us! We will drink to her health and teach the husband his conjugal duties!"

At these words there was a great jingling of spurs, and our lovers trembled, fearing that their room was about to be taken by storm. All at once a voice was raised which stopped the manœuvre. It evidently belonged to a commanding officer. He reproached the officers with their want of politeness, ordered them to sit down again and to talk decently, without shouting. Then he added some words too low to be heard in the Blue Chamber. He was listened to with deference, but, nevertheless, not without exciting a certain amount of covert hilarity. From that moment there was comparative quiet in the officers' room; and our lovers, blessing the salutary reign of discipline, began to talk together with more freedom.... But after such confusion it was a little time before they regained that peace of mind which anxiety, the worries of travelling, and, worse than all, the loud merriment of their neighbours, had so greatly agitated. This was not very difficult to accomplish, however, at their age, and they had very soon forgotten all the troubles of their adventurous expedition in thinking of its more important consequences.

They thought peace was declared with the Hussars. Alas! it was but a truce. Just when they expected it least, when they were a thousand leagues away from this sublunary world, twenty-four trumpets, supported by several trombones, struck up the air well known to French soldiers, "La victoire est nous!" How could anyone withstand such a tempest? The poor lovers might well complain.

But they had not much longer to complain, for at the end the officers left the dining-room, filed past the door of the Blue Chamber with a great clattering of spurs and sabres, and shouted one after the other—

"Good night, madam bride!"

Then all noise stopped. No, I am mistaken; the Englishman came out into the passage and cried out—

"Waiter! bring me another bottle of the same port."

Quiet was restored in the hotel of N——. The night was fine and the moon at the full. From time immemorial lovers have been pleased to gaze at our satellite. Léon and his lover opened their window, which looked on a small garden, and breathed with delight the fresh air, which was filled with the scent of a bower of clematis.

They had not looked out long, however, before a man came to walk in the garden. His head was bowed, his arms crossed, and he had a cigar in his mouth. Léon thought he recognised the

nephew of the Englishman who was fond of good port wine.

I dislike useless details, and, besides, I do not feel called upon to tell the reader things he can readily imagine, nor to relate all that happened hour by hour in the inn at N——. I will merely say that the candle which burned on the tireless mantelpiece of the Blue Chamber was more than half consumed when a strange sound issued from the Englishman's room, in which there had been silence until now; it was like the fall of a heavy body. To this noise was added a kind of cracking, quite as odd, followed by a smothered cry and several inarticulate words like an oath. The two young occupants of the Blue Chamber shuddered. Perhaps they had been waked up suddenly by it. The noise seemed a sinister one to both of them, for they could not explain it.

"Our friend the Englishman is dreaming," said Léon, trying to force a smile.

But although he wanted to reassure his companion, he shivered involuntarily. Two or three minutes afterwards a door in the corridor opened cautiously, as it seemed, then closed very quietly. They heard a slow and unsteady footstep which appeared to be trying to disguise its gait.

"What a cursed inn!" exclaimed Léon.

"Ah, it is a paradise!" replied the young woman, letting her head fall on Léon's shoulder. "I am dead with sleep...."

She sighed, and was very soon fast asleep again.

A famous moralist has said that men are never garrulous when they have all their heart's desire. It is not surprising, therefore, that Léon made no further attempt to renew the conversation or to discourse upon the noises in the hotel at N——. Nevertheless, he was preoccupied, and his imagination pieced together many events to which in another mood he would have paid no attention. The evil countenance of the Englishman's nephew returned to his memory. There was hatred in the look that he threw at his uncle even while he spoke humbly to him, doubtless because he was asking for money.

What would be easier than for a man, still young and vigorous, and desperate besides, to climb from the garden to the window of the next room? Moreover, he was staying at the hotel, and would walk in the garden after dark, perhaps ... quite possibly ... undoubtedly, he knew that his uncle's black bag contained a thick bundle of bank-notes.... And that heavy blow, like the blow of a club on a bald head!... that stifled cry!... that fearful oath! and those steps afterwards! That nephew looked like an assassin.... But people do not assassinate in a hotel full of officers. Surely the Englishman, like a wise man, had locked himself in, specially knowing the rogue was about.... He evidently mistrusted him, since he had not wished to accost him bag in hand.... But why allow such hideous thoughts when one is so happy?

Thus did Léon cogitate to himself. In the midst of his thoughts, which I will refrain from analysing at greater length, and which passed in his mind like so many confused dreams, he fixed his eyes mechanically on the door of communication between the Blue Chamber and the Englishman's room.

In France, doors fit badly. Between this one and the floor there was a space of nearly an inch. Suddenly, from this space, which was hardly lighted by the reflection from the polished floor, there appeared something blackish and flat, like a knife blade, for the edge which the candlelight caught showed a thin line which shone brightly. It moved slowly in the direction of a little blue-satin slipper, which had been carelessly thrown close to this door. Was it some insect like a centipede?... No, it was no insect. It had no definite shape.... Two or three brown streams, each with its line of light on its edges, had come through into the room. Their pace quickened, for the floor was a sloping one.... They came on rapidly and touched the little slipper. There was no longer any doubt! It was a liquid, and that liquid, the colour of which could now be distinctly seen by the candlelight, was blood! While Léon, paralysed with horror, watched these frightful streams, the young woman slept on peacefully, her regular breathing warming her lover's neck and shoulder.

The care which Léon had taken in ordering the dinner on their arrival at the inn of N—— adequately proved that he had a pretty level head, a high degree of intelligence and that he could look ahead. He did not in this emergency belie the character we have already indicated, he did not stir, and the whole strength of his mind was strained to keep this resolve in the presence of the frightful disaster which threatened him.

I can imagine that most of my readers, and, above all, my lady readers, filled with heroic sentiments, will blame the conduct of Léon on this occasion for remaining motionless. They will tell me he ought to have rushed to the Englishman's room and arrested the murderer, or, at least, to have pulled his bell and rung up the people of the hotel. To this I reply that, in the first case, the bells in French inns are only room ornaments, and their cords do not correspond to any metallic apparatus. I would add respectfully, but decidedly, that, if it is wrong to leave an Englishman to die close by one, it is not praiseworthy to sacrifice for him a woman who is

sleeping with her head on your shoulder. What would have happened if Léon had made an uproar and roused the hotel? The police, the inspector and his assistant would have come at once. These gentlemen are by profession so curious, that, before asking him what he had seen or heard, they would have questioned him as follows:—

"What is your name? Where are your papers? And what about Madam? What were you doing together in the Blue Chamber? You will have to appear at the Assizes to explain the exact month, at what hour in the night, you were witnesses of this deed."

Now it was precisely this thought of the inspector and officers of the law which first occurred to Léon's mind. Everywhere throughout life there are questions of conscience difficult to solve. Is it better to allow an unknown traveller to have his throat cut, or to disgrace and lose the woman one loves?

It is unpleasant to have to propose such a problem. I defy the cleverest person to solve it.

Léon did then what probably most would have done in his place. He never moved.

He remained fascinated for a long time with his eyes fixed upon the blue slipper and the little red stream which touched it. A cold sweat moistened his temples, and his heart beat in his breast as though it would burst.

A host of thoughts and strange and horrible fancies took possession of him, and an inward voice cried out all the time, "In an hour all will be known, and it is your own fault!" Nevertheless, by dint of repeating to himself "Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère?" he finished up by perceiving some few rays of hope. "If we leave this accursed hotel," he said to himself at last, "before the discovery of what has happened in the adjoining room, perhaps they may lose trace of us. No one knows us here. I have only been seen in blue spectacles, and she has only been seen in a veil. We are only two steps from the station, and should be far away from it in an hour."

Then, as he had studied the time-table at great length to make out his journey, he recollected that a train for Paris stopped at eight o'clock. Very soon afterwards they would be lost in the vastness of that town, where so many guilty persons are concealed. Who could discover two innocent people there? But would they not go into the Englishman's room before eight o'clock? That was the vital question.

Quite convinced that there was no other course before him, he made a desperate effort to shake off the torpor which had taken possession of him for so long, but at the first movement he made his young companion woke up and kissed him half-consciously. At the touch of his icy cheek she uttered a little cry.

"What is the matter?" she said to him anxiously. "Your forehead is as cold as marble."

"It is nothing," he replied in a voice which belied his words. "I heard a noise in the next room...."

He freed himself from her arms, then he moved the blue slipper and put an armchair in front of the door of communication, so as to hide the horrid liquid from his lover's eyes. It had stopped flowing, and had now collected into quite a big pool on the floor. Then he half opened the door which led to the passage, and listened attentively. He even ventured to go up to the Englishman's door, which was closed. There were already stirrings in the hotel, for day had begun. The stablemen were grooming the horses in the yard, and an officer came downstairs from the second story, clinking his spurs. He was on his way to preside at that interesting piece of work, more agreeable to horses than to men, which is technically known as *la botte*.

Léon re-entered the Blue Chamber, and, with every precaution that love could invent, with the help of much circumlocution and many euphemisms, he revealed their situation to his friend.

It was dangerous to stay and dangerous to leave too precipitately; still much more dangerous to wait at the hotel until the catastrophe in the next room was discovered.

There is no need to describe the terror caused by this communication, or the tears which followed it, the senseless suggestions which were advanced, or how many times the two unhappy young people flung themselves into each other's arms, saying, "Forgive me! forgive me!" Each took the blame. They vowed to die together, for the young woman did not doubt that the law would find them guilty of the murder of the Englishman, and as they were not sure that they would be allowed to embrace each other again on the scaffold they did it now to suffocation, and vied with each other in watering themselves with tears. At length, after having talked much rubbish and exchanged many tender and harrowing words, they decided, in the midst of a thousand kisses, that the plan thought out by Léon, to leave by the eight o'clock train, was really the only one practicable, and the best to follow. But there were still two mortal hours to get through. At each step in the corridor they trembled in every limb. Each creak of boots proclaimed the arrival of the inspector.

Their small packing was done in a flash. The young woman wanted to burn the blue slipper in the fireplace; but Léon picked it up and, after wiping it by the bedside, he kissed it and put it in his pocket. He was astonished to find that it smelt of vanilla, though his lover's perfume was "Bouquet de l'impératrice Eugénie."

Everybody in the hotel was now awake. They heard the laughing of waiters, servant-girls singing at their work, and soldiers brushing their officers' clothes. Seven o'clock had just struck. Léon

wanted to make his friend drink a cup of coffee, but she declared that her throat was so choked up that she should die if she tried to drink anything.

Léon, armed with the blue spectacles, went down to pay the bill. The host begged his pardon for the noise that had been made; he could not at all understand it, for the officers were always so quiet! Léon assured him that he had heard nothing, but had slept profoundly.

"I don't think your neighbour on the other side would inconvenience you," continued the landlord; "he did not make much noise. I bet he is still sleeping soundly."

Léon leant hard against the desk to keep from falling, and the young woman, who had followed him closely, clutched at his arm and tightened the veil over her face.

"He is a swell," added the pitiless host. "He will have the best of everything. Ah! he is a good sort. But all the English are not like him. There was one here who is a skinflint. He thought everything too dear: his room, his dinner. He wanted me to take a five-pound Bank of England note in settlement of his bill for one hundred and eighty-five francs,... and to risk whether it was a good one! But stop, Monsieur; perhaps you will know, for I heard you talking English with Madam.... Is it a good one?"

With these words he showed Léon a five-pound bank-note. On one of its corners there was a little spot of red which Léon could readily explain to himself.

"I think it is quite good," he said in a stifled voice.

"Oh, you have plenty of time," replied the host; "the train is not due here till eight o'clock, and it is always late. Will you not sit down, Madam? you seem tired...."

At this moment a fat servant-girl came up.

"Hot water, quick," she said, "for milord's tea. Give me a sponge too. He has broken a bottle of wine and the whole room is flooded."

At these words Léon fell into a chair, and his companion did the same. An intense desire to laugh overtook them both, and they had the greatest difficulty in restraining themselves. The young woman squeezed his hand joyfully.

"I think we will not go until the two o'clock train," said Léon to the landlord. "Let us have a good meal at midday."

BIARRITZ,

September, 1866.

THE "VICCOLO" OF MADAM LUCREZIA

I was twenty-three years old when I set out for Rome. My father gave me a dozen letters of introduction, one of which, four pages long, was sealed. It was addressed: "To the Marquise Aldobrandi."

"You must write and tell me if the Marquise is still beautiful," said my father.

Now, from my earliest childhood, I had seen over the mantelpiece in his study a miniature of a very lovely woman, with powdered hair crowned with ivy, and a tiger skin over her shoulder. Underneath was the inscription, "*Roma*, 18—." The dress struck me as so strange that I had many times asked who the lady was.

"It is a bacchante," was the only answer given me.

But this reply hardly satisfied me. I even suspected a secret beneath it, for, at this simple question, my mother would press her lips together, and my father look very serious.

This time, when giving me the sealed letter, he looked stealthily at the portrait; involuntarily I did the same, and the idea came into my head that the powdered bacchante might perhaps be the Marquise Aldobrandi. As I had begun to understand the world I drew all kinds of conclusions from my mother's expression and my father's looks.

When I reached Rome, the first letter I delivered was the one to the Marquise. She lived in a beautiful palace close to the square of Saint-Mark.

I gave my letter and my card to a servant in yellow livery, who showed me into a vast room, dark and gloomy, and badly furnished. But in all Roman palaces there are pictures by the old masters. This room contained a great number of them, and several were very remarkable.

The first one I examined was a portrait of a woman which I thought was a Leonardo da Vinci. By the magnificence of the frame, and the rosewood easel on which it rested, there was no doubt it was the chief gem of the collection. As the Marquise was long in coming I had plenty of time to look at it. I even carried it to a window to see it in a more favourable light. It was evidently a portrait and not a fancy study, for such a face could not have been imagined: she was a beautiful

woman, with rather thick lips, eyebrows nearly joined, and an expression that was both haughty and endearing. Underneath was her coat of arms, surmounted by a ducal coronet. But what struck me most was the dress, which even to the powder was like that of my father's bacchante.

I was holding the portrait in my hand when the Marquise entered.

"Exactly like his father!" she cried, coming towards me. "Ah, you French! you French! Hardly arrived before he seizes upon 'Madam Lucrezia.'"

I hastened to make excuses for my impertinence, and began to praise at random the *chef-d'œuvre* of Leonardo, which I had been so bold as to lift out of its place.

"It is indeed a Leonardo," said the Marquise, "and it is the portrait of the infamous Lucrezia Borgia. Of all my pictures it was the one your father admired most.... But, good heavens! what a resemblance! I think I see your father as he was twenty-five years ago. How is he? What is he doing? And will he not come to see us at Rome some time?"

Although the Marquise did not wear either tiger skin or powdered hair, at the first glance, and with my natural quickness of perception, I recognised in her my father's bacchante. Some twenty-five years had not been able entirely to efface the traces of great beauty. Her expression only had changed, even as her toilette. She was dressed completely in black, and her treble chin, her grave smile and her manner, serious and yet radiant, apprised me that she had become religious.

No one could have given me a warmer welcome; in a few words she offered me her home, her purse and her friends, among whom she mentioned several cardinals.

"Look upon me," she said, "as your mother."

She lowered her eyes modestly.

"Your father has charged me to look after you and to advise you."

And to show me that she did not intend her office to be a sinecure she began at once to put me on my guard against the dangers Rome had for young men of my age, and exhorted me earnestly to avoid them. I must shun bad company, artists especially, and only associate with people that she chose for me. In fact, I received a lengthy sermon. I replied respectfully, and with conventional hypocrisy.

"I regret that my son the Marquis should be away on our property at Romagna," she said, as I rose to go, "but I will introduce you to my second son, Don Ottavio, who will soon become a Monsignor. I hope you will like him, and that you will make friends with each other as you ought to...."

She broke off precipitately—

"For you are nearly the same age, and he is a nice steady boy like yourself."

She sent immediately for Don Ottavio, and I was presented to a tall, pale young man, whose downcast, melancholy eyes seemed already conscious of his hypocrisy.

Without giving him time to speak, the Marquise offered me in his name the most ready services. He assented by bowing low at all his mother's suggestions, and it was arranged that he should take me to see the sights of the town on the following day and bring me back to dinner *en famille* at the Aldobrandi palace.

I had hardly gone twenty steps down the road when an imperious voice exclaimed behind me—

"Where are you going alone at this hour, Don Ottavio?"

I turned round and saw a fat priest, who looked me up and down from head to foot with his eyes wide open.

"I am not Don Ottavio," I said.

The priest bowed down to the ground, profuse in apologies, and a moment after I saw him go into the Aldobrandi palace. I continued on my way, not much flattered at being taken for a budding Monsignor.

In spite of the Marquise's warnings, perhaps even because of them, my next most pressing concern was to find out the lodging of a painter I knew, and I spent an hour with him at his studio talking over the legitimate or dubious ways of enjoying oneself that Rome could provide. I led him to the subject of the Aldobrandi.

The Marquise, he said, after being excessively frivolous became highly devotional when she recognised that she was too old for further conquests. Her eldest son was a fool, who spent his time hunting and receiving the rents of the farms on his vast estates. They were going the right way to make an idiot of the second son, Don Ottavio; he was to be a cardinal some day. Until then he was given up to the Jesuits. He never went out alone; he was forbidden to look at a woman, or to take a single step without a priest at his heels, who had educated him for God's service, and who, after having been the Marquise's last *amico*, now ruled her house with almost despotic authority.

The next day Don Ottavio, followed by the Abbé Negroni, he who had taken me for his pupil the

previous evening, came to take me out in a carriage and to offer his services as cicerone.

The first public building we stopped at was a church. Following his priest's example, Don Ottavio knelt down, beat his breast, and made endless signs of the cross. After he had got up he showed me the frescoes and statues, and talked like a man of sense and taste. This was an agreeable surprise to me; we began to talk, and his conversation pleased me. For some time we conversed in Italian, but suddenly he said to me in French—

"My director does not understand a word of your language; let us talk French, and we shall feel freer."

It might be said that change of idiom transformed the young man. There was nothing that smacked of the priest in his talk. I could have imagined him one of our own liberal-minded men. I noticed that he said everything in an even, monotonous tone of voice, which often contrasted strangely with the vivacity of his sentiments. It was, apparently, a ruse to put Negroni off the scent, who from time to time asked us to explain what we were talking about. I need hardly say that our translation was extremely free.

A young man in violet stockings passed us.

"That is one of our modern patricians," said Don Ottavio. "Wretched livery! and it will be mine in a few months! What happiness," he added after a moment's silence—"what happiness to live in a country like yours! If I were French I might perhaps one day have become a deputy."

This high ambition made me feel strongly inclined to laugh, and as the Abbé noticed it, I had to explain that we were talking of the error of an archaeologist who mistook a statue by Bernini for an antique.

We dined at the Aldobrandi palace. Directly after the coffee the Marquise asked me to excuse her son, who was obliged to retire to his room to fulfil certain pious duties. I remained alone with her, and the Abbé Negroni leant back in his chair and slept the sleep of the just.

In the meantime the Marquise interrogated me minutely about my father, about Paris, as to my past life, and on my future plans. She seemed to me a good and amiable woman, but rather too inquisitive and over-much concerned about my salvation. But she spoke Italian perfectly, and I took a lesson in pronunciation from her which I promised myself I would repeat.

I often came to see her. Nearly every morning I visited the antiquities with her son and the ever-present Negroni, and in the evenings I dined with them at the Aldobrandi palace. The Marquise entertained very rarely, and then nearly always ecclesiastics.

Once, however, she introduced me to a German lady, who was a recent convert and her intimate friend. She was a certain Madam de Strahlenheim, a very handsome woman who had lived a long while in Rome. Whilst these ladies talked together about a celebrated preacher, I studied, by the lamp-light, the portrait of Lucrezia, until I felt it my duty to put in a word.

"What eyes!" I exclaimed; "her eyelids almost seem to move!"

At this somewhat pretentious figure of speech which I ventured on to show myself to Madam Strahlenheim in the light of a connoisseur, she trembled with fear and hid her face in her handkerchief.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said the Marquise.

"Oh! nothing but what Monsieur said just now!..."

We pressed her with questions, and when she said that my phrase had recalled a horrible story we compelled her to relate it.

Here it is in a few words:—

Madam de Strahlenheim had a sister-in-law called Wilhelmina, who was betrothed to a young man from Westphalia, Julius de Katzenellenbogen, a volunteer in General Kleist's division. I am very sorry to have to repeat so many barbarous names, but extraordinary episodes never happen except to people with names which are difficult to pronounce.

Julius was a charming fellow, full of patriotic feeling and love of metaphysics. He gave his portrait to Wilhelmina when he entered the army and she gave him hers, which he wore next his heart. They do this sort of thing in Germany.

On the 13th of September, 1813, Wilhelmina was at Cassel. She was sitting in a room, about five o'clock in the afternoon, busy knitting with her mother and sister-in-law. While she worked she looked at her *fiancé's* portrait, which was standing on a little table opposite to her. Suddenly she uttered a terrible cry, put her hand on her heart and fainted. They had the greatest difficulty in the world to bring her back to consciousness, and, as soon as she could speak, she said—

"Julius is dead! He has been killed!"

She insisted that she had seen the portrait shut its eyes, and at the same instant that she had felt a terrible pain as though a red-hot iron had pierced her heart: her horror-struck countenance gave credence to her words.

Everybody tried to show her that her vision was unreal and that she ought to pay no attention to

it. It was of no use. The poor child was inconsolable; she spent the night in tears and wanted to go into mourning the next day, as though quite convinced of the affliction which had been revealed to her. Two days after news came of the bloody battle of Leipzig. Julius wrote to his *fiancée* a letter dated at three o'clock p.m. on the 13th. He had not been wounded, but had distinguished himself, and was just going into Leipzig, where he expected to pass the night in the general's quarters, which were, of course, out of the range of danger. This reassuring letter did not calm Wilhelmina, who noticed that it had been written at three o'clock, and persisted in believing that her beloved had died at five o'clock.

The unhappy girl was not mistaken. It was known that Julius had been sent out of Leipzig with a despatch at half-past four, and that three-quarters of a league from the town, beyond the Elster, a straggler from the enemy's army, concealed in a trench, had fired and killed him. The bullet pierced his heart and broke the portrait of Wilhelmina.

"And what became of the poor girl?" I asked Madam de Strahlenheim.

"Oh! she has been very ill. She is married now to a gentleman who is a barrister in Werner, and, if you went to Dessau, she would show you Julius's portrait."

"All that was done by the interposition of the devil," the Abbé broke in, for he had only been half asleep during Madam de Strahlenheim's story. "He who could make the heathen oracles speak could easily make the eyes of a portrait move if he thought fit. Not twenty years ago an Englishman was strangled by a statue at Tivoli."

"By a statue!" I exclaimed. "How did that come about?"

"He was a wealthy man who had been making excavations at Tivoli, and had discovered a statue of the Empress Agrippina Messalina ... it matters little which. Whoever it was he had it taken to his house, and by dint of gazing at it and admiring it he became crazy. All Protestants are more than half mad. He called it his wife, his lady, and kissed it, marble as it was. He said that the statue came to life every evening for his benefit. So true was this that one morning they found milord stone dead in his bed. Well, would you believe it?—there was another Englishman quite ready to purchase the statue. Now I would have had it made into lime."

When once stories of the supernatural are let loose there is no stopping them. Everybody contributed his share, and I too took part in this collection of fearful tales; to such purpose that when we broke up we were all pretty well scared and full of respect for the devil's power.

I walked back to my lodgings, and, to get into the Corso, I took a little winding lane, down which I had not yet been. It was quite deserted. I could see nothing but long garden walls, or some mean-looking houses, none of which were lighted up. It had just struck midnight, and the weather was threateningly dark. I was in the middle of the street, walking very quickly, when I heard a slight noise above my head, a st! and just at the same time a rose fell at my feet. I raised my eyes and, in spite of the darkness, I saw a woman clothed in white, at a window, with one arm stretched out towards me. Now we French show to great advantage in a strange land, for our forefathers, the conquerors of Europe, have cradled us in the traditions flattering to national pride. I believed religiously in the susceptibility of all German, Spanish, and Italian ladies at the mere look of a Frenchman. In short, at that period I was still very much of a Frenchman, and, besides, did not the rose tell its own tale plainly enough?

"Madam," I said in a low voice, as I picked up the rose, "you have dropped your nosegay...."

But the lady had already vanished, and the window had been closed noiselessly. I did what every other man would have done in my position: I looked for the nearest door, which was two steps from the window; I found it, and I waited to have it opened for me. Five minutes passed in a profound silence; then I coughed, then I scratched softly, but the door did not open. I examined it more carefully, hoping to find a lock or latch; to my great surprise I found it padlocked.

"The jealous lover has not gone in yet, then," I said to myself.

I picked up a small stone and threw it against the window; it hit a wooden outside shutter and fell at my feet.

"The devil!" I thought; "Roman ladies must be accustomed to lovers who carry ladders in their pockets; no one told me of the custom."

I waited a few more moments, but fruitlessly. I thought once or twice I saw the shutter shake lightly from the inside, as though someone wanted to draw it aside to look into the street, but that was all. My patience was exhausted at the end of a quarter of an hour. I lit a cigar and went on my way, but not until I had carefully taken stock of the position occupied by the padlocked house.

The next day, in thinking over this adventure, I arrived at the following conclusions: A young Roman lady, probably a great beauty, had noticed me in my expeditions about the town, and had been attracted by my feeble charms. If she had declared her passion only by the gift of a mysterious flower, it was because she was restrained by a becoming sense of modesty, or perhaps she had been disturbed in her plans by the presence of some duenna, maybe some cursed guardian like Bartolo de Rosina. I decided to lay siege to the house which was inhabited by this infanta.

With this fine idea in my head I left my rooms when I had first given my hair a finishing touch and had put on my new coat and yellow gloves. In this get-up, with my hat tilted over my ear and the faded rose in my button-hole, I turned my steps toward the street whose name I did not yet know, but which I had no difficulty in discovering. A notice stuck on a Madonna told me it was called "Il viccola di Madama Lucrezia."

I was struck by this name at once, and recollected Leonardo da Vinci's portrait, together with the stories of presentiments and witchcraft that I had heard the evening before at the Marquise's. Then I remembered that some matches are made in heaven. Why should not my love be named Lucrezia? Why should she not be like the Lucrezia of the Aldobrandi collection?

It was dawn. I was within two steps of a ravishing young lady, and no sinister thoughts mingled with the emotion I felt.

I came to the house. It was No. 13. What an unlucky omen!... Alas! it hardly answered to the idea of it that I had conceived by night. It was certainly no palace, whatever else it might be. The walls surrounding it were blackened with age and covered with lichen, and behind these were some fruit trees badly eaten by caterpillars. In one corner of the inclosure was a pavilion one story high, with two windows looking on to the street; both were closed by old shutters furnished outside with a number of iron bars. The door was low, and over it was an old coat of arms almost worn away; it was shut, as on the previous night, by a large padlock which was attached to a chain. Over the door was a notice written in chalk, which read, "House to Let or to be Sold."

However, I had not made a mistake. The houses were too few for confusion to be possible. It was indeed my padlock, and, furthermore, two rose leaves on the pavement, near the door, indicated the exact spot where I had received the evidences of love from my well-beloved, and they also proved that the pavement in front of the house was rarely swept.

I asked several poor people in the neighbourhood if they could tell me where the keeper of this mysterious house lived.

"Not anywhere here," they replied curtly.

My question seemed to displease those to whom I put it; and this piqued my curiosity still further. Going from door to door I finished by going into a kind of dark cave, where was an old woman, who might have been suspected of witchcraft, for she had a black cat, and was cooking some mysterious decoction in a cauldron.

"You want to see over the house of Madam Lucrezia?" she said. "I have the key of it."

"All right. Show me over."

"Do you wish to take it?" she asked, smiling with a dubious air.

"Yes, if it suits me."

"It will not suit you; but, see, will you give me a *paul* if I show it you?"

"Most willingly."

Upon this assurance she rose slowly from her stool, unhooked a very rusty key from the wall, and led me to No. 13.

"Why," I said, "do they call this the house of Lucrezia?"

"Why are you called a foreigner?" retorted the old woman, chuckling. "Is it not because you *are* a foreigner?"

"Certainly. But who was this Madam Lucrezia? Was she a Roman lady?"

"What! you come to Rome without knowing Madam Lucrezia? I will tell you her history when we are inside. But here is another devilish trick! I do not know what has come to this key—it will not turn. You try it."

Indeed, the padlock and the key had not seen each other for a long time. Nevertheless, by means of three or four oaths and much grinding of my teeth, I succeeded in turning the lock; but I tore my yellow gloves and strained the palm of my hand. We entered upon a dark passage, which led to several low rooms.

The curiously decorated ceilings were covered with cobwebs, under which traces of gilding could dimly be seen. By the damp smell which pervaded every room it was evident they had not been occupied for a long time. There was not a single stick of furniture in them, only some strips of old leather hung down the saltpetred walls. From the carving of some consoles and the shape of the chimney-pieces I concluded that the house dated from the fifteenth century, and it is probable that at one time it had been tastefully decorated. The windows had little square panes of glass, most of which were broken; they looked into the garden, where I noticed a rose tree in flower, some fruit trees, and a quantity of broccoli.

When I had wandered through all the rooms on the ground floor, I went upstairs to the story from where I had seen my mysterious being. The old woman tried to keep me back by telling me there was nothing to see and that the staircase was in a very bad state. Seeing I was headstrong, she followed me, but with marked aversion. The rooms on this floor were very much like the others,

only they were not so damp, and the floors and windows also were in a better state. In the last room that I entered I saw a large armchair covered with black leather, which, strangely enough, was not covered with dust. I sat down in it, and finding it comfortable enough in which to hear a story, I asked the old woman to tell me the history of Madam Lucrezia; but, in order to refresh her memory, I first gave her a present of several *pauls*. She cleared her throat, blew her nose, and began the following story:—

"In heathen times, when Alexander was Emperor, he had a daughter, who was as beautiful as the day. She was called Madam Lucrezia. Stop—there she is!..."

I turned round quickly. The old woman was pointing to a carved console which upheld the chief beam of the room. It was a very roughly carved siren.

"Goodness!" went on the old woman, "how she loved to enjoy herself! And, as her father found fault with her, she had this house built.

"Every night she left the Quirinal and came here to amuse herself. She stood at that window, and when a fine cavalier, such as yourself, Monsieur, passed by in the street, she called to him, and I leave you to guess if he was well received. But most men are chattering magpies, and they could have done her great harm by their babbling, so she took care to guard herself. When she had made her adieu to her lover, her armed attendants filled the staircase by which we came up. They despatched you, and then buried you among the cabbages! Yes, many of their bones are found in the garden!

"This establishment went on for a long time, but one evening her brother, Sisto Tarquino, passed under the window. She did not recognise him, and she called to him. He came up. In the dark all cats look grey, and he was treated like all the others. But he had left his handkerchief behind, and his name was upon it.

"Despair seized her as soon as she saw the mischief she had done. She immediately unwound her garter and hung herself from that beam up there. What an example for young people!"

While the old woman was thus confusing the ages, mixing up the Tarquins with the Borgias, I had my eyes fixed on the flooring. I had discovered several rose petals still quite fresh, which gave me plenty to think of.

"Who attends to this garden?" I asked the old woman.

"My son, Monsieur, gardener to M. Vanozzi, who has the next garden. M. Vanozzi is always away in the Maremma; and he hardly ever comes to Rome. That is why the garden is not very nicely kept. My son goes with him, and I am afraid they will not come back for a very long time," she added, with a sigh.

"He is busily employed, then, with M. Vanozzi."

"Oh, he is a queer man—busy over too many things. I am afraid he spends his time in a bad way.... Ah, my poor boy!"

She took a step towards the door as though she wanted to change the conversation.

"No one lives here, then?" I resumed, stopping her.

"Not a single creature."

"And why is that?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Listen to me," I said, as I gave her a piastre. "Tell me the truth. A woman comes here."

"A woman? Good Lord!"

"Yes; I saw her yesterday evening and I spoke to her."

"Holy Mother!" cried the old dame, and she rushed to the staircase; "it must be Madam Lucrezia! Let us go! let us go, Monsieur! They certainly told me she walked here by night, but I did not wish to tell it you for fear of injuring the landlord, because I thought you wished to rent it."

It was out of the question to keep her there; she hurried out of the house, anxious, she said, "to light a candle in the nearest church."

I went out too, and let her go, hopeless of learning anything more from her.

You will readily guess that I did not relate my adventures at the Aldobrandi palace; the Marquise was too prudish, and Don Ottavio too much taken up with politics to be a useful adviser in a love affair. But I went to my artist friend, who knew Rome from end to end, and asked him what he thought of it.

"I think you have seen the ghost of Lucrezia Borgia," he said. "What a danger you have run into! She was dangerous enough when she was alive; imagine how much more she must be now she is dead! It makes me shudder to think of it."

"You are surely half joking?"

"So Monsieur is an atheist and a philosopher and does not believe in the most orthodox explanations. Very well, then. What do you say to another hypothesis? Suppose the old woman lets the house to women who are equal to accosting men who pass by in the street; there are old women sufficiently depraved to drive such a trade."

"Wonderful," I said. "Then I must look like a saint, for the old dame never suggested any such offers. You insult me. Besides, my friend, remember the furnishing of the house: a man must be possessed by the devil to be satisfied with it."

"Then it is a ghost, there can be no doubt about it. But wait a bit, I have still another idea. You have mistaken the house—ah! that is it; near a garden? With a little low door to it.... Why, that is my dear friend Rosina's! Eighteen months ago she was the ornament of that street. It is true she has become blind in one eye, but that is a trifle.... She still has a very lovely profile."

None of these explanations satisfied me. When evening came I walked slowly past the house of Lucrezia, but I did not see anything. I went up and down past it with no further result. Three or four evenings followed, and I danced attendance under her windows as I went home from the Aldobrandi palace, with ever the same want of success. I had begun to forget the mysterious occupant of No. 13, when, passing towards midnight through the lane, I distinctly heard a woman's light laugh behind the shutter of the window at which the giver of the flowers had appeared to me. Twice I heard that little laugh, and I could not prevent feeling slightly afraid, when just at that moment I saw come out at the other end of the street a group of penitents, closely hooded, with tapers in hand, bearing a corpse to burial. When they had gone by I took up my stand once more under the window; but this time I did not hear anything. I tried to throw pebbles; and I even called out more or less loudly; but still no one appeared; and, a heavy shower coming on, I was obliged to beat a retreat.

I am ashamed to tell how many times I stood before that accursed house without succeeding in solving the riddle that tormented me. Once only did I pass along the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia with Don Ottavio and his ubiquitous Abbé.

"That is the house of Lucrezia," I said.

I saw him change colour.

"Yes," he replied; "a very dubious popular tradition asserts that Lucrezia Borgia's little house was here. If those walls could speak, what horrors they could reveal to us! Nevertheless, my friend, when I compare those times with our own I am seized with regrets. Under Alexander VI. there were still Romans. Now there are none. Cæsar Borgia was a monster; but he was a great man. He tried to turn the barbarians out of Italy; and perhaps, if his father had lived, he might have accomplished his great design. Oh! if only Heaven would send us a tyrant like Borgia to deliver us from these human despots who are degrading us!"

When Don Ottavio threw himself into the realms of politics, it was impossible to stop him. We were at the Piazza del Popolo before his panegyric in favour of enlightened despotism was concluded; but we were a thousand miles from the subject of my Lucrezia.

One night, when I was very late in paying my respects to the Marquise, she told me her son was unwell, and begged me to go up to his room. I found him lying on his bed, still dressed, reading a French journal which I had sent him that morning concealed between the leaves of a volume of the Fathers. An edition of the Holy Fathers had for some time served us for those communications which he had to conceal from the Abbé and the Marquise. On the day when the *Courier de France* appeared I received a folio Father. I returned another, in which I slipped a newspaper, lent me by the Ambassador's secretary. This gave the Marquise an exalted notion of my piety; and also his director, who often wanted to make me discuss theology with him.

When I had talked for some time with Don Ottavio, and had noticed that he seemed so much upset that not even politics could attract his attention, I recommended him to undress, and I bid him adieu. It was cold, and I had no coat with me; Don Ottavio pressed me to take his, and in accepting it I received a lesson in the difficult art of wearing a cloak in the proper Roman fashion.

I left the Aldobrandi palace muffled up to the eyes. I had gone but few steps on the pavement of the Square of Saint-Mark when a peasant, whom I had noticed seated on a bench by the gate of the palace, came up to me and held out a crumpled bit of paper.

"Read it, for the love of God!" he said, and quickly disappeared, running at top speed.

I took the paper, and looked round for a light by which to read it. By the light of a lamp which was burning before a Madonna I saw it was a pencilled note, and written apparently in a trembling hand. I had much difficulty in making out the following words:—

"Do not come to-night, or we are lost! All is known except your name. Nothing can sever us.—Your LUCREZIA."

"Lucrezia!" I cried, "Lucrezia again! What devilish mystification underlies all this? 'Do not come.' But, my good lady, what road must I take to find you out?"

While I was cogitating over the contents of this note I mechanically took the road to the Yiccolo di Madama Lucrezia, and soon found myself in front of No. 13.

The street was deserted as usual, and only the sound of my footsteps disturbed the profound silence which reigned all round. I stopped and looked up at the well-known window. This time I was not mistaken: the shutter was pushed back and the window was wide open.

I thought I saw a human shape standing out from the dark background of the room.

"Lucrezia, is it you?" I said in a low voice.

No one answered, but I heard a clicking-noise, the cause of which I could not at first understand.

"Lucrezia, are you there?" I repeated rather louder.

At the same instant I received a sharp blow in the chest, followed by the sound of a report, and down I went on the pavement.

"Take that from the Signora Lucrezia!" cried out a hoarse voice, and the shutter was noiselessly closed.

I soon staggered to my feet, and the first thing I did was to feel myself all over, as I expected to find a big hole in my body. The cloak and my coat were both pierced, but the ball had been blunted by the folds of the cloth, and I had escaped with nothing worse than a nasty bruise.

The idea that a second shot might not be long in coming made me drag myself close up to the side of this inhospitable house, and I squeezed close to the walls, so that I could not be seen.

I took myself off as quickly as I could, still panting, when a man whom I had not noticed behind me took my arm and asked me anxiously if I were hurt.

By the voice I recognised Don Ottavio. It was not the moment to question him, however surprised I was to see him alone and in the street at that time of night. I told him briefly that I had just been fired at from a window, but that I was only grazed.

"It is a mistake!" he cried. "But I hear people coming. Can you walk? If we are seen together I shall be lost; but I will not abandon you."

He took my arm and led me along at a rapid pace. We walked, or rather ran, as fast as I could manage; but I was soon obliged to sit down on a stump to get my breath.

Happily we were by that time not far from a large house where a ball was being given; there were numbers of carriages in front of the door, and Don Ottavio went to find one, then he put me inside and conducted me to my hotel. After a good drink of water I felt quite restored and related to him minutely all that had happened in front of that fatal house, from the gift of the rose to that of the bullet.

He listened with his head bent down, half hidden behind one of his hands. When I showed him the note that I had received, he seized it and read it eagerly.

"It is a mistake! A wretched mistake!" he exclaimed again.

"You will admit, my dear fellow," I said to him, "that it is extremely disagreeable for both of us. I might have been killed, and there are about a dozen holes in your fine cloak. Good gracious! how jealous your fellow-countrymen are!"

Don Ottavio shook hands with me, looking the picture of woe, and re-read the note without answering.

"Do try," I said, "to offer me some explanation of this affair. Devil take it if I can make anything of it!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"At least tell me what I ought to do," I said; "to whom I should address my grievances in this pious town of yours, in order to see justice done to this gentleman who peppers passers-by without even asking them their names. I confess I should love to see him hanged."

"Be very careful," he cried. "You do not know this country. Do not say a word to anyone of what has happened, or you will expose yourself too much."

"What shall I expose myself to? Damn it! I mean to have my revenge. If I had offended the scoundrel there might be some excuse; but, because I picked up a rose.... In all conscience, surely I did not deserve to be shot."

"Let me act in the matter," said Don Ottavio; "perhaps I shall succeed in clearing up the mystery. But I ask you as a special favour, as a signal proof of your friendship for me, not to mention this to a single soul. Will you promise me?"

He looked so sad as he entreated that I had not the heart to resist him, and I promised him all he asked. He thanked me effusively, and, when he had himself applied a compress of eau de Cologne to my chest, he shook hands and bid me adieu.

"By the way," I asked him, as I opened the door to let him go out, "tell me how it happened that you were there just in the nick of time to help me."

"I heard the gunshot," he replied in an embarrassed tone, "and I came out at once, fearing some

mischance had happened to you."

He left me hastily, after he had again sworn me to secrecy.

In the morning a surgeon came to see me, sent no doubt by Don Ottavio. He prescribed a poultice, but asked no questions about the cause that had added violet marks to my white skin. People are very discreet in Rome, and I desired to conform to the customs of the country.

Several days passed by without my being able to talk freely with Don Ottavio. He was preoccupied and even more gloomy than usual; besides, he seemed to try to avoid my questionings. During the rare moments that I was alone with him he did not say a word about the strange inhabitants of the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia. The day fixed for the ceremony of his ordination drew near, and I attributed his melancholy to his repugnance to the profession he was being forced to adopt.

I prepared to leave Rome for Florence. When I announced my departure to the Marquise Aldobrandi, Don Ottavio made some excuse to take me up to his room. When we reached it he took both my hands in his—

"My dear friend," he said, "if you will not grant me the favour I am going to ask you I shall certainly blow out my brains, for I see no other way out of my difficulties. I have quite made up my mind never to wear the wretched dress they want me to adopt. I want to escape out of this country. I ask you to take me with you, and to let me pass as your servant; it will only need one word added to your passport to facilitate my flight."

At first I tried to turn him from his design by speaking of the grief it would cause his mother; but, finding his resolution was firmly fixed, I ended by promising to take him with me, and to have my passport altered accordingly.

"That is not all," he said. "My departure still depends on the success of an enterprise on which I am engaged. You must set out the day after to-morrow; by then I may have succeeded, and then I shall be completely at your service."

"Are you so foolish," I asked uneasily, "as to get yourself entangled in some conspiracy?"

"No," he replied; "the matter is not quite of such grave importance as the fate of my country, but grave enough for my life and happiness to depend on the success of my undertaking. I cannot tell you any more now. In a couple of days you shall know everything."

I had begun to get used to mysteries, so I resigned myself to yet another. It was arranged that we should start at three o'clock in the morning, and that we should not break our journey until we reached Tuscan territory.

As I knew it would be useless to go to bed with such an early start in prospect, I employed the last evening of my stay in Rome in paying calls at all the houses where I had received hospitality. I went to take leave of the Marquise, and for form's sake I shook hands ceremoniously with her son. I felt his hand tremble in mine.

"At this moment my life is a game of pitch and toss," he whispered. "You will find a letter at your hotel from me. If I am not with you punctually at three o'clock, do not wait for me."

I was struck by the alteration in his features, but I attributed it to a very natural emotion on his part at leaving his family possibly for ever.

It was nearly one o'clock when I regained my lodgings. I felt a desire to walk along the Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia once more. Something white hung from the window which had been the scene of two such different visions. I approached it cautiously, and saw that it was a knotted rope. Was it an invitation to bid farewell to the Signora? It looked like it, and the temptation was strong. I did not yield to it, however, but recollected my promise to Don Ottavio; and also, it must be confessed, the disagreeable reception I had brought on myself some days ago by an act that was nothing like as bold.

I continued on my way slowly, for I was sorry to lose the last opportunity of penetrating the mysteries of No. 13. I turned my head at each step that I took, expecting every time to see some human being climb up or descend the cord. Nothing appeared, and at length I got to the far end of the lane, which led into the Corso.

"Farewell, Madam Lucrezia," I said, and I took off my hat to the house which I could still see. "Find out someone else, I beg you, to help you to avenge yourself on the jealous lover who keeps you imprisoned there."

It was striking two o'clock when I entered my hotel. A carriage loaded with luggage stood waiting in the yard. One of the hotel waiters gave me a letter; it was from Don Ottavio, and, as it looked a long one, I thought I had better take it up to my room to read, so I asked the waiter to light me upstairs.

"Monsieur," he said, "your servant, whom you told us was going to travel with you...."

"Well? Has he come?"

"No, Monsieur...."

"He is at the inn, and will come with the horses."

"Monsieur, a lady came a little while ago and asked to speak to your servant. She absolutely insisted on going up to your room, Monsieur, and told me to tell your servant as soon as he came that Madam Lucrezia was in your room."

"In my room!" I cried, clutching hold of the bannister rail.

"Yes, Monsieur; and it looks as though she were going too, for she gave me a small box to put in the boot."

My heart beat loudly, and superstitious terror and curiosity possessed me in turn. I went up the stairs step by step. When I reached the first landing (my rooms were on the second floor), the waiter, who was in front of me, tripped, and the candle which he held in his hand was extinguished. He begged pardon profoundly, and went downstairs to relight it. I still climbed on.

I had my hand on the key of my room, but I hesitated. What fresh vision should I see? More than once, in the darkness, the story of the bleeding nun had returned to me. Was I possessed by a demon, even as was Don Alonso? The waiter seemed a terribly long time in coming.

I opened the door. Heaven have mercy on us! there was a light in my bedroom. I rapidly crossed the little sitting-room which came first, and a single glance sufficed to show me no one was in my bedroom; but immediately I heard light steps behind me, and the rustle of skirts. I believe my hair stood on end as I turned round suddenly.

A woman, dressed in white, her head covered with a black mantilla, rushed to me with outstretched arms.

"Here you are at last, my beloved!" she cried, as she seized my hands.

Hers were as cold as ice, and her features were as pale as death. I started back against the wall.

"Holy Mother! It is not he!... Oh, Monsieur, are you Don Ottavio's friend?"

At that name all was made clear. In spite of her pallor the young lady did not look like a ghost; she lowered her eyes, a thing ghosts never do, and held her hands clasped in a modest attitude before her girdle, which made me think that my friend Don Ottavio was not so much of a politician as I had imagined. In short, it was high time to take Lucrezia away; and, unfortunately, the role of confidant was the only one deputed to me in this adventure.

A moment after Don Ottavio arrived, disguised. The horses came too; and we set off. Lucrezia had no passport; but a woman, especially a pretty one, raises no suspicions. One gendarme, however, raised difficulties. I told him he was a hero, and had assuredly served under the great Napoleon. He acknowledged the fact, and I offered him a portrait of that great man on a golden coin, telling him that it was my habit to travel with a lady friend to keep me company; and that, as I very frequently changed them, I did not think it any use to put their names on my passport.

"This one," I added, "leaves me at the next town. I am told that I shall find many others there who could take her place."

"You would do wrong to change her," said the gendarme, as he respectfully shut the carriage door.

To tell you the truth, Madam, this rascal of a Don Ottavio had entered upon terms of friendship with a lovely young lady. She was the sister of a certain wealthy planter named Vanozzi, who earned a bad name for himself for being very stingy, and carrying on illicit trade. Don Ottavio knew very well that, even if his family had not intended him for the Church, they would never have consented to let him marry a girl so much lower in social position than himself.

Love is ingenious. The Abbé Negroni's pupil succeeded in holding a secret correspondence with his beloved. Every night he escaped from the Aldobrandi palace, and, as he had not dared to scale the walls of Vanozzi's house, the two lovers arranged to meet in Madam Lucrezia's house, which was protected by its ill-repute. A little door hidden by a fig tree communicated between the two gardens. They were young and in love, and Lucrezia and Ottavio did not complain of the paucity of furnishing, which consisted, as I think I have already pointed out, of an old leather-covered armchair.

One night, when waiting for Don Ottavio, Lucrezia mistook me for him, and made me the present which I received in his place. There was certainly some resemblance between Don Ottavio's figure and appearance and my own, and some scandal-mongers, who knew my father in Rome, maintained that there were reasons for this likeness. In course of time the accursed brother discovered their meetings; but his threats did not make Lucrezia reveal her seducer's name. We know how he took vengeance and how I was to pay their debt. It is needless to tell you how the two lovers took steps respectfully to set themselves free.

To conclude. We all three arrived at Florence. Don Ottavio married Lucrezia, and they left immediately for Paris. My father gave him as warm a welcome as I had received at the hands of the Marquise. He took upon him to bring about a reconciliation, and after a good deal of trouble he succeeded. The Marquis Aldobrandi was opportunely taken with Roman fever and died; so Ottavio inherited his title and fortune, and I became god-father to his firstborn.

27th April, 1846.

DJOUMANE

On the 21st of May, 18—, we returned to Tlemcen. The expedition had been a fortunate one: we brought back oxen, sheep, goats, prisoners and hostages.

After a thirty-seven days' campaign, or rather of incessant hunt, our horses were thin and lean-ribbed, but their eyes were still lively and full of fire; not one was saddle-galled. We men were bronzed by the sun, our hair was long, our cross-belts were dirty, and our waistcoats were worn to threads; we all presented that appearance of indifference to danger and hardship which characterises the true soldier.

What general would not have chosen our light cavalry for a battle-charge rather than the smartest of squadrons all decked out in new clothes.

Since morning I had thought of all the little pleasures that awaited me.

Now I should sleep in my iron bedstead, after having slept for thirty-seven nights on a square of oilcloth. I should sit on a chair to take my dinner, and should have as much soft bread and salt as I liked. Next I wondered to myself whether Mademoiselle Coucha would wear a pomegranate flower or jessamine in her hair, and if she had kept the vows made when I left; but, faithful or inconstant, I knew she could reckon on the great depth of tenderness that a man brings home from the wilds. There was not anyone in our squadron who had not made plans for the evening.

The colonel received us in a most fatherly manner, and even told us he was satisfied with us; then he took our commanding officer aside and for five minutes, and in low tones, communicated to him some not very agreeable intelligence, so far as we could judge from their expressions.

We noticed the movements of the colonel's moustaches, which rose up to his eyebrows, whilst those of the commandant fell, piteously out of curl, almost on to his breast. A young trooper, whom I pretended not to hear, maintained that the commandant's nose stretched as far as one could see; but very soon ours lengthened too, for the commandant came to tell us to "Go and feed your horses, and be ready to set off at sunset! The officers will dine with the colonel at five o'clock, in the open; the horses must be mounted after the coffee.... Is it possible that you are not pleased at this, gentlemen?..."

It did not suit us, and we saluted in silence, inwardly sending him to all the devils we could think of, and the colonel into the bargain.

We had very little time in which to make our small preparations. I hurried to change my dress, and, when I had done this, I was wise enough not to sit in my easy-chair, for fear I should fall asleep.

At five o'clock I went to the colonel's. He lived in a large Moorish house. I found the open court filled with French and natives, all crowding round a band of pilgrims or mountebanks who had come from the South.

An old man conducted the performance; he was as ugly as a monkey and half naked, under his burnous, which was full of holes. His skin was the colour of chocolate made of water; he was tattooed all over with scars; his hair was frizzy and so matted that from a distance one might have thought he had a bearskin cap on his head; and his beard was white and bristly.

He was reputed to be a great saint and a great wizard.

In front of him an orchestra, composed of two flutes and three tambourines, made an infernal din, worthy of the performance about to be played. He said that he had received complete sway over demons and wild beasts from a famous Mahomedan priest, and, after some compliments addressed to the colonel and the elite audience, he went off into a sort of prayer or incantation, accompanied by his orchestra, whilst the actors danced to his command, turned on one foot, and struck their breasts heavy blows with their fists.

Meanwhile the tambourines and flutes increased their din and played faster and faster.

When exhaustion and giddiness had made these people lose what few brains they had, the chief sorcerer drew several scorpions and serpents from some baskets round him, and, after showing that they were full of life, he threw them to his jesters, who fell upon them like dogs on a bone, and tore them to pieces with their teeth, if you please!

We looked down on this extraordinary spectacle from a high gallery; no doubt the colonel treated us to it to give us a good appetite for our dinner. As for myself, I turned my eyes away from these beasts, who disgusted me, and amused myself by staring at a pretty girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age, who had threaded through the crowd to get nearer to the performance.

She had the most beautiful eyes imaginable, and her hair fell on her shoulders in fine tresses; these ended in small pieces of silver, which made a tinkling sound as she moved her head gracefully about. She was dressed with more taste than most of the girls of that country; she had a kerchief of silk and gold on her head, a bodice of embroidered velvet, and short pantaloons of blue satin, showing her bare legs encircled with silver anklets. There was not a vestige of a veil over her face. Was she a Jewess or a heathen? or did she perhaps belong to those wandering

tribes of unknown origin who never trouble themselves with religious prejudice?

Whilst I followed her every movement with so much interest, she had arrived at the first row of the circle where the fanatics carried on their exercises.

While she was trying to get still nearer she knocked over a narrow-bottomed basket that had not been opened. Almost at the same time the sorcerer and the child both uttered a terrible cry, and there was a great commotion in the ring, everyone recoiling with horror.

A very big snake had escaped from the basket and the little girl had trodden on it. In an instant the reptile had curled itself round her leg and I saw several drops of blood ooze from under the ring that she wore round her ankle. She fell down backwards, crying, and grinding her teeth, while her lips were covered with a white foam, and she rolled in the dust.

"Run! run, doctor!" I cried out to our surgeon-major; "for the love of Heaven save the poor child."

"Greenhorn!" the major replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you not see that it is part of the programme? Moreover, my trade is to cut off your arms and legs. It is the business of my *confrère* down below there to cure girls who are bitten by snakes."

In the meantime the old wizard had run up, and his first care was to possess himself of the snake.

"Djoûmane! Djoûmane!" he said to it in a tone of friendly reproach. The serpent uncoiled itself, quitted its prey, and started to crawl away. The sorcerer nimbly seized it by the end of its tail, and, holding it at arm's length, he went round the circle exhibiting the reptile, which bit and hissed without being able to stand erect.

You know that a snake held by his tail does not know in the least what to do with himself. He can only raise himself a quarter of his length, and cannot therefore bite the hand of the person who seizes him.

The next minute the serpent was put back in his basket and the lid firmly tied down. The magician then turned his attention to the little girl, who shrieked and kicked about all the time. He put a pinch of white powder, which he drew from his girdle, on the wound, and whispered an incantation in the child's ear, with unexpected results. The convulsions ceased; the little girl wiped her mouth, picked up her silk handkerchief, shook the dust off it, put it on her head again, rose up, and soon after went away.

Shortly after she came up to our gallery to collect money, and we fastened on her forehead and shoulders many fifty-centime coins.

This ended the performance, and we sat down to dinner.

I was very hungry, and was preparing to do justice to a splendid Tartary eel, when our doctor, by whom I sat, said that he recognised the snake of the preceding moment. That made it quite impossible for me to touch a mouthful.

After first making great fun of my fastidiousness the doctor annexed my share of the eel, and declared that snake tasted delicious.

"Those brutes you saw just now," he said to me, "are connoisseurs. They live in taverns with their serpents as the Troglodytes do; their girls are pretty—witness the little girl in blue knickerbockers. No one knows what their religion is, but they are a cunning lot, and I should like to make the acquaintance of their sheik."

We learnt during dinner why we were to recommence the campaign. Sidi-Lala, hotly pursued by Colonel R——, was trying to reach the mountains of Morocco.

There was choice of two routes: one to the south of Tlemcen, fording the Moulaïa, at the only place not rendered inaccessible by rocks; the other by the plain, to the north of our cantonment, where we should find our colonel and the bulk of the regiment.

Our squadron was ordered to stop him at the river crossing if he attempted it, but this was scarcely likely.

You know that the Moulaïa flows between two walls of rock, and there is but a single point like a kind of very narrow breach, where horses can ford it. I knew the place well, and I did not understand why a blockhouse had not been raised there before. At all events, the colonel had every chance of encountering the enemy, and we of making a useless journey.

Before the conclusion of dinner several orderlies from Maghzen had brought despatches from Colonel R——. The enemy had made a stand, and seemed to want to fight. They had lost time. Colonel R——'s infantry had come up and routed them.

But where had they escaped to? We knew nothing at all, and must decide which of the two routes to take. I have not mentioned the last resource that could be taken, viz. to drive them into the desert, where his herds and camp would very soon die of hunger and thirst. Signals were agreed upon to warn us of the enemy's movements.

Three cannon-shots from Tlemcen would tell us that Sidi-Lala was visible in the plain, and we should carry rockets with us in case we had to let them know that we needed reinforcements. In all probability the enemy could not show itself before daybreak, and our two columns had several

hours' start. Night had fallen by the time we got to horse. I commanded the advance guard platoon. I felt tired and cold; I put on my cloak, turned up the collar, thrust my feet far into my stirrups, and rode quietly to my mare's long-striding walk, listening absently to quarter-master Wagner's stories about his love affairs, which unluckily ended by the flight of an infidel, who had run off with not only his heart, but a silver watch and a pair of new boots. I had heard this history before, and it appeared even longer than usual.

The moon rose as we started on our way. The sky was clear, but a light, white mist had come up since sundown, and skimmed the ground, which looked as though it were covered with down. On this white background, the moon threw long shadows, and everything took on a fantastic air. Very soon I thought I saw Arab mounted sentries. As I came nearer I found they were tamarisks in flower. Presently I stopped short, for I thought I heard the cannon-shot signal. Wagner told me it was the sound of a horse galloping.

We reached the fort and the commandant made his preparations.

The place was very easy to defend, and our squadron would have been sufficient to hold back a considerable force. Complete solitude reigned on the other side of the river.

After a pretty long wait, we heard the gallop of a horse, and soon an Arab came in sight mounted on a magnificent animal and riding towards us. By his straw hat crowned with ostrich plumes, and by his embroidered saddle from which hung a *gebira* ornamented with coral and chased with gold flowers, we recognised that he was a chief; our guide told us it was Sidi-Lala himself. He was a fine-looking and well-built young man, who managed his horse admirably. He put it at a gallop, threw his long gun up in the air and caught it again, shouting at us unintelligible terms of defiance.

The days of chivalry are over, and Wagner called for a gun to *take the marabout down a peg*, as he called it; but I objected, yet, so that it should not be said that the French refused to fight at close quarters with an Arab, I asked the commandant for leave to go through the ford and cross swords with Sidi-Lala. Permission was granted me, and I was soon over the river where the enemy's chief was trotting a little way off, and taking stock of things.

Directly he saw I was across he ran upon me and aimed with his gun.

"Take care!" cried Wagner.

I am rarely afraid of a horseman's shot, and, after the tricks he had just played with it, I thought that Sidi-Lala's gun could not be in a condition to fire. And in fact he pulled the trigger when he was only three paces from me, but the gun missed fire, as I had expected. Soon he turned his horse round so rapidly that instead of planting my sabre in his breast I only caught his floating burnous.

But I pressed him close, keeping him always on my right and beating him back, whether he was willing or not, towards the steep declivities which edged the river. He tried in vain to turn aside, but I pressed him closer and closer. After several moments of frantic effort, suddenly I saw his horse rear and the rider drew rein with both hands. Without stopping to ask myself why he made such a strange movement I was on him like a shot, and I pierced him with my blade, right in the centre of his back, my horse's hoof striking his left thigh at the same time. Man and horse disappeared, and my mare and I fell after them.

Without perceiving it we had reached the edge of a precipice and were hurled over it.... While I was yet in the air—so rapid is thought!—I remembered that the body of the Arab would break my fall. I could distinctly see under me a white burnous with a large red patch on it, and I should fall on it, head or tail.

It was not such a terrible leap as I feared, thanks to the water being high; I went in over head and ears and sputtered for an instant quite stunned, and I do not know quite how I found myself standing in the middle of the tall reeds at the river's edge.

I knew nothing of what had become of Sidi-Lala and the horses. I was dripping and shivering in the mud, between two walls of rock. I took a few steps forward, hoping to find a place where the declivity was less steep; but the further I advanced the more abrupt and inaccessible it looked.

Suddenly I heard above my head the sound of horses' hoofs and the jangling of sabres against stirrups and spurs; it was evidently our squadron. I wanted to cry out, but not a sound would come out of my throat; I must in my fall have broken in my ribs.

Imagine the situation I was in. I heard the voices of our men and recognised them, and I could not call them to my aid.

"If he had let me do that," old Wagner was saying, "he would have lived to be made colonel."

The sound soon lessened and died away, and I heard it no more.

Above my head hung a great branch, and I hoped by seizing this to hoist myself up above the banks of the river. With a desperate effort I sprang up, and ... crack!... the branch twisted and escaped from my hands with a frightful hissing.... It was an enormous snake....

I fell back into the water; the serpent glided between my legs and shot into the river, where it seemed to leave a trail of fire....

A moment later I had regained my sang-froid, and the fire-light had not disappeared: it still trembled on the water. I saw it was the reflection from a torch. A score of steps from me a woman was filling a pitcher at the river with one hand, and in the other she held a lighted piece of resined wood. She had no idea I was there; she placed the pitcher coolly upon her head and, torch in hand, disappeared among the rushes. I followed her and found I was at the entrance to a cave.

The woman advanced very quietly and mounted a very steep incline; it was a sort of staircase cut out of the face of an immense hall. By the torchlight I saw the threshold of this great hall, which did not quite reach the level of the river; but I could not judge of its full extent. Without quite knowing what I did, I entered the slope after the young woman who carried the torch, and followed her at a distance. Now and again her light disappeared behind some cavity of the rocks, but I soon found her again.

I thought I could make out, too, the gloomy opening's of great galleries leading into the principal room. It looked like a subterranean town with streets and squares. I stopped short, deeming it dangerous to venture alone into that vast labyrinth.

Suddenly one of the galleries below me was lit up brilliantly, and I saw a great number of torches, which appeared to come out of the sides of the rocks as though they formed a great procession. At the same time a monotonous chanting rose up, which recalled the singing of the Arabs as they recited their prayers. Soon I could distinguish a vast multitude advancing slowly. At their head stepped a black man, almost naked, his head covered with an enormous mass of stubbly hair. His white beard fell on his breast, and contrasted with the brown colour of his chest, which was gashed with bluish-tinted tattooing. I quickly recognised the sorcerer of the previous evening, and, soon after, saw the little girl near him who had played the part of Eurydice, with her fine eyes, and her silk pantaloons, and the embroidered handkerchief on her head.

Women and children and men of all ages followed them, all holding torches, all dressed in strange costumes of vivid colour, with trailing skirts and high caps, some made of metal, which reflected the light from the torches on all sides.

The old sorcerer stopped exactly below me, and the whole procession with him. The silence was profound. I was twenty feet above him, protected by great stones, from behind which I hoped to see everything without being perceived. At the feet of the old man I noticed a large slab of stone, almost round, with an iron ring in the centre.

He pronounced some words in a tongue unknown to me, which I felt sure was neither Arabic nor Kabylic. A rope and pulleys, hung from somewhere, fell at his feet; several of the assistants attached it to the ring, and at a given signal twenty stalwart arms all pulled at the stone simultaneously. It seemed of great weight, but they raised it and put it to one side.

I then saw what looked like the opening down a well, the water of which was at least a yard from the top. Water, did I say? I do not know what the frightful liquid was; it was covered over with an iridescent film, disturbed and broken in places, and showing a hideous black mud beneath.

The sorcerer stood in the midst of the gathered crowd, near the kerbstone which surrounded the well, his left hand on the little girl's head; with his right he made strange gestures, whilst uttering a kind of incantation.

From time to time he raised his voice as though he were calling someone. "Djoumâne! Djoumâne!" he cried; but no one came. None the less he went on making raucous cries which did not seem to come from a human throat, and rolled his eyes and ground his teeth. The mummeries of this old rascal incensed and filled me with indignation; I felt tempted to hurl a stone at his head that I had ready to hand. When he had yelled the name of Djoumâne for the thirtieth time or more, I saw the iridescent film over the well shake, and at this sign the whole crowd flung itself back; the old man and the little girl alone remained by the side of the hole.

Suddenly there was a great bubbling of the bluish mud from the well, and out of this mud came the head of an enormous snake, of livid grey colour, with phosphorescent eyes....

Involuntarily I leapt backwards. I heard a little cry and the sound of some heavy body falling into the water....

When perhaps a tenth of a second later I again looked below, I saw the sorcerer stood alone by the well-side; the water was still bubbling, and in the middle of what remained of the iridescent scum there floated the kerchief which had covered the little girl's hair....

Already the stone was being moved, and it glided into its place over the aperture of the horrible gulf. Then all the torches were simultaneously extinguished, and I remained in darkness in the midst of such a profound silence that I could distinctly hear my own heart beat....

When I had recovered a little from this ghastly scene I wanted to quit the cavern, vowing that if I succeeded in rejoining my comrades, I would return to exterminate the abominable denizens of those quarters, men and serpents.

But the pressing question was how to find my way out. I had come, I believed, a hundred feet into the cave, keeping the rock wall on my right.

I turned half round, but saw no light which might indicate the entrance to the cavern;

furthermore, it did not extend in a straight line, and, besides, I had climbed up all the time from the river's edge. I groped along the rock with my left hand, and sounded the ground with the sword which I held in my right, advancing slowly and cautiously. For a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes ... possibly for half an hour, I walked without being able to find the way I came in.

I was seized with apprehension. Had I entered unconsciously some side gallery instead of returning the way I had at first taken?...

I went on all the time groping along the rock, when in place of the cold stone I felt a curtain, which yielded to my touch and let out a ray of light. Redoubling my precaution, I drew the curtain noiselessly aside and found myself in a little passage which led to a well-lighted room. The door was open, and I saw that the room was hung with silk tapestry, embroidered with flowers and gold. I noticed a Turkey carpet and the end of a velvet-covered divan. On the carpet was a narghile of silver and several perfume-burners. In short, it was an apartment sumptuously furnished in Arabian taste.

I approached with stealthy tread till I reached the door; a young woman squatted on the divan, and near her was a little low table of inlaid wood, which held a large silver-gilt tray full of cups and flagons and bouquets of flowers.

On entering this subterranean boudoir I felt quite intoxicated by the most exquisite perfume.

Everything in this retreat breathed voluptuousness; on every side I saw the glitter of gold and sumptuous materials, and varied colourings and rare flowers. The young woman did not notice me at first; she held her head down and lingered the yellow amber beads of a long necklace, absorbed in meditation. She was divinely beautiful. Her features were like those of the unfortunate child I had seen below, but more finely formed, more regular and more voluptuous. She was as black as a raven's wing, and her hair was

> "Long as are the robes of a king."

It fell over her shoulders to the divan and almost to the carpet under her feet. A gown of transparent silk in broad stripes showed her splendid arms and neck. A bodice of velvet braided with gold enclosed her figure, and her short blue satin knickerbockers revealed a marvellously tiny foot, from which hung a gold-worked Turkish slipper which she danced up and down gracefully and whimsically.

My boots creaked, and she raised her head and saw me.

Without being disturbed or showing the least surprise at seeing a stranger with a sword in his hand in her room, she clapped her hands gleefully and beckoned me to come nearer. I saluted her by placing my hand first on my heart and then on my head to show her I was acquainted with Mahomedan etiquette. She smiled, and with both hands she put aside her hair which covered the divan—this was to tell me to take a seat by her side. I thought all the spices of Araby pervaded those beautiful locks.

I modestly seated myself at the extreme end of the divan, inwardly vowing I would very soon go much nearer to her. She took a cup from the tray, and holding it by the filigree saucer, she poured out some frothed coffee, and after touching it lightly with her lips she offered it to me.

"Ah, Roumi! Roumi!..." she said. "Shall we not kill the vermin, lieutenant?..."

At these words I opened my eyes as wide as a carriage entrance. This young lady had enormous moustaches, and was the living image of Quartermaster Wagner.... And it was indeed Wagner who stood over me with a cup of coffee, whilst, pillowed on my horse's neck, I stared at him wildly.

"It appears we have *pioncé*, all the same, lieutenant. We are at the ford, and the coffee is boiling."

THE END

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