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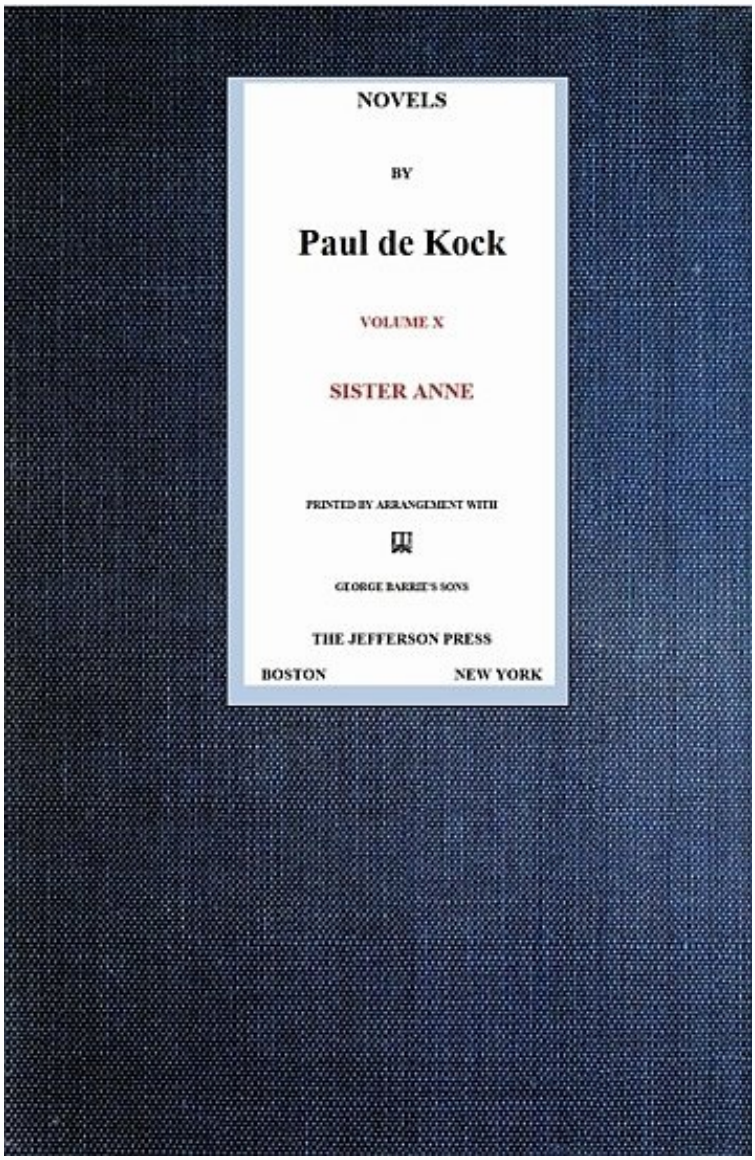

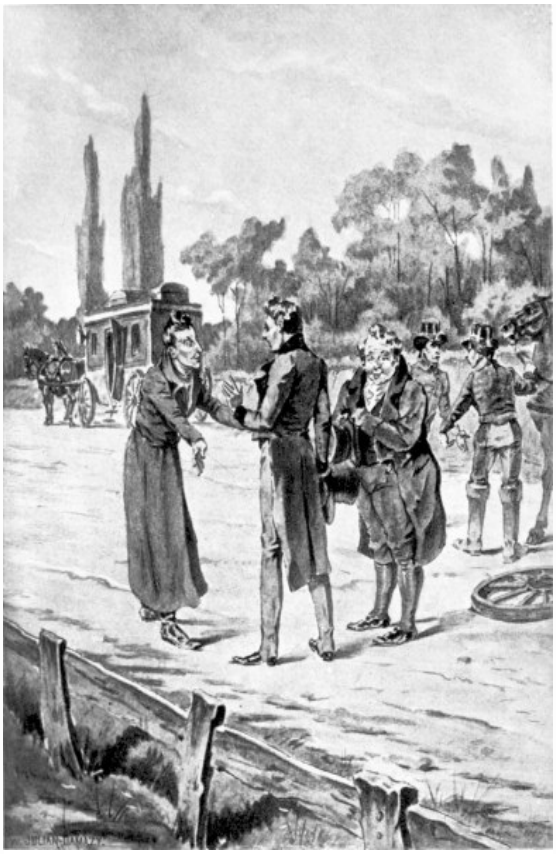

A PREMEDITATED COLLISION

———

Frédéric looked up and recognized Dubourg; he was on the point of laughing outright, when his friend forestalled him by running toward him, exclaiming:

"I cannot be mistaken! What a fortunate meeting! It surely is Monsieur Frédéric de Montreville!"

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME X

SISTER ANNE

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SISTER ANNE

Contents

I

A NOCTURNAL WALK.—MY AUNT'S FIVE HUNDRED FRANCS

The theatres had long since dismissed their audiences, the shops were closed, and the cafés were closing. Passers-by were becoming more and more infrequent, the cabs moved more rapidly, the street lights were burning, and the gas in the houses was disappearing; the streets of Paris, like the inhabitants thereof, were about to enjoy their brief hour of repose.

But repose, like fine weather, is never universal: when we are enjoying it in Paris, it may be that people are fighting in some other quarter of the globe; and while we are revelling in mild and delicious weather, within a hundred leagues of us a tornado may be destroying the crops, or a tempest submerging ships. Since peace and fine weather cannot be universal, let us try to make the most of them while they are in our possession, and let us not worry as to what sort of weather our neighbors are having.

A gentleman, who presumably had no desire to sleep, was walking through the streets of Paris, which had become almost silent. For more than an hour, he had been walking on the boulevards, from Rue du Temple to Rue Poissonnière; occasionally, without any very clear idea as to where he was going, he strayed into the faubourgs; but he soon stopped, looked about him, muttered between his teeth: "What the devil am I doing here?" and returned to the boulevards.

This gentleman seemed to be in the neighborhood of thirty years of age; he was of medium height, and rather stout than thin. His face was neither ugly nor handsome; his round eyes protruded overmuch, and his nose, while not exactly flat, had neither the nobility of the Grecian nor the charm of the aquiline type. By way of compensation, he had what is called expression, and possessed the art of forcing his features to depict the sentiment which he desired to seem to feel: an art no less valuable in society than on the stage; for we are actors everywhere, and there are at court, in the city, in palaces, in salons, in boudoirs, and even in the servants' hall, people of unexcelled skill in the art of counterfeiting what they do not feel.

Our promenader's costume was neither elegant nor shabby. He was dressed like one who is in the habit of going into society, but not for the purpose of exhibiting the cut of his coat or the color of his trousers. His bearing corresponded with his dress; it was not at all pretentious. You will say, perhaps, that a man does not select so late an hour of the night to adopt a swagger or a mincing gait; I shall, in that case, have the honor to reply that I am drawing the portrait of the man as he was under ordinary circumstances, and that I had made his acquaintance prior to the moment of his introduction to you.

Now that you have the means of forming an idea of this individual's appearance, you will perhaps be curious to know what business detained him on the boulevards, why he was walking there so late instead of going home to bed. In order to find out, let us listen to him for a moment talking to himself as he walks, with both hands in his pockets, and as unconcernedly as if it were only eight o'clock in the evening.

"I had a presentiment of what would happen to me. I didn't want to go to that little Delphine's. If I had stayed away, I should still have my five hundred francs in my pocket. But little Delphine is such a dear creature! she wrote me such a sweet little note! Am I still green enough to fall into such a trap? I, who know the world so well, especially women! If I had had sense enough to take only three hundred francs with me, I should have something left; but, no! I must needs play the millionaire! I played like a fool. That little man who won my money turned the king very often. Hum! it looks a little shady. But one thing is certain, and that is that I haven't a sou, and that my landlord turned me out of his house yesterday because I didn't pay him. For four paltry louis! the Arab! I was going to pay him yesterday, with the five hundred francs my old aunt sent me, when little Delphine's invitation came and upset all my virtuous plans. Poor Dubourg! you are incorrigible, my friend; and yet, you are beginning to be old enough to reform."

At this point, Dubourg—for now we know his name—took his snuff-box from his pocket, and paused to take a pinch.

"O my only comfort! my trusty companion!" he continued, gazing at his snuff-box with an expression that was almost sentimental; "it's very lucky that you are made of nothing more valuable than horn; if you had been, I should

have parted with you long ago.—But let us reflect a little. What in the devil am I going to do? I have no employment; they are so ridiculous in these public offices! I earned only fifteen hundred francs, so it seemed fair to me that I shouldn't work any more than the deputy-chief who earned three thousand; strictly speaking, indeed, I ought to have worked only half as much. Now, as my deputy-chief never appeared till noon and went away at four o'clock, and passed that time reading the newspapers, cutting quill pens, chatting with his back to the stove in winter, and going out to take the air in summer, I saw no reason why I shouldn't get to the office as late as he did and go away as early; pass an hour reading the *Moniteur*, three-quarters of an hour on the *Constitutionnel*, and an hour and a quarter on the *Débats*; stare at my pen a long while before trimming the nib; look at the work before me without touching it; turn over a file of papers for an hour, and then put it back in its place, without the slightest intention of writing anything on it; and take as much time to go out to buy a roll as it would have taken me to go from Paris to Saint-Cloud. This conduct, dictated by a sense of justice, was not to the liking of my superiors; as they wanted to force me to work hard, so that they need do nothing, they didn't like it because I presumed to imitate them; they reported me to the minister, and I was kicked out. To be sure, they offered to take me back a little later, as a substitute, but I felt that I was unworthy of such an honor.

"Then I went into a banking-house. Gad! what a difference! There, my superiors set the example of working hard. From the head clerk to the office-boy, everyone came at eight o'clock and stayed till five, then came back at seven and stayed till ten; and during all that time, not a minute's rest; writing, or making figures all the time. If by chance a fellow could venture to say a word, it was only while he was copying a letter or opening an account. No holidays! Always a mail coming in or going out. A man couldn't do too much; and if I happened to leave the office a few minutes before ten, an infernal Dutchman, who had passed forty-five years of his life over a ledger, would always take out his watch and say: 'You're in a great hurry to-night!'

"Faith, I couldn't stand it! That animal life was ruining my health; and one fine morning, when they lectured me because I went out to get a glass of beer at a café near by, I took my hat and said good-bye to banking-houses and business.

"I tried being a notary, but I was too absent-minded: I mistook a death certificate for a marriage contract, and a power of attorney for a will; so I was politely advised to abandon that profession.

"Then I went into an old solicitor's office. Ah! I was in clover there for some little time. He had a wife who was past her prime; she was very fond of walking and driving, and she chose me for her escort. The husband, who was thus relieved of that duty, was very well pleased to have me escort her everywhere; I think he would have made me his first clerk, if I would have agreed to take madame to walk all my life. But I got tired of having always on my arm a costume *à la* Pompadour and the face of a country magistrate. I ceased to be attentive to madame, monsieur took offence and discharged me. *O tempora! O mores!*

"Thereupon I renounced the legal profession; I felt in my heart the impulses of a noble independence, an intense love of liberty. So I began to do nothing—a superb profession, within everybody's reach; and a delightful one when it is supported by investments in the funds. Unluckily, my name is not inscribed on the books of the State, but only on those of my tailor, bootmaker, et cetera. I am an orphan; my parents left me very little, and that little could not last long, especially with me, who am neither miserly, nor economical, nor prudent, and who have no desire for money except to have the pleasure of spending it. My father, an estimable Breton, practised medicine; he ought to have made a fortune! Probably in his day there weren't enough colds, fevers, and bad air. He left me nothing but a most honorable name, which, for all my follies, I shall never suffer to be disgraced, because a man can be a reprobate and still be honest.

"When I had spent my modest inheritance, I began to philosophize; I was tempted to write, as Seneca did, on contempt for wealth. But Seneca had a fortune of forty millions when he wrote that; so that he was better acquainted with his subject than I am, without a sou. So, as one should try to talk of nothing except what one knows about, I concluded not to talk about wealth, of which I know nothing.

"Luckily, I still have an old aunt, in the wilds of Bretagne, who has never married. The dear woman has only a modest fortune, and yet she has never deserted her nephew. To be sure, I have written her some very affecting letters. Poor, dear soul! she thinks I am married! Faith! as I couldn't think of any other possible way of getting money from her, in my last letter I made myself out, at one stroke, a husband and father; yes, and the father of triplets! That was what brought the five-hundred-franc note that I have just lost at écarté. O cursed écarté! I swore that I wouldn't gamble any more, as I am in hard luck this month. But how could I resist? I went to little Delphine's, who, since she left the stage, receives the best people in Paris: artists, authors, journalists, English, Russian, and Tartar noblemen. Tartars, yes! indeed, I fancy that little man I played with was something of a Greek.[A] To pass eighteen times in succession is a little too much! And that other idiot, who made a point of offering me punch every time I lost! as if I could drink five hundred francs' worth of it! Ah! my poor old aunt! if you knew what had become of your money! The worst of it all is that she won't send me any more for a long time. I can't have the wife I have taken to my bosom, to touch my aunt's heart, lie in every month; I have said she was sick twice already; I have credited my triplets with all the diseases children have, and have given myself inflammation of the lungs and jaundice. But that sort of thing will be played out sooner or later. No, my poor aunt, no, I won't pester you any more. No, I don't propose that you shall deprive yourself any longer of all the little comforts of life, for your scamp of a nephew. I have abused your goodness of heart too much. I blush to think how often I have appealed to it; I feel in my heart a noble pride; and when I think of your last remittance of five hundred francs! gone in four games! Gad! it's horrible!"

[A] Greek, *i.e.*, "sharper."

Dubourg began to walk a little more rapidly; he took his hands from his pockets, as if he were furious to find nothing in them; but in a moment he became calm again, resumed his former gait, and once more exclaimed:

"But what in the deuce am I going to do?"

At that moment, he passed one of those individuals who wander about the streets at night, with a bag on their back and a hooked stick in their hand, and halt in front of places which we avoid during the day.

"That's a last resort, to be sure," said Dubourg, glancing at the man with the lantern; "but I confess that I don't as yet feel courageous enough to employ it; and although a famous author has said: 'It is not the trade that honors the man, but the man should honor the trade,' I doubt whether I should be held in high esteem if I should take to that little hooked stick; even though I possessed with it the wisdom of Cato, the clemency of Titus, and the virtues of

Marcus Aurelius.

"However, I have some talents of my own, and I am not reduced to that yet. I love the arts; ah! I adore them! I was born to be an artist. I don't know how to draw, I cannot play on any instrument, I do not write poetry with great facility; but, for all that, I love painting, music, and poetry. If I should go on the stage, I believe I should make a success of it. But to make one's début at thirty years—that's rather late in life. And then, the idea of the son of a doctor at Rennes going on the stage! But why not? Louis XIV did it; he acted before his court; and if I had been in Racine's place, I certainly would have written some splendid parts for him, instead of trying to turn aside his inclination. Our present-day authors wouldn't be so stupid; consequently they are rich, whereas in Racine's time they were not.

"But I can't begin to-morrow, and yet I must dine to-morrow: a desperate plight to be in when one has neither money nor credit. Come, come, Dubourg! come, my fine fellow, don't be downcast, retain that lightness of heart, that sang-froid which has never failed you thus far. Remember that it is a glorious thing to be able to endure misfortune; that it is in disaster that a brave heart manifests its courage. Oh! yes; it's easy enough for me to say all this now, while my stomach is still full of Mademoiselle Delphine's cakes and sweetmeats and punch; but when I am hungry, I am afraid I shall be a wretched philosopher.

"In misfortune, one has recourse to one's friends; but one has no friends when one is unfortunate. But sometimes men aren't so selfish as they are said to be. Let me think! Frédéric! yes, he alone can be useful to me. Frédéric is only twenty; he still looks upon the world as a young man is likely to do at that age, when he has been, up to eighteen, under his father's eye and under the care of a tutor. Frédéric is kind-hearted, generous, easily moved—too easily, indeed; but it is not for me to blame him for following too readily the impulses of his heart. He has accommodated me several times; but, no matter; I am sure that he'll do it again, if he can. Let us go to see Frédéric."

Dubourg mechanically put his hand to his fob, to see what time it was; then he sighed, and murmured:

"Unlucky dog that I am! I have never been able to keep one a week. Ah! my poor aunt! If I only had your five hundred francs!"

The weather was becoming threatening, and a few drops of rain fell. The cabs had ceased to break the silence of the night; the street lanterns cast only a faint and flickering light.

"It must be very late," said Dubourg, glancing about. "Frédéric lives with his father, Monsieur le Comte de Montreville. How can I venture to go there at this time of night? The count is inclined to be strict; he's not one of your stage fathers, with whom you can do whatever you choose. On the contrary, they say that he demands the most absolute obedience from his son, and that his son trembles before him. But I have no doubt that his severity is exaggerated; at all events, he hardly knows me. I have been to the house several times, but he has seen me only once or twice. Frédéric's apartment is in a different wing from his, so we will try our luck."

And Dubourg, leaving at last the circle to which he had confined his steps for so long, walked rapidly toward Rue de Provence, where the Comte de Montreville's mansion was situated.

As he drew nearer to Frédéric's abode, his hope of seeing him before the next day became fainter and fainter. Ought he to turn the whole house upside down in the middle of the night? If he woke the son, he would wake the father too; and it was a decidedly ill-advised method of improving his acquaintance with Monsieur de Montreville, to call at his house between two and three o'clock in the morning.

But Dubourg walked on, even while he reflected thus; like a lover, who has sworn never to see his faithless one again, but who prowls constantly about her abode and always ends by going in, still repeating: "I will never see her again!"—At such time, reason speaks, but passion guides our footsteps. Poor mortals! is it your fault, pray, that passion so often carries the day?

As he approached the house, Dubourg's eyes were agreeably surprised by the appearance of a double row of private carriages, whose lanterns lighted a large part of the street. He quickened his pace; the carriages were most numerous in front of the Comte de Montreville's house, and the courtyard was filled with coupés, landaus, and vis-à-vis. The coachmen were talking together, the footmen swearing impatiently; servants hurried to and fro across the courtyard. Lamps on the carriage-stones and on the broad steps banished the darkness, and delicious strains of music floated out through the windows of the beautiful salon, brilliantly lighted by thousands of candles, forming a strong contrast with the depressing silence that reigned a short distance away.

Dubourg no longer walked: he ran, he leaped, he flew. The sight of the lanterns, the noise made by so numerous a company, and the strains of the contra-dances within, drove from his mind the serious thoughts which had begun to monopolize it.

"There's a party going on," he cried, "a ball! Idiot that I am! to forget that this was Thursday, monsieur le comte's reception day; and they say he gives delightful parties. Frédéric has invited me several times; he said he wanted to introduce me to his father. Hum! it rested only with me to go into the best society, to make acquaintances who would have given me a boost in the world. But, no; it isn't in my power to be sensible and leave those damned billiard-tables! Ah! I recognize that tune; it's by Rossini; a three-step. I danced to it at Vauxhall, with the stout blonde."

Dubourg was already in the courtyard, threading his way among carriages, coachmen, and footmen. No one had paid any attention to him; and, if he had been suitably dressed, he might have entered the salons, and, perhaps, have played cards and danced, without attracting the notice of the host; for at such large functions, it not infrequently happens that the master of the house fails to see and speak with all of his guests.

But Dubourg stopped under the windows of the salon on the first floor, where dancing was in progress. In order to keep in the background, he had walked away from the brilliantly lighted steps and taken his stand in the shadow of a huge berlin, whence he could see the ball and distinguish the dancers.

He was tempted for a moment to enter the salon; but, upon glancing down at his dress, he realized that it was not an opportune moment to appear before monsieur le comte, who was a great stickler for etiquette. His coat was blue, with metal buttons; he wore high boots and a black cravat. That was a very suitable costume in which to play écarté and talk nonsense at Mademoiselle Delphine's, but it would have been exceedingly out of place at Monsieur de Montreville's reception.

"Ah! if I had kept my aunt's five hundred francs," he muttered again, as he turned his eyes from his costume to the ballroom, "I should have outshone all those fine clothes!"

As he watched the dancing and eyed the ladies through the windows, most of which were open because of the heat, Dubourg spied a table with a green cloth in a smaller salon, at which two middle-aged men had just taken their seats. They were soon surrounded by onlookers, and the table was covered with gold.

In order to obtain a better view of the small salon, Dubourg climbed up behind the carriage by which he was standing; there he could watch the game perfectly, and could see the hand of one of the players, who was sitting with his back to the window.

"How lucky they are!" he thought; "they are playing écarté. The deuce! it's a warm old game; at least thirty louis a side! If I still had my aunt's money, I could bet from here. What am I saying? If I ever touch cards again, may I be damned! Ah! there's the same hand that I lost my last game on; and I ought to have won it; I played according to rule. Well! what the devil is he doing? He's going to ask for cards!"

And Dubourg, oblivious of the fact that he was on top of a carriage in the courtyard, shouted:

"Don't take any cards! Play your hand, play it, I tell you! I'll answer for the point!"

The voice surprised the players beyond words. They turned and stared, and questioned each other.

"Who was that who undertook to advise me?" demanded the old man whose turn it was to play. "Has he got more at stake than I have, to give him the right to talk like that? Why don't you answer, messieurs?"

"The voice came from the courtyard," said a young man near the window.

"From the courtyard! from the courtyard! Do you mean to say that those rascally footmen presume to watch us play and to make remarks?"

And the old gentleman with the powdered head left his seat and looked into the courtyard. Dubourg jumped down from the carriage, and the shock woke the horses; whereupon they began to prance, and tried to run. The drowsy coachmen rubbed their eyes, thinking that the ball was over; those who were talking hurried to their seats, and those in the street, observing the commotion in the courtyard, did the same; while the coachman and footmen of the carriage on which Dubourg had perched struggled to pacify the horses.

Meanwhile, Dubourg had slunk away by the side of the house.

"It seems that I must always put my foot in it!" he muttered. "Here are thirty coachmen and as many footmen all stirred up, and a pair of horses have nearly trampled on me, just because I attempted to advise that old fellow who doesn't know how to play the game and was going to ask for cards when he ought to take every trick! That's the last time I'll ever meddle in other people's business."

As Dubourg crept along by the wall, he came to a door just as a servant came out to ascertain the cause of the noise in the courtyard. Dubourg recognized Frédéric's valet, and instantly accosted him.

"Where is your master, Germain?"

"Ah! is it you, monsieur?" said the servant, who had often seen Dubourg with his young master. "Have you come to the ball?"

"No, no; I have no desire to dance. Where is your master, I ask you?"

"Oh! Monsieur Frédéric is dancing. There are some beautiful women inside, and he's an amateur, you know."

"The deuce! I would like to speak with him; I have something very important to say to him, but I don't want to disturb him, or to go into the salon; I am not dressed."

"If you wish, monsieur, I will take you to Monsieur Frédéric's apartment; you can wait there comfortably until he retires."

"That's a delightful idea of yours, Germain; take me to Frédéric's apartment at once."

Germain took a candle and went before Dubourg, who was overjoyed to have found a place to finish the night. The valet, who had seen his master display great friendliness to Dubourg, was certain that he would not be reproved for what he was doing.

In due time, they arrived at the young man's apartment, which was so far from the ballroom that the music could barely be heard.

"Would you like me to tell my master that you are here?" inquired Germain, as he placed the candle on a table.

"No, it isn't worth while; I'll read while I am waiting. I am in no hurry at all now; let him dance as long as he pleases."

Germain left Dubourg alone; whereupon he stretched himself out in a luxurious easy-chair and tossed away the book he had taken up.

"To the devil with reading!" he said, assuming the position best adapted for a nap; "it's high time for me to rest; I have earned it. Dance, dance away! How comfortable it is in this chair, especially when one has been within an ace of sleeping in the street! Here am I installed under the roof of Monsieur le Comte de Montreville, a most respectable gentleman, who has at least thirty thousand francs a year, and just one son, whose friend I am, and whose education I aspire to finish; for they have stuffed a heap of rubbish into his head, and have neglected to teach him the most essential thing of all—knowledge of the human heart, and especially of the female heart. As I am decidedly well posted in that branch of knowledge, I propose to make something of our dear Frédéric, and to teach him to know the world; so that he may make his way, like me."

While he thus communed with himself, Dubourg began to nod, and before he had been in the easy-chair five minutes he was sleeping soundly.

II

THE COMTE DE MONTREVILLE.—AN EVENING PARTY IN SOCIETY

The Comte de Montreville was, at the time that we make his acquaintance, about sixty years old. The scion of a noble and wealthy family, he had served in the army, married, and retired from service, and had succeeded in coming safely through the tempests of the Revolution.

He was a short, slender man, with a cold, stern face which commanded respect. He did not lack intelligence, nor was he the slave of a mass of absurd prejudices of the sort that some old men were trying to make fashionable, like paniers and curly wigs. Monsieur de Montreville was not one of those men who insist on retrograding while others go forward; he followed the general current of the time, and, wise amid a multitude of fools, he blamed only those who, from a proneness to exaggeration, from selfishness, or from incapacity, muddied the waters of a stream which all the efforts of all mankind could not prevent from flowing.

But the count had been brought up strictly by his father. Accustomed early in life to unquestioning obedience, he desired his son to be no less submissive to him. At the age of six, young Frédéric lost his mother. The count did not choose to marry again; he had a son to inherit his name, and that was enough for him. He placed Frédéric at one of the best schools in Paris. At fourteen, the young count, who was endowed with an unusually fine intellect, had carried off several prizes. His education was not then completed; but his father, fearing that at that age he might form some dangerous intimacy, and impelled by his longing to have him always by his side, in order to accustom him to absolute obedience, took him away from the school, and gave him a private tutor.

This tutor, in whose charge the count placed his son, and with whom we shall soon become very well acquainted, was neither a scholar nor a man of brains; far from it. But he was entirely at the orders of monsieur le comte, and would not have taken his pupil out to walk without first asking the father's permission; that was the reason for his selection, despite his limited mental qualifications.

The count was very fond of his son, but he would have been very sorry to allow the full depth of his affection to appear; he would have considered that he had forfeited his dignity and his claim to Frédéric's respect if he had spoken to him in the kindly tone of a dear friend. But is not our father the first friend that nature gives us? and ought the respect we owe him to banish confidence and intimacy?

Frédéric loved his father, but he trembled before him. Accustomed from childhood never to reply to him, and to obey promptly his lightest word, he had retained, as he grew to manhood, that habit of passive obedience and that timidity which made it impossible for him to allow his heart to speak freely in his father's presence.

But we must do the Comte de Montreville the justice to say that he did not abuse his power over his son. When Frédéric was eighteen, and his education was at an end, the count dismissed the tutor, and, having sent for the young man to come to him, addressed him thus:

"I am content with you, Frédéric. You have responded to the pains I have taken with your education, and I have no reason to complain of your disposition. But you are approaching the age at which a young man should study the world for himself. Henceforth, therefore, you are to enjoy absolute liberty. You will continue to live in the same house with me; but I will give you the apartment in the wing that looks on the street; mine is at the end of the courtyard; thus you will be able to go in and out at any hour without disturbing me. My steward has orders to supply you with money whenever you ask for it. I know you, and I am sure that you will not abuse this indulgence. You are at an age when young men are eager for pleasure; enjoy yourself, indulge in the follies characteristic of your years; I mean those that lead neither the heart nor the mind astray. You are easily moved, you adore all women! but this enthusiasm will vanish and never return. Be more particular about forming intimacies with men of your age; do not make friends too hurriedly: one should be more exacting in the choice of a friend than of a mistress. However, I shall not lose sight of you altogether; I trust that the principles I have instilled into you will keep you from any reprehensible excess, and that I shall have no reason to repent of having given you liberty of action."

Frédéric, deeply touched by this harangue, would have rushed into his father's arms; but the count, repressing that affectionate impulse, which his own heart shared, confined himself to giving him his hand to press, and added in a voice that trembled slightly:

"In a few years, I will look to your future; I will see about finding a suitable wife for you. But the time for that has not come yet; enjoy your youth, and do not abuse it."

Having said this, the count hastily left the room, for the conversation had moved him; he felt tears in his eyes, and it would have distressed him to allow Frédéric to see them.

Two years had passed since this interview, during which Frédéric, now his own master, had followed the first impulse of his heart. Endowed with an ardent and sensitive nature, Frédéric was certain speedily to feel the pangs of love. At eighteen, most young men say to themselves: "I must fall in love," as they say: "I must dance, or gamble, or ride." But the young count did not treat love so lightly: his inexperienced heart loved or believed that it loved sincerely, and desired to be repaid in kind; treachery broke his heart, and he wept bitterly over the infidelity of a mistress.

Frédéric had a fine figure, and a most attractive face, dignified and sweet; his eyes expressed all that his heart felt. But he had not yet acquired the careless tone and the free and easy manners of the dandies of the day; he did not sway back and forth as he talked, he did not smile into mirrors, he did not deal in the airy nothings which are so popular in salons, and had not the art of looking a woman in the eye to tell her that she was adorable. And as such cavalierish manners are fashionable, and as the ladies care for nothing except what is consecrated by the goddess of fashion, they considered Frédéric rather sentimental, awkward even, and said to one another:

"He's not very bad, but he needs to be trained."

A *petite-maîtresse* can hardly attach herself to a novice; she may indulge a fancy for him, but only a reprobate can inspire a *grande passion*; that is why poor Frédéric was constantly deceived and thrown over by his mistresses.

It was at Tortoni's that he had made the acquaintance of Dubourg. On that day, the philosopher, being in funds, had created an uproar at that café, where he was entertaining four of his friends. Several strangers, annoyed by the noise they made, tried to impose silence on them; Dubourg's only reply was to throw the remains of a bowl of punch at their heads. They sprang to their feet, shouting and threatening, and during the quarrel Dubourg's four friends deemed it prudent to disappear in rapid succession. He, enraged by their cowardly conduct in abandoning him, was still holding out against his adversaries, when Frédéric espoused his quarrel and offered to act as his second. Dubourg accepted, and a duel took place the next day. Dubourg's antagonist was slightly wounded, and the affair had no more serious results; but it served to cement the friendship thus formed between Dubourg and Frédéric. The former, although nearly ten years the young count's senior, was far from being as reasonable as he; but his unfailing gayety pleased Frédéric, who often felt the need of his friend's merriment to help him to forget the infidelities of his charmers.

Now that we know the Comte de Montreville and his son, let us enter the salons, where the most brilliant society of the capital was assembled, because, as Dubourg had said, it was the count's reception day.

The company was scattered through several rooms, all resplendent with the light of innumerable candles; here there was dancing, there card-playing; elsewhere, the guests were chatting, or strolling about, or standing where they could get a breath of air; the heat was intense in the cardroom, where it was almost impossible to force one's way through the crowd of bettors.

The ladies were remarkable for the elegance, and in some cases for the singularity, of their toilets. As a general rule, the costumes of the mothers are even more elaborate than those of the unmarried women. Is it because they think that their daughters stand less in need of external attractions? or is it true that coquetry increases as natural charm decreases? I do not presume to decide the question. It is different with men: with them, the ball costume, when once established, is soon adopted by all, and those who desire to distinguish themselves have no other resource than to dress their hair in some original way, or to devote their attention to the knot of their cravat; but this last-mentioned portion of the costume is beginning to be no longer a matter of choice.

But it was nearly three o'clock, and the party was drawing to a close. It was the best of all times for the observer to use his faculties; there were fewer people dancing, the circulation was less impeded, and the guests who remained ventured to talk and laugh a little. Toward the close of a ball, informality takes the place of ceremony, and many women do not begin to be charming until they cease to be affected. Some persons who had not previously had an opportunity to speak together were conversing in a corner of the salon. Young men chatted with the pretty partners, whom they invited from choice rather than necessity. The ladies smiled more sweetly upon their escorts; people drew nearer together, they knew one another better.

Monsieur de Montreville walked about his salons with the amiable manner of a host who excels in the art of doing the honors. He talked with an elderly marchioness who was sitting alone on a sofa; he said a courteous word to a lady who was not dancing; and, on his way to her, found time to bestow a compliment or two on the young dancers; he saw to it that the punch was passed around, and the ices; he spent a moment looking over the écarté table, and if somebody was wanted to take a bet he was always ready.

But what was Frédéric doing, leaning against that mantel-shelf? he seemed to be devoting his whole attention to the dance; but was it really the quadrille which interested him so deeply? and why, if he was thinking of nothing but that pretty maiden's agile movements, did he seem to be suffering? Yes, to the keen observer, his tranquillity was assumed, the smile which passed over his lips when he was spoken to was forced and unnatural. Frédéric was preoccupied, but not with the dance. A few feet away from him a young woman was seated, a young woman not more than twenty years old, although she had been three years married to a sexagenarian notary, who was in the cardroom at that moment.

Madame Dernange was very pretty; her vivacity, the sparkle of her eyes, her costume, her brilliant intellect, everything about her had a dazzling effect: she attracted, subjugated, enslaved, with a glance; but, as she knew the power of her charms, she sought constantly to add to the number of her adorers. At sixteen, she married Monsieur Dernange, without the slightest affection for him; but she married him joyfully. She was impatient to be her own mistress, and to give a free rein to her penchant for flirtation.

With a husband nearly sixty, she was very certain of being able to do just what she chose; and, in fact, Monsieur Dernange left her perfectly untrammelled. She was seen at all receptions, balls, festivities of every description. Sometimes her husband escorted her, but generally he went to bed about the time that his wife left the house; which did not prevent them from leading a very peaceful life. It is a very simple matter to live happily with your wife: all you have to do is just to allow her to do whatever she desires.

Monsieur Dernange had an abundance of *savoir vivre*; he was enchanted to have his wife enjoy herself. Many people declared that the young woman did not abuse his confidence, and it is very possible: she was a great flirt, but flirts love no one; however, it is not well to trust them too far.

Frédéric had not been able to look upon the brilliant Madame Dernange with an indifferent eye. She had had no difficulty in setting him on fire with a glance, and with a glance she had realized her triumph. The young Comte de Montreville was not a conquest to be disdained; Madame Dernange resolved to fasten him to her chariot, and for that nothing more was necessary than a glance or two, an occasional smile, a faint pressure of the hand, and a veiled remark uttered in a voice that seemed to tremble slightly. And the coquette used all her powers with such art! She was not in love, and she knew so well how to win love! A person who loves sincerely has much more difficulty in making an impression than one who does not love at all; for the latter is able to avail herself of all her advantages, while the other, striving to appear amiable, is often only awkward and embarrassed. Ninon said that, and Ninon knew what she was talking about.

Poor Frédéric very soon succumbed to that treatment; he believed that she loved, yes, adored him! and for a few days he lost his head. But at this party of his father's a young and gorgeous colonel had made his appearance; he was a man notorious for his *bonnes fortunes*, his amorous adventures; a man, in a word, whom any woman might be proud to number among her captives, and Madame Dernange had at once determined to achieve this new triumph.

Poor Frédéric! you were utterly forgotten: she no longer gave a thought to you, but was engrossed by the handsome colonel. Now and again, she deigned to smile sweetly upon you, it is true; but you were in love, you were jealous, and you saw that the coquette instantly turned her eyes upon the man she desired to enslave.

Several times the young man had approached the scintillating Dernange; he wished to show her that he had detected her perfidy; but she contented herself with smiling at him, and saying:

"What on earth is the matter with you to-night, Monsieur de Montreville? You have a solemn air which is most amusing."

How comforting such words are to a jealous lover! Frédéric made no reply, but walked away with rage in his heart, while the coquette laughed long and loud at a bright remark made by the colonel, or by some other of her adorers.

Frédéric was on pins and needles all the evening; and, toward the close of the festivities, seeing Madame Dernange on a sofa, on which the colonel also had taken his seat, he stationed himself a few steps away. He leaned against a mantel, with his back turned to them, and pretended to be engrossed by the dance; but he did not lose a word of what was said on the sofa. The colonel was amiable and gallant; he strove to make himself agreeable to

Madame Dernange, and she put forth all her powers and played with him with her usual grace. She laughed so heartily, she was so pretty, so fascinating, when she desired to make a favorable impression! There was a constant exchange of compliments and clever retorts, during which poor Frédéric was all on fire. If he had not held himself in check, he would have insulted the colonel and overwhelmed the faithless one with reproaches. Luckily, he retained his senses sufficiently to realize all the impropriety of such a scene, and all the ridicule it would bring upon him; for in love intrigues the party who complains, and who is betrayed, is always laughed at. It is said: the *vanquished* pay the fine; we might vary this proverb slightly, and thus make it truer, except in England, where husbands are in the habit of exacting compensation in money when they are in the position which I understand by *vanquished*.

The colonel paid his court in military fashion—that is to say, he made much progress in a short time. Unluckily, this method is often successful. Unluckily for timid lovers, that is; or is not she the best who makes us happy most promptly? Frédéric heard him ask Madame Dernange's permission to call to pay his respects. The respects of a colonel of hussars! Frédéric was bathed in cold perspiration at the thought. The pretty woman made some resistance; she laughed and joked, and said that he must ask her husband first; then added, with a rippling laugh:

"But, no; no, you needn't! Monsieur Dernange will have no objection."

The colonel was urgent, and he received permission. Frédéric was choking with rage; he walked hastily away, for he could stand it no longer. He went into a room which was empty for the moment, a large number of the guests having already taken their leave.

He threw himself into an easy-chair. The room was but dimly lighted by the flickering candles in glass globes; he could abandon himself without reserve to his feelings. He drew his handkerchief, he was choking; his eyes were filled with tears. A young man almost always pays with tears the fees of his apprenticeship in society. In two or three years, he will laugh at the misfortune that now drives him to despair. After being deceived, he will deceive in his turn; but he will never again be so foolish as to fix his fancy on a coquette, and it may be that some hearts that love him sincerely will be rejected by him, for the innocent often have to pay for the guilty. But, let us wait: it is possible that Frédéric will always retain that emotional nature, that constancy in love, which now cause him to regret the loss of a heart that he never possessed.

The words *faithless*, *fickle*, *traitress*, issued from his mouth, followed by long sighs. For more than half an hour he had been buried in his reflections. The candles had gone out, the music had ceased. Several people passed him without attracting his attention, nor was he, sitting in a dark corner, noticed by them. Some ladies came into the room to get their shawls, which they had left on a couch not far from Frédéric. But a familiar voice awoke the echoes in his heart: it was the voice of Madame Dernange, talking with one of her friends. They seemed in excellent spirits.

"What sport I have had!" said the notary's wife. "That colonel is really very attractive!"

"But, my dear, did you see the wry face Frédéric made?"

"Yes, indeed I did, and I was strongly tempted to laugh!"

"You drove him to despair."

"What a calamity! That young man is romantic and sentimental enough to give one the blues; he's an idiot!"

"Oh! he's a very pretty fellow, my dear; and when he has got rid of that schoolboy air, and has acquired the tone of fashionable gallantry, you'll see how popular he will be!"

"When I choose to amuse myself with him again, I have only to say a word, to glance at him, and he will be at my feet. But give me my shawl, which you have had in your hand an hour. The colonel is waiting to escort me to my carriage."

When the ladies had gone, Frédéric rose. He found it difficult to believe his ears. Shame, jealousy, anger, filled his heart, where love had already ceased to fill any space; for his self-esteem had been wounded, and wounded self-esteem soon triumphs over love.

In this frame of mind, Frédéric retired to his apartment; he slammed the door as he entered, and thereby woke Dubourg with a start.

III

TRAVELLING PLANS.—MONSIEUR MÉNARD.—EN ROUTE.

"I count four!" cried Dubourg, springing to his feet; while Frédéric, surprised to find him there, stared at him a moment in silence, then abandoned himself unreservedly to the pleasure of pouring out his heart and telling his sorrows to his friend.

"Ah! my dear Dubourg! it must have been heaven that sent you."

"No; it was my landlord, who has turned me out of the house."

"At last I have found a heart which understands mine, which will appreciate my distress and pity my torments."

"Have you been betting on the wrong side, too?"

"The treacherous, fickle creature!"

"Luck is a woman, my friend; that tells the whole story."

"Yes, and a very heartless woman, too! If you knew what she dared to say about me!"

"What's that! has luck been talking about you?"

"I am an idiot! Indeed, she is right; I was an idiot to love her! But it's all over, yes, forever! She thinks that she can bring me to her feet, enslave me again, with a word and a smile! But, no, I will not be her dupe again; I know her now!"

Dubourg rubbed his eyes and looked at Frédéric, who was pacing the floor with an air of desperation, sometimes stopping to beat his forehead, sometimes smiling bitterly.

"Who in the devil are you talking about, my dear fellow?"

"Why, Madame Dernange, that woman whose heart is as false as her face is pretty, that coquette whom I have adored for two months, and who, as I believed, loved me. But, my dear Dubourg, she was making a fool of me."

"And that surprises you? Ah! my poor Frédéric, what a boy you still are!"

"She made me believe that she reciprocated my love; and this evening, a new-comer, a colonel, has stolen her heart from me, apparently without much difficulty. I was strongly tempted to insult the fellow and kill him."

"Would that have made your Madame Dernange less fickle?"

"No, of course not; that is what I said to myself."

"In making love to her, he did what any other man would have done in his place. You ought not to bear him any grudge for it; on the contrary, you ought to be grateful to him, for he has taught you to know a woman who was making a fool of you."

"I believe you are right," said Frédéric sadly, seating himself in an easy-chair, while Dubourg, now wide awake, thought it a fitting moment to deliver a lecture to his friend.

"Listen to me, my dear Frédéric; I am older than you are, I have seen a good deal of the world, and I have a large store of experience, although I still do foolish things. Now, let me tell you that you have an unfortunate tendency to indulge in sentimental and romantic passions, which will do you a bad turn some day. You absolutely insist on being loved, adored, if you will! Damnation! do you mean to pass your life sighing? Is that the way a young man ought to make love? It isn't that you are in reality more constant than other men, for this is your seventh ill-fated passion in the year that I have known you. The great trouble is that your seven passions have all left you first, whereas you ought to have taken the initiative. However, you have always found consolation thus far, and you will this time too, I promise you. But, my friend, don't, I implore you, take on so seriously for what ought to be simply a youthful folly. You must have a certain amount of sentiment, to gratify the ladies, but you mustn't overdo it; because, you see, excess of sentiment kills sentiment; and what I am saying to you is perfectly reasonable; I am sure that your father, the count, would agree with me, if he were here, and that he would be overjoyed to find that you have a friend who gives you nothing but good advice, and who would give you a lot more—if he had not lost last night the five hundred francs his poor aunt sent him."

Frédéric had not listened very attentively to Dubourg's speech; but he had grown calmer, because the most violent tempests are always of the shortest duration, and the young man believed himself to be much more in love than he really was.

"How does it happen that I find you here in the middle of the night?" he asked Dubourg, at last.

"My dear fellow—what do you suppose?—a succession of unlucky circumstances. In the first place, my landlord, who is a genuine *Vulture*; secondly, an evening party at little Delphine's—you know, I took you there once; but as you must always have a touch of sentiment in everything, you never went again; and yet, she would have given you some, for your money, that would have been worth quite as much as Madame Dernange's. Lastly, I played, and I lost all that I possessed! Really, I didn't know which way to turn. But I thought of you; I know how loyal your friendship is. At first, I didn't expect to see you until to-morrow; but, finding everything in commotion in this house, it occurred to me that I might wait for you here; and I have had a nap while your charmer was being spirited away from you."

"Poor Dubourg!"

"Yes, very poor, in truth!"

"Listen; I have an idea."

"Let's hear it."

"I am sick of life in Paris."

"I shall soon be much sicker of it, as I haven't a sou."

"The sight of all these coquettes makes me ill."

"Oh! it's sure to do that."

"I propose to run away from the disloyal hussies."

"I don't know just where you can go to avoid them."

"These parties where you talk without saying anything; where you make acquaintances, but not friends; where you go because you have nothing else to do, rather than for pleasure,—I am tired of the whole business. I have been going into society only two years and a half, and I am sick of it already. This is my plan——"

"Do you mean to become a hermit?"

"No; but I mean to leave Paris for some time; I mean to travel, to visit different countries; in that way, by comparing the manners and customs of the different peoples, by admiring the wonders and beauties of nature, a man can best form his mind and his judgment and increase his store of knowledge; and in that way the heart is made acquainted with pleasures which it could never know in these worldly gatherings, inspired by idleness and governed by etiquette."

"Powerfully argued!" cried Dubourg, rising from his reclining-chair; "you must travel, my dear fellow, there is nothing better for the young. But when a man travels alone, he is always bored to death; one can't be more than half happy when he has no one to whom he can impart the sentiments inspired by a beautiful landscape, an ancient monument, or an imposing ruin! Besides, you are too young to run about the world alone; you need a companion who is wise, well informed, and, above all, experienced; well, my friend, I offer myself as your mentor."

"I was about to make the same suggestion, my dear Dubourg."

"Parbleu! I accept with great pleasure."

"But is there nothing to keep you in Paris?"

"Oh! nothing at all, not even a cot-bed."

"No affair of the heart?"

"Oh! with respect to affairs of the heart, I am not like you! I will form attachments as we go along, or, better still, I'll give them up altogether. My mind is made up; I propose to be virtuous and orderly; you will be edified by my behavior."

"Well, then, my dear Dubourg, it is settled that we travel together."

"There is just one little difficulty left: suppose your father doesn't want you to travel?"

"Oh! I don't think that he'll object; I have already mentioned the subject to him, and he seemed to approve of it."

"Then everything will go as nicely as possible; but will you tell him that you are going to take me?"

"Why not? I shall say that a friend of mine, who is also about to travel, will be able to accompany me for some time."

"All right; arrange it as best you can; if necessary, you can present me to your father, who hardly knows me, and you will see what a dignified and imposing manner I can assume. Above all things, don't mention little Delphine, or my aunt, or my supposed marriage, or my triplets."

"Never fear."

"As for my family, if it isn't noble, that doesn't prevent its being as good as the Comte de Montreville's, and very highly esteemed in Bretagne."

"Oh! mon Dieu! I know all that."

"It isn't on your account that I say it, but your father's. So, then, it's agreed. It is broad daylight now; I have slept enough, but you need rest. Go to bed; during the day, you can speak to your father, and come and tell me what he says. I'll expect you at six o'clock, at the Café de la Rotonde."

"Agreed."

"By the way, I forgot! Lend me a dozen louis; I owe you thirty already, but we will settle up when I get my next remittance from my aunt."

"That's all right; ought there to be any settling among friends?"

"Ah! my dear Frédéric, there aren't many friends like you!"

Dubourg pocketed the twelve louis which Frédéric handed him; then, leaving his friend to go to bed, he went away from the house, humming a new couplet, and strolled along the boulevards, as well pleased as if he had just been appointed to a twelve-thousand-franc office where he would have nothing to do.

During the day, Frédéric went to see his father. He trembled slightly when he appeared before him, and the count, instead of assisting his son to confide in him, waited silently for him to say what he wanted.

Having bowed respectfully, Frédéric began his speech, in which he floundered a little at times, because the count's eyes, fastened on his face, seemed determined to read his inmost thoughts. He set forth his project, however, and awaited in fear and trembling his father's reply. The count seemed to reflect, and did not speak for some minutes. Frédéric dared not break the silence, and at last the count spoke.

"You wish to leave Paris, Frédéric?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte."

"Are you tired already of its pleasures—balls and parties? It is rather early for that."

Frédéric sighed, but made no reply.

"You haven't told me everything," continued the count, with a sarcastic smile. "Confess that some disappointment in love——"

Frédéric blushed, and lowered his eyes; whereupon the count went on, in a gentler tone:

"Well, all that sort of thing belongs to your age. Travel; I am willing; it cannot fail to be useful to you. But if your presence should become necessary, I trust that nothing would delay your return?"

"Oh! father, a single word from you, and I will be with you."

"Very good; I rely upon your word."

"A friend of mine, a young man named Dubourg, of an old Breton family, is also making arrangements to travel for some time. If you are willing, I will join forces with him."

"No, monsieur; I am not willing. I have heard of this Monsieur Dubourg, whom you call your friend, and, although I have seen him with you only two or three times, I know enough of him to be unwilling that he should be my son's travelling companion. His family is respectable, I know, but Monsieur Dubourg is a great reprobate, they say."

"I promise you, father——"

"Don't interrupt me, monsieur. I cannot prevent your associating in Paris with such light-headed characters; but when you are to travel for your instruction, and to mature your judgment, I tell you again that a Monsieur Dubourg is not a proper person for you to travel with. I don't propose that you shall take Germain either; that fellow has been behaving badly for some time. Besides, when you are travelling you should be able to do without a valet. With your money, you will find servants enough wherever you stop."

"Am I to go alone, then, father?"

"No; you are not twenty-one yet; you are too young to be left to your own devices. Stay—yes—he's the very man you need: Monsieur Ménard will go with you."

"What, monsieur le comte, my tutor?"

"He hasn't been that for a long time, and he will not go with you in that capacity, my son, but as a friend, a judicious adviser. Monsieur Ménard is an educated man, and, in addition to that, is the mildest and most patient of men. You know him well enough, I think, not to regret having him for your travelling companion. Monsieur Ménard is not a mere pedant who will constantly reprove you for enjoying yourself; he is attached to you, and he will be able, I trust, to prevent the son of the Comte de Montreville from forgetting what he owes to himself."

"But, father——"

"Enough. I will write to Monsieur Ménard; if he accepts, as I think he will, you can set out to-morrow."

Frédéric left his father, not overpleased with his choice, although he knew that Monsieur Ménard was an excellent man. He would have preferred to travel with Dubourg, whose inexhaustible gayety harmonized perfectly with his own sentimental disposition; a fact which seems strange, at first blush, but which is very common: small men love tall women, and small women large men; loquacious folk like those who say little; gourmands never dine satisfactorily except with those who are abstemious; the strong form alliances with the weak; men of genius select wives who attend strictly to their household duties; female authors rarely have men of intellect for their husbands; ostentatious people cannot live comfortably except with those who make no pretensions; knaves consort with men of probity; the most sentimental women often love the most frivolous men, and the most loyal of the one sex will give

her heart to the most fickle of the other; lastly, libertines pursue innocence, and innocence often yields to the seductions of a ne'er-do-well. Extremes meet, contrasts are drawn together, and a painter finds his most beautiful effects in the opposition of light and shadow.

"Well," said Dubourg, when Frédéric joined him at the appointed place; "what news?"

"Why, not very good."

"Doesn't your father want you to travel?"

"Oh! yes, he has consented."

"In that case, I don't see why everything isn't all right."

"But—he—he isn't willing——"

"Go on."

"He isn't willing that I should travel with you."

"Why not?"

"Because—he says——"

"He says—— Well, go on."

"He says that you are a—reprobate."

"Why, he has never seen me more than three times!"

"It seems that somebody has talked to him about you."

"There are always people who make it their business to slander innocence. Do you know that, if monsieur le comte were not your father, I—— Although, after all, he is not far from right. But if he knew how thoroughly I have reformed! and how I have preached at myself since last night!—Well, what else?"

"He suggests as my travelling companion my former tutor, Monsieur Ménard."

"The idea of giving a tutor to a young man who is almost twenty-one! That sort of thing positively makes me ill! No matter; let us allow monsieur le comte to have his way; we will carry out our plans, all the same."

"How?"

"You won't be sorry to have me travel with you, will you?"

"Surely not."

"And I shall not be sorry to leave Paris for a time; that will give my creditors, who are always at my heels, a chance to rest a bit."

"But my father?"

"Don't you worry. Just don't say a word, and I will arrange matters so that—— By the way, what sort of a man is this tutor?"

"Oh! he's the best fellow in the world; but he's not a genius."

"So much the better."

"He thinks a great deal of a learned man."

"I'll talk Latin, Greek, English, to him; yes, and Chinese, if he doesn't understand it."

"I fancy that he has never travelled, except on the map."

"I'll tell him that I have been round the world."

"But it flatters him to be in the company of persons of high rank."

"I'll assume a rank that will be high enough for him."

"In heaven's name, what is your scheme?"

"I'll arrange it all, I tell you; go back to your father, and start off with your tutor. By the way, get all the money you can, for money is never a disadvantage when you're travelling; and be sure to let me know what time you are to start, and in what direction you are going."

The young men separated, Dubourg having told Frédéric where to send him word of the time at which he was to start, and having refused to divulge any of the details of his plan.

Let us leave them for a moment, while we make the acquaintance of Monsieur Ménard, of whom the young count has given us only a faint sketch, and whom it is essential to know before we travel in his company.

Monsieur Ménard was a man of about fifty years of age, very short and stout, and with a very fat face. He had a double chin, which was quite in harmony with a nose like a huge chestnut. Like Monsieur Tartufe, he had red ears and a florid complexion. His stomach was beginning to embarrass him a little, but his short legs, with their enormous calves, seemed strong enough to support an even heavier bulk.

Monsieur Ménard had passed almost the whole of his life in teaching young people; he had retained the mild and benign manners which a tutor employed in good society always adopts with his pupils. He was not a great scholar, but he was proud of what he did know, and was by no means insensible to praise. His narrow intellect had become even more confined by having no exercise except with children; but Monsieur Ménard was upright, kindly, and peaceably disposed; his only weakness was a tendency to feel that his stature was increased when he conversed with a lord, and his only fault a very pronounced fondness for the pleasures of the table, which was sometimes the occasion of a slight indisposition; not that he drank immoderately, but because he returned too often to a truffled turkey or a salmi of partridges.

The Comte de Montreville summoned Monsieur Ménard, who hastened to obey the summons and joyfully accepted the proposition that was made to him. To travel in a comfortable post chaise with the Comte de Montreville's son, with that one of his pupils who reflected the greatest credit on him! that was unexampled good fortune for the excellent tutor, who happened to be unemployed at the moment.

The count urged him to have an eye upon Frédéric, but not to thwart his caprices when it was simply a question of indulging in the follies characteristic of his years. As he was well pleased with his son's ready submission in the matter of a travelling companion, he determined to reward him by allowing him to go wherever he chose.

Everything being settled between the count and the two travellers, Monsieur de Montreville handed Monsieur Ménard a considerable sum of money, which was to be at Frédéric's disposal.

"Travel in a manner befitting your rank, my son," said the count; "but do not squander this money foolishly. I have succeeded, by leading always an orderly, regular life, in saving a considerable fortune in anticipation of your marriage; but you must not encroach upon your patrimony. If you need more money, however, Monsieur Ménard will let me know."

Frédéric promised to behave himself; but he had just written to Dubourg that he was to start the next morning, and that he should take the Lyon road.

A young man's preparations are soon made. Monsieur Ménard's took a little longer; like the prudent man he was, he did not take his place in the carriage until he had bestowed one of Lesage's pâtés in the box, and a bottle of madeira in his pocket.

At last, everything was ready. Frédéric was overjoyed to leave Paris and Madame Dernange. The poor boy fancied that she would regret him, and that his departure would make her miserable! He was certain to lose all such illusions after he had travelled a short time.

The carriage was waiting; the postilion was in the saddle. Frédéric pressed his father's hand to his heart, Monsieur Ménard bowed six times to the count and entered the chaise backward in order to have the honor of continuing to bow. Frédéric jumped into his seat, the postilion cracked his whip, and they were off for Italy.

IV

A NOVEL WAY OF MAKING ACQUAINTANCES.—BARON POTOSKI

The two travellers were not far from Paris, when the conversation between them began to flag; at the outset, Monsieur Ménard expressed to Frédéric his very great pleasure in being in his company, and Frédéric thanked him; then they admired the view at several points. But soon the younger man's thoughts reverted to Madame Dernange and other disloyal fair ones, and he became pensive and silent; whereupon Monsieur Ménard turned his attention to the pâté with which he had taken care to supply himself, and entered upon a conversation with it, which he interrupted only to say a word or two to the bottle of madeira.

"I imagine that we shall have a delightful trip," said Frédéric, emerging from his reverie.

"I agree with you, monsieur le comte; we have everything requisite for it," replied Monsieur Ménard, with a smile, making haste to swallow what he had in his mouth. "If monsieur le comte would like to taste this pâté—it is delicious."

"No, thanks, my dear Ménard; I am not hungry yet."

"As monsieur le comte pleases."

"Oh! I beg you, no *monsieur le comte* between ourselves; call me Frédéric, that is much better."

"But, monsieur le comte—when we are travelling—at public-houses—it is well that people should know that they have the honor——"

"Yes, of course; so that they can make us pay four times the usual prices. I tell you again that I want to avoid all those ceremonies which add nothing to the pleasure of a journey."

"You will at least allow me to call you Monsieur de Montreville; for monsieur le comte your father might be angry if he knew that you travelled incognito."

"By the way, how much money did he give you?"

"Eight thousand francs, monsieur."

"Eight thousand francs! that's none too much!"

"Oh! Monsieur de Montreville, surely it is enough, when we have in addition a comfortable carriage and good horses. We are not going to the world's end. And then, you know, your father said that we could ask him for more, in an emergency."

"True; besides, we're not going to do anything foolish."

"And it would be imprudent to carry a larger sum on a journey. We are going to Italy, and that country is infested with brigands; between Rome and Naples, especially, they say the highroads are very dangerous. When we get there, we must take every precaution."

Frédéric made no reply; he was thinking of Dubourg, and was surprised that he had heard nothing from him. They were already nine leagues from Paris, on a very fine road, where it was difficult to imagine any possible mishap.

Suddenly the loud cracking of a postilion's whip announced that there were other travellers behind them. Frédéric looked back, and saw a small berlin coming up at a gallop. The clatter drew rapidly nearer, indicating that the berlin was overtaking them and would soon pass them by. A cloud of dust enveloped them, but the road was so wide that there was no need for them to turn out. But just as they expected to see the berlin whirl by, it collided with their carriage; and the shock was so violent that the post chaise was overturned beside the ditch, into which Monsieur Ménard was thrown headlong, shrieking at the top of his voice.

The berlin stopped. The postilion of the chaise reviled the other postilion, calling him fool and blockhead and drunkard, for running into him on a road where three carriages could easily pass. The other postilion limited his reply to a sneering laugh, which inflamed his confrère's wrath. Frédéric, who was not injured, went to Monsieur Ménard, to ascertain what his condition was. He proved to be more frightened than hurt; he felt himself all over, straightened his wig, and kept repeating that the fall would certainly upset his digestion.

Meanwhile, the postilion of the berlin had dismounted; after exchanging a few words with his passenger, he, hat in hand, approached our travellers, who were still in the ditch, and, after apologizing for his awkwardness, said to them that Baron Ladislas Potoski, Palatine of Rava and Sandomir, requested permission to come in person to inquire for their welfare, and to offer them such assistance as was in his power.

When he heard the postilion declaim the name and titles of his passenger, Monsieur Ménard scrambled out of the ditch, and removed from under his waistcoat one end of his ruff, which his fall had rumpled.

"Tell your master that we appreciate his courtesy," said Frédéric; "but that it is unnecessary for him to put himself out; I think that the accident will have no serious results."

"But there's something broken in our chaise," said Monsieur Ménard; "and we might avail ourselves of Monsieur le Palatine Pota—Poto—Potiouski's offer, to reach the next village."

The tutor had not finished speaking, when the soi-disant Polish nobleman alighted from his berlin and walked toward them, with his hand on his hip, affecting a most dignified air and carriage. Frédéric looked up and recognized Dubourg; he was on the point of laughing outright, when his friend forestalled him by running toward him, exclaiming:

"I cannot be mistaken! What a fortunate meeting! It surely is Monsieur Frédéric de Montreville!"

And he threw his arms about Frédéric, who also feigned surprise and cried:

"What! why! it is Monsieur de—Monsieur du——"

"Baron Potoski!" whispered Dubourg.

"Monsieur le Baron Potoski!"

During this recognition, which took place on the edge of the ditch, Monsieur Ménard outdid himself in salutations, pulling Frédéric gently by his coat-tails the while, in order to lead him back to the highroad, which seemed to him a more suitable place for his introduction to the noble Pole.

At last, Dubourg turned to Ménard, and said, addressing Frédéric:

"Have I the honor of seeing monsieur le comte your father?" And he bestowed upon the tutor the most gracious and most dignified smile imaginable.

"No," said Frédéric; "but he has been a second father to me. Allow me to present Monsieur Ménard, my former tutor."

"Monsieur Ménard!" said Dubourg, assuming an expression of unfeigned admiration, and gazing at the tutor as one might gaze at Voltaire. "What! can it be that this is Monsieur Ménard? Peste! I have often heard of him; the *primus inter pares* of tutors! How delighted I am to make his acquaintance! *Tandem felix*, Monsieur Ménard, since I know you."

Monsieur Ménard did not know where he was; this deluge of courtesies and flattery from the Palatine of Rava and Sandomir so confused and delighted him, that his profuse salutations would have landed him in the ditch a second time, had not Frédéric caught him opportunely.

Dubourg finally put an end to the poor man's embarrassment by taking his hand and pressing it hard.

"What a great honor you do me, monsieur le baron," he stammered.—"So you are acquainted with Baron Potoski?" he added, turning to Frédéric.

"Acquainted with him!" was the reply, accompanied by a smile; "why, we are close friends. Dear Dubourg!"

"What do you say? Dubourg?" cried Ménard.

"Yes," hastily interposed the pretended baron; "that is the name I went by at Paris, where I was compelled to maintain the strictest incognito, being intrusted by my government with a secret and very delicate mission."

"I understand, I understand," said Ménard.

"Continue to call me Dubourg, my dear Frédéric; that was my name when I first knew you, and it will always be dear to me."

While Ménard went to inspect the overturned vehicle, Frédéric said to Dubourg, in an undertone:

"The method you employed to join me was a little violent, do you know? You nearly killed poor Ménard and me."

"It's that blockhead of a postilion's fault: I told him to upset me as we passed you; but the rascal preferred to upset you. That annoys me the more, because I expected to get a seat in your carriage, whereas I must offer to take you in mine, which is a very different matter. Never mind: let me talk and act. I see already that it will be easy enough to pull the wool over this poor Ménard's eyes. But be ready to second me, and back up what I say, when it's necessary. Above all things, don't forget that I am Baron Potoski, Palatine of Rava and Sandomir. You nearly spoiled everything by calling me Dubourg; luckily, I found a way to straighten that out; but don't make any more such blunders, or I shall be obliged to travel without you, and I assure you I shall not go very far."

Ménard returned and announced that one of the axles of the chaise was broken, and that it could not be repaired before the next morning.

"Well, messieurs," said Dubourg, "you must do me the honor to ride in my carriage; we will stop at the first village and pass the night there, while the local blacksmith repairs your chaise."

This plan being adopted, they left the postilion to bring the vehicle to the village, and our three travellers entered the Polish baron's berlin. It was a wretched old affair, the lining patched and soiled, and so badly hung that the passengers were jolted terribly.

Frédéric could not restrain a smile as he stepped into the palatine's equipage; but Dubourg hastened to say to Monsieur Ménard, who took his place modestly on the front seat and had not as yet done more than glance furtively at his surroundings:

"This carriage is older than we are; it belonged to my grandfather. It was in this same carriage that he rescued Stanislas Leczinski, when he was pursued by his rival, Augustus, whose cause was espoused by the Czar, while Charles XII of Sweden was the protector of Stanislas.—But you know all that better than I do, Monsieur Ménard, for you are a scholar."

"Oh! monsieur le baron."

"To return to this carriage—all my family revere it as I do; it is a family carriage. When my father left Cracow, during a period of civil commotion, this modest berlin contained six millions in gold and jewels; it was the remnant of his fortune, with which he intended to live in retirement in Bretagne, where they have delicious milk and butter."

At this point, Frédéric, who had bitten his lips at the six millions, began to cough to overcome his desire to laugh, while Monsieur Ménard looked at the carriage with the utmost respect.

"You will appreciate, Monsieur Ménard," pursued Dubourg, wiping his forehead with a silk handkerchief, which he had thrust into his waistcoat to give himself the aspect of a foreigner, "you will appreciate that one becomes

strongly attached to a carriage which recalls such honorable memories. I know that it is not modern, and that it might be hung better; twenty times, my steward has talked of having it repainted, and of having it newly lined inside, but I always refuse. This seat, which I now occupy, was once occupied by King Stanislas; that in which you sit, by a princess of Hungary; and I confess, Monsieur Ménard, that I am determined not to change this Utrecht velvet, which has had the honor of supporting those eminent persons."

"I share your feelings in that respect to the full, monsieur le baron," said Ménard, who, enchanted as he was to travel with two men of distinguished rank, was unable to contain himself when he was told that a princess of Hungary had once sat where he was sitting. "This carriage must be very dear to you; and I assure you, monsieur le baron, that it rides very nicely, and that I find it very comfortable——"

At that moment a vicious jolt threw Monsieur Ménard forward, almost into his pupil's lap; but he added, clinging to the door:

"*Ubi plura intent in carmine; non ego paucis offendar maculis.*"

"*Vitam impendere vero*," rejoined Dubourg.

Frédéric looked out of the door, coughing harder than ever; while Monsieur Ménard said, with a bow:

"I never doubted it, monsieur le baron."

"As I am obliged to remain incognito," said Dubourg, "I have not brought any of my suite with me, and I confess that I am not inclined to complain; I detest all the pomp and parade and etiquette which are the accompaniments of high station. When I travel, I lay it all aside; I am the man of nature, and I play the part of a simple observer. But, by the way, my dear Frédéric, I haven't asked you yet where you are going; would it be presumptuous in me to inquire?"

"No, indeed, my friend; I am leaving Paris because I found there only coquettish or heartless women, who do not understand my way of loving."

"Well, my dear fellow, the trouble is that your way of loving is no longer fashionable! However, this is mere amorous petulance, I see; you are still a little romantic, a little sentimental.—We must cure Frédéric of all such nonsense, eh, Monsieur Ménard?"

"That doesn't come within my functions, monsieur le baron; besides, we must overlook a little something; Seneca says, you know: *Non est magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiæ.*"

"That is very true," Dubourg replied; "the greatest men have had their weak points. Alexander drank too much; Antiochus dressed as Bacchus to please Cleopatra; Æneas consulted the Cumæan sibyl; the Emperor Maximilian died from eating too much melon. So it's not at all surprising that Frédéric should have a too sensitive heart."

Monsieur Ménard bowed to monsieur le baron, who had given him a small specimen of his erudition; which added not a little to the respect he had already conceived for him.

"I have no definite plan," said Frédéric; "I intend, however, to visit the countries which recall interesting events, or which have given birth to illustrious men. One loves to tread the ground from which the genius sprang that has outlived so many generations. In all that surrounds us, we fancy that we recognize the great man who, by his writings, his feats of arms, or his virtues, made his birthplace famous. In a word, my friend, we are going, first of all, to Italy."

"What! can it be? Why, my own purpose, like yours, is to see a little of the world, in order to add some new light to my poor stock of knowledge. What a delightful idea! Suppose we make the journey together?"

"Gladly, my dear baron! it will be most agreeable to me, I assure you."

"Upon my honor, I am grateful to the chance that led to our meeting! What an unexpected pleasure to travel with my friend the Comte de Montreville and the learned Monsieur Ménard, to compare our reflections concerning the places we visit, to be enlightened by the observations, the friendship, and the learning of so distinguished a teacher!"

Ménard outdid himself in reverences, and began to express his thanks; but Dubourg continued earnestly, giving him no time to reply:

"What a delight to visit ancient Rome with you—and magnificent Genoa! to climb with Monsieur Ménard to the summit of Vesuvius, and even to go down into the crater, if there is no danger! How pleasant to view, in a friend's company, the tomb of Virgil and the Grotto of the Dog, and to ascend, with a profound scholar, the Tarpeian rock! What pleasures await us in Switzerland, the home of William Tell! that cradle of liberty, whose morals have retained all their purity amid revolutionary tempests! There we shall receive the most touching hospitality in every village; we shall eat cheese there, Monsieur Ménard—oh! such cheese! I don't undertake to say, however, that it's as good as the cheese in Bretagne, for there's nothing like that; a charming country, Bretagne, studded with woods, fields, and rich pastures. Ah! what fine cows they have there, Monsieur Ménard!"

Frédéric nudged Dubourg, to make him leave Bretagne, whither he constantly returned with the affection of a native.

"In Switzerland," he continued, "one often eats cheeses fifteen or twenty years old; the excellent Helvetians know the secret of keeping them for an indefinite time."

"They must be even better than our roquefort," said Ménard, who felt sure of his ground when eating was the subject of conversation.

"Oh! I promise you they are; compared with the old Swiss cheeses, our roquefort is no better than neufchâtel. However, Monsieur Ménard, if you travel with me, I shall hope to give you cheese to eat more than once."

"Ah! monsieur le baron!"

"We will visit the glaciers, we will ascend the Saint-Gothard, and the Rigi, which you have to climb on all fours. What magnificent views we shall have! And when we go down into the canton of Les Grisons, we will botanize. Monsieur Ménard will gather herbs. We will watch the Swiss maidens glean; they wear very short skirts—and we shall see some fine sights!"

"Well, my dear master, what do you think of our plan?" queried Frédéric. The former tutor was enchanted with it: to travel with a man of such high rank, and so learned and agreeable, as Baron Potoski, seemed to him great good fortune; and although the hard cushions and the jolting of the berlin made him black and blue in spots, he felt brave enough to travel a thousand leagues in a carriage which had held King Stanislas, and in a seat which a princess of

Hungary had occupied.

"Most certainly I see no reason why we should not travel with monsieur le baron," he said; "and at the first post-office I will write to monsieur your father and tell him of our fortunate meeting; he cannot fail to approve our plan."

"No, no!" cried Dubourg; "on the contrary, you must not write a single word to monsieur le comte. As I have told you, I am travelling incognito; I don't want anybody to know where I am. My government desires to appoint me ambassador to Turkey, but I am not at all desirous of that distinction. Monsieur le comte might inadvertently let the cat out of the bag, and all France would soon know my whereabouts; it will be much better not to say anything."

"I agree with you," said Frédéric. "What's the use of saying anything about it to my father? He left me free to go wherever I please, and asked Monsieur Ménard to go with me as a friend, not as a mentor. Surely, my father would be exceedingly pleased to know that I am travelling with monsieur le baron; but in his delight at learning that I am in such company, he would undoubtedly betray your incognito, and you would be obliged to leave us."

"Yes, I understand," said Ménard; "and yet—if——"

Dubourg, seeing that the tutor still retained some scruples, made haste to produce his horn snuff-box, which he offered to Frédéric, looking at him with a meaning expression.

"Do you recognize this, my dear Frédéric? it's the one I showed you at Paris."

"Yes, I recognize it perfectly," said Frédéric, with no idea of Dubourg's purpose; while Monsieur Ménard glanced at the snuff-box and waited impatiently for the baron to explain himself.

"Ah! it's a very precious object in my eyes!" said Dubourg, taking a pinch of snuff. "You have no suspicion, Monsieur Ménard, to whom this modest snuff-box belonged?"

"No, monsieur le baron."

"Modest as it is, I would not exchange it for one of solid gold. It was the King of Prussia's snuff-box, Monsieur Ménard."

"The King of Prussia's?"

"Yes, monsieur; the great Frederick, who, as you know, was very fond of snuff and often carried it in his pocket; still, he had snuff-boxes, which were always very simple, like everything he carried. He himself gave this one to my father, from whom I had it."

"Ah! monsieur le baron, if I might dare to crave the honor——"

And Ménard respectfully put out two fingers to take a pinch of snuff from the Prussian king's snuff-box, which Dubourg smilingly offered him.

Ménard took a pinch with becoming humility. He stuffed his nose full of snuff which he considered delicious, and, when he sneezed, the poor man fancied that he bore some slight resemblance to the King of Prussia. He had lost his head completely; the fumes of grandeur mingled with those of the snuff, and at the third sneeze he cried, saluting Baron Potoski with renewed deference:

"It certainly is not necessary to write to monsieur le comte."

V

A VILLAGE INN, AND WHAT BEFELL OUR TRAVELLERS THERE

At nightfall, our travellers arrived at a village of wretched aspect. Dubourg ordered his postilion to set them down at the best inn; but as there was only one in the place, they must needs content themselves with that.

The inn in question was rarely patronized by travellers in carriages; pedestrians were its usual guests.

Frédéric was disinclined to stop in that wretched hamlet, but Dubourg insisted upon passing the night there. He had reasons of his own for not wishing to go farther with his berlin; and as Monsieur Ménard was hungry, and the remains of his pâté had been left in the post chaise, he endorsed Dubourg's suggestion.

The carriage drove into a great yard filled with mud and dungheaps. Half a score of ducks were splashing in a pool, apparently disputing possession of it with some geese which waddled majestically around the banks. Three pigs went grunting into every corner of the enclosure, an old lame horse was quenching his thirst at a trough, on the edge of which perched several hens, which laid their eggs in the house, in the street, or in the yard, as it happened, considering probably that there was little to choose between those places. Lastly, to complete the picture, a number of rabbits showed their heads from time to time under the hedge of a garden which had been turned into a warren; then fled in alarm at the barking of a huge dog, whose duty it seemed to be to watch the other beasts.

There was hardly room for the berlin to pass through a gateway, whose dilapidated gate had not been closed for a long while. On one side the wheels sank into a deep rut, on the other they had to pass over a dungheap; so that, for a moment, Monsieur Ménard feared that the Palatine of Rava's venerable berlin would be overturned, and himself with it. But he got off with nothing worse than a fright. On the arrival of the carriage, the rabbits and pigs fled, the ducks quacked, the geese and hens flew away, and the dog barked under the travellers' noses; while a dozen or more of idlers, and as many peasant women, who formed substantially the whole population of the village, stood about the gateway to see the occupants of the carriage alight.

"Where in the devil is he taking us?" said Frédéric, putting his head out of the window, and instantly drawing it in again; for the wheels had stirred up the filth which covered the ground and thereby caused it to emit an odor ill adapted to attract the travellers.

"Let us hope that we are not in front of the kitchen," said Monsieur Ménard, holding his nose.

"Don't be alarmed, messieurs," said Dubourg; "we shall be very comfortable here; we must not judge by appearances, you know. I have stopped at this inn, and I remember that they give you excellent rabbit stews and omelets."

Although it might seem surprising that a palatine should be fond of such commonplace dishes, Monsieur Ménard at once considered the yard less offensive; and, alighting on the heels of Dubourg, who had stepped out on the dungheap, he looked about on all sides, trying to discover the kitchen.

The innkeeper appeared, with his cap over his left ear; he did not salute the new arrivals, for, being accustomed to entertain only carters or peasants, who care little for polite manners, he had contracted a habit of treating all strangers with a certain familiarity; and the sight of a carriage made little impression on him, because it was not to such guests that he looked for the support of his establishment.

He was a little man of fifty years or thereabout, with a slight limp, and a bloated nose which seemed to denote intemperate habits.

"Are you going to drink a glass of wine, messieurs?" he said, addressing Ménard, who still had his nose in the air, trying to catch the scent of a rabbit stew, and to whom the innkeeper's manner seemed lacking in respect.

"Take us to your best room, my good man," said Dubourg; "we are going to sup and sleep here. Set everyone at work; let the fire blaze and the spits turn, and serve our supper as soon as may be."

"Yes," interposed Ménard, tapping the host's shoulder patronizingly; "and understand, my friend, that you have the honor of entertaining Monsieur le Comte Frédéric de Montreville, Monsieur le Baron Ladislas Potoski, Palatine of Rava and Sandomir, and Monsieur Benoît Ménard, master of arts and eminent professor."

"I shall never have room enough to put up so many people," said the innkeeper, while Dubourg reproved Ménard for betraying his incognito and begged him to be more discreet in future.

"Holà! Goton! Goton!" cried mine host, walking toward the garden; "come and show these gentlemen into the house, while I look after the horses; and tell my wife to see about getting supper."

Mademoiselle Goton appeared; she was a tall, stoutly-built damsel of twenty, dark, with black eyes, and a sunburned complexion; her features were irregular, but her retroussé nose and her fine teeth, which she showed constantly, her mouth being rather large, made her face decidedly attractive. If, instead of a short stuff skirt, a waist of coarse blue woollen cloth, and a cotton cap, Goton had worn a dress which set off her figure; if her skin had been treated with almond paste, and her hair by a hair-dresser, she would undoubtedly have made many conquests in Paris.

"Will you follow me, messieurs?" she said, smiling at the travellers; for Mademoiselle Goton smiled very often, because it added to her beauty; and in the smallest village, no less than in the largest city, a woman always knows how to make the most of her advantages. Lacking a mirror, a fountain is sufficient to train the simplest-minded.

Dubourg estimated the servant's qualities at a glance, and, as they followed her, he said to himself:

"I will amuse Ménard with the supper, which shall be a good one, if I can manage it. I can pass the time pleasantly with Mademoiselle Goton. Ah! if I only could find some sentimental beauty to engage Frédéric's attention! Failing a new passion, I will talk to him of Madame Dernange and all his faithless charmers in Paris; that will serve to make his evening pass quickly."

The best room in the inn was the one usually occupied by the carters and peasants. Four itinerant merchants, who had arrived an hour before our illustrious travellers, were seated at a table, drinking, and discussing their business affairs.

The arrival of three new guests in no wise disturbed the four men. They glanced at them, and continued their conversation.

"I'll set plates for you here," said Goton, pointing to a table covered with a glazed cloth.

"No, no," said Dubourg; "we can't eat our supper here; you may serve us in one of the rooms where we are to sleep."

"But this is the eating-room."

"That may be," said Ménard; "but monsieur le comte and monsieur le bar—at all events, we don't choose to eat here."

These words caused the peddlers to raise their heads, and they scrutinized the travellers, laughing contemptuously among themselves. Ménard, fearing that he had offended them, and dreading a scene, was already in the passage, where he waited for the servant to come; while Dubourg, who was not long-suffering, eyed the four drinkers in his turn. Frédéric, his mind still engrossed by his memories, paid little heed to what was taking place.

"You see, Goton," said one of the four, with a sneering smile, "these gents are too swell to eat in the same room with us. *Jarni*! we must take care and not look at 'em too close; it might offend 'em."

"Nobody spoke to you," said Dubourg; "try not to be too insolent, or you may be sorry for it."

"Oho! there's one of 'em who means to show his teeth!"

"For heaven's sake, monsieur le baron," said Ménard, putting his nose in at the door, "don't let this go any further! These gentlemen certainly have no intention of——"

"Hallo! he's a baron!" exclaimed another of the peddlers; "I took him for a Swiss liniment-maker, with his silk handkerchief across his breast."

"Did you see their carriage?" said a third; "it's an old shack I wouldn't put my donkey in!"

"The wretches! to talk so about King Stanislas's berlin!" said Ménard; but he made the remark in such a low tone that no one suspected that he had spoken.

"Once more, hold your peace!" said Dubourg, "or we'll teach you whom you have to deal with."

"Indeed!" said the peddlers, brandishing their cudgels; "perhaps we might teach you something more."

Frédéric, who had been silent thus far, took a pair of pistols from his pocket, and, walking toward the table at which the four men were seated, he said calmly:

"Messieurs, whatever may be the titles we bear, we are men, and we are quite able to prove it; we are not accustomed to using clubs, but here is something that will make matters even between us. Everyone knows how to fire a pistol. Which of you would like to begin with me?"

"Yes," said Dubourg, producing in his turn a pair of pistols of heavier calibre; "and this is for the man who comes forward next."

At sight of the pistols, the peddlers changed color and dropped their cudgels; those who presume too far upon their strength to insult those whom they deem weaker than themselves, generally appear very cowardly and foolish when confronted by such arguments.

Goton shrieked when she saw the fire-arms; the innkeeper came limping into the room, and Monsieur Ménard, proposing to retreat to the end of the passage, where it was quite dark, collided with the hostess, who was coming to find out what was happening in the living-room.

The hostess, whose acquaintance we have not made as yet, was a woman of fifty, short of stature, and almost as broad as she was tall. Her corpulence had within a short time increased to such a degree that she could hardly walk from her desk to the kitchen; even so, she had to make a judicious and abundant use of flour to keep herself from chafing when she walked. This difficulty in moving made her very sedentary; she passed almost all her time in an armchair which the village carpenter had made for her, of sufficient breadth to admit her enormous bulk. This mode of life naturally caused her embonpoint to make rapid progress from day to day. It was beginning to become disquieting, and the innkeeper, limping as he did, took a long time to walk around his spouse.

She had heard Goton's outcry and her husband's exclamations, and, suspecting that something extraordinary was taking place, she had left her broad armchair and waddled along the corridor leading to the living-room. As this corridor was narrow, her body closed it hermetically and rubbed against the partitions on each side; so that it was impossible for anyone to pass through in the opposite direction, unless by jumping over her head or crawling between her legs.

It was this enormous mass with which Monsieur Ménard collided when he attempted to leave the field of battle, all his youthful vigor being restored by the sight of the pistols. Despite the violence with which the tutor hurled himself against her, the hostess did not waver; solid as a rock, and upheld, too, by the walls of the corridor, the bulky dame contented herself with crying in a shrill falsetto:

"What's all this? who is it?"

Ménard, still dazed by the shock, was determined none the less to force a passage, and he returned toward the person he had struck, hoping that she had moved to one side or the other; he turned to the right and ran his nose against a breast which rivalled that of the Hottentot Venus; he stepped back and turned to the left, and collided with an arm that would have darkened a window.

"Mon Dieu! where am I?" exclaimed poor Ménard, who had no idea of what he had come in contact with, and, still trying to go forward, lowered his head like a ram; while the hostess cried, louder than ever:

"Who is it? what's he trying to do? where does he want to go?"

Her shrieks attracted the attention of the travellers, peace having been restored in the living-room, since Frédéric and Dubourg had exhibited their pistols; the four peddlers had become more amiable and had mumbled some apologies, with which the young men were content, having no desire for a quarrel with such adversaries. So general attention was now directed to the corridor.

"It's my wife's voice," said the innkeeper; "something very funny must have happened to make her leave her chair!"

He hurried out into the passage with Goton, who carried a light; Dubourg and Frédéric followed them, and they discovered the hostess, who was shrieking louder than ever, because the sound of approaching footsteps had increased Ménard's terror; he had resolved to pass at any cost, and, being unable to force a passage on either side, had dropped on his hands and knees and tried to crawl between the corpulent dame's legs. But she, determined that the unknown, whom she believed to be a thief, should not escape, could devise no better way of detaining him than to sit upon him; so that she was fairly astride Ménard, when light was thrown on the scene.

Goton laughed uproariously, and the innkeeper was petrified with amazement. Frédéric and Dubourg tried to discover the meaning of that amusing tableau.

"I can't stand it any longer," gasped Ménard, in a dying voice.

"I've got him! he's caught!" exclaimed the hostess triumphantly.

The poor fellow was so effectively caught, that he would have been stifled if not rescued. But the innkeeper, jealous of his chaste better half, whom he regarded as the most beautiful creature to be found within a hundred leagues, instantly stooped and pulled Ménard from under his wife's skirts, swearing roundly.

"You villain! sacrebleu! what was you doing under there? ten thousand eyes!"

"Oh! he didn't do any harm, I promise you, ducky!" said the hostess sweetly, to allay her husband's suspicions; while Ménard, restored at last to the light of day, struggled to his feet, with wig awry and distorted features.

"Look ye, my friend," continued the innkeeper, "you didn't go in there, sacrebleu! to look for violets, did you?"

Ménard looked from one to another, with a dazed expression; he had not fully recovered himself. Dubourg succeeded in adjusting matters to everybody's satisfaction; he divined why Ménard was trying to get away, so he dispelled the host's suspicions, and reassured his wife concerning the quarrel in the living-room. Then he ordered Goton to show them to their bedrooms; which she did after the landlady had concluded to return to her armchair and thus uncork the passage.

The best quarters that they could give our three friends consisted of two very dirty rooms, with the ceiling rafters exposed, which cats and spiders seemed in the habit of occupying in company with the guests of the house. In each room there was a wretched bed, partly surrounded by blue and white curtains resembling in design the common salad-bowl we see in the country. Both beds were more than five feet high.

"These are modest quarters," said Frédéric, with a smile; "but in war time we must take what comes, and it's the same when we travel, eh, my dear Ménard?"

"To be sure; a night is soon passed, and these beds look comfortable."

"We shall need a ladder to climb into them."

"I see only two beds, monsieur le comte."

"Oh! don't worry about me," said Dubourg; "I shall not go to bed; I have letters to write and despatches to send; and I will finish the night in a chair."

"But I don't see any chairs, monsieur le baron."

"Never mind—a chair or a bench. When a man has slept in camp, he's not hard to please. But the supper is a long while coming; I'll take a look at the kitchen."

Dubourg went downstairs, and Frédéric walked to a window which looked on the fields. The moon was shining

on the village, where the most perfect quiet reigned. The young man mused upon the contrast between life in Paris and in that hamlet; he reflected that, at that moment, when the villagers had all retired, the fashionable inhabitants of the city were at the play or at social festivities, exhibiting their fine clothes and jewels, and seeking pleasure. But need one leave the city to find striking contrasts? In the house where people are dancing on the first floor, on the second there is mourning for the death of a husband or father; on the third, a young man is making a passionate declaration of love to his sweetheart; on the fourth, a drunkard is beating his wife; on the fifth, a gambler is filling his pockets with gold preparatory to going out; and under the eaves, a poor girl passes the night in toil to earn bread for her mother.

While Frédéric abandoned himself to such reflections, Monsieur Ménard inspected the beds, and was pained to find that what he had deemed at first sight so soft and comfortable was but a wretched mattress, and a straw bed itself nearly four feet thick.

"What an insane idea it is of these villagers to have such enormous straw beds!" said Ménard, as he examined the sheets, which scratched his hand. "And I fancied that I was going to sink into a soft feather-bed! These are terribly poor sheets! And yet, monsieur le baron says that one is well taken care of here! I shall go to bed in my drawers. God grant that the supper may make up for the rest!"

Dubourg had gone down to speak to his postilion, with whom he settled his account, ordering him to leave the place before dawn; for he had only three louis left of the twelve Frédéric had lent him, and he was not anxious to keep a carriage that he could not pay for. That business adjusted, he prowled about Mademoiselle Goton, to whom he wished to say a few words. The servant was inclined to look favorably on Dubourg, because he had borne himself gallantly with the peddlers; for a courageous act pleases a country wench no less than a *petite-maîtresse*; but Goton had to help her master in the kitchen, and then serve the four men in the living-room, who seemed disposed to pass the night drinking, and to postpone their departure till daybreak.

They laughingly toyed with the buxom servant, who had much ado to defend herself from the familiarities of those gentry; but Goton was accustomed to fighting with such clowns: she boxed the ears of one and kicked another; she pinched and scratched, and the fellows found her all the more seductive.

Being busily occupied thus in all directions, Goton could do no more than whisper a word of hope to Dubourg, giving him to understand that the peddlers would be gone at daybreak, her employers asleep, and herself more at liberty. This promise delighted our friend; he was talking with Goton at the foot of the staircase, and gave her a resounding kiss. The girl ran away; but, on looking up, Dubourg saw Ménard, who had come out, with a candle in his hand, to ascertain whether they were likely to have any supper, and was decidedly amazed to see the Palatine of Rava embracing a dishwasher.

Dubourg, who was never disconcerted, went to meet him, saying:

"The Emperor Heliogabalus rewarded the cook who invented a new dish; I embrace the person who informs me that our supper is ready."

Ménard asked nothing more; he went back to Frédéric with Dubourg, and Goton laid the table in one of the rooms.

"Now to the table, and *vive la gaieté*!" said Dubourg, more at ease since he was certain that he would soon be rid of his carriage. Ménard responded to the invitation by a gracious smile, and Frédéric finally decided to leave the moon and turn his mind to earthly affairs.

"Let us taste the wine first of all," said Dubourg; "is it the best, my child?"

"Yes, monsieur; it's the best, for we haven't got any other."

"It's a little sour," said Ménard, making a wry face.

"We have some white that's sweeter," said Goton.

"Go and get us some of the white, my dear; don't spare anything; you don't have people like us to supper every day."

"No, indeed," said Ménard; "and we will hope that the rabbit stew is made with that understanding."

Dubourg served the stew; but the innkeeper, disturbed by his wife's adventure in the corridor, had allowed it to burn, and Goton, being constantly beset by the four peddlers, had put the onions in too late and had not grated the bacon. Dubourg vainly insisted on declaring that it had a delicious odor; Ménard said nothing, because he dared not contradict monsieur le baron; but his face grew darker with every mouthful.

"What infernal kind of a stew is this?" said Frédéric, pushing away the plate that Dubourg persisted in offering him. "A rabbit that has had nothing to eat but cabbage, raw onions, and rancid lard; and a detestable burned taste, in addition."

"It can't be denied," said Ménard, "that it doesn't come up to what monsieur le baron told us."

"What do you expect, messieurs?" said Dubourg; "a cook must make mistakes sometimes. *Errare humanum est*; isn't that so, Monsieur Ménard?"

"A cook ought never *errare*, monsieur le baron."

"It's partly your fault, too. You disturbed his mind; why in the devil did you go prowling about under his wife's skirts?"

"I only wanted to get by, monsieur le baron."

"Only a husband should take that road, Monsieur Ménard."

"My intentions were pure, monsieur le baron."

"I never doubted it; but your position was shockingly equivocal."

"Monsieur le baron, in the temple of Apollo, the pythonesses, seated on the sacred tripod, received the prophetic exhalations under their robes."

"If my wife had seated herself on that tripod, Monsieur Ménard, I should have asked for a separation."

Goton put an end to this conversation by bringing an omelet and white wine.

"Were the gentlemen satisfied with the stew?" she asked.

"It was worse than the devil!" replied Frédéric.

"It was a total failure," said Ménard.

"My dear child," added Dubourg, "the rabbits in Bretagne don't smell so strong of cabbage. They have fine rabbits there; but here you have a very bad way of bringing them up."

"It would seem that monsieur le baron has passed a good deal of time in Bretagne?" said Ménard, respectfully putting out his hand to take a pinch of snuff from the King of Prussia's snuff-box, which Dubourg offered him.

"Yes, Monsieur Ménard; and I admit that I still have a weakness for that province. I have such delightful recollections of it! Ah! how lovely the sky is in Bretagne! And the fields—how pretty they are! What rich pastures, what enchanting groves! You can walk leagues and leagues without once leaving the leafy thickets and flower-grown paths which make the fields of Bretagne one endless garden."

"But Poland, monsieur le baron?"

"Oh! Poland has its good points, of course. Have you ever been there, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I have not had that honor, monsieur le baron."

"As you are not familiar with the country, I will talk with you often about it."

"It must be a very interesting country."

"Extremely interesting, and extremely picturesque; first of all, we have the Krapach Mountains, beside which Mont Cenis is no more than a little hillock."

"Oh, indeed! they are covered with snow, of course?"

"Almost all the year. I have a château on the summit of one of those mountains, where only chamois can keep their footing."

"But how do you reach your château, monsieur le baron?"

"I have had a winding staircase constructed inside the mountain; it cost me a hundred thousand francs, but it's a wonderful piece of work, and people come hundreds of miles to see it. I trust, Monsieur Ménard, that I shall have the pleasure of showing it to you, and of entertaining you for some time at my castle of Krapach. I will give you a glass of a certain tokay which came to me from Tekely's cellar; and you will tell me what you think of it."

"Ah! monsieur le baron, you overpower me. But it must be very cold at your château, is it not?"

"It used to be very cold, in truth, in the days of my ancestors; but, thanks to recent scientific discoveries, I have found a way of modifying the temperature—a very simple method, which answers my purposes perfectly."

"What is it, pray, monsieur le baron?"

"I have built a gasometer under the château; gas, as you know, makes the earth very warm; indeed, in some places directly over the pipes, I raise green peas in January.—What is it, my dear count? drink, drink, or you will choke!"

Frédéric had, in fact, much difficulty in listening to this discourse, which Dubourg delivered with imperturbable gravity, while Ménard listened with childlike confidence to every word uttered by the baron.

At that moment, the conversation was interrupted by a violent shock, followed by an ominous cracking.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Ménard; "what can that be? This house doesn't seem to be very solidly built."

"Can it be that they are firing cannon to celebrate our arrival in the village?" Dubourg asked Goton, who replied, with a laugh:

"Oh! no, monsieur; it ain't anything; it's only madame going to bed, that's all."

This explanation made the young men laugh; but Ménard was not satisfied until he was assured that the hostess slept on the same floor; he would not have consented to pass the night on the floor below a woman who shook the house whenever she moved; it was quite enough to remain under the same roof with her.

The white wine, being a little more palatable than the red, enabled them to eat an omelet with parsley, which Dubourg tried in vain to make them think was tarragon. For dessert there was nothing to offer the travellers except some Géromé cheese, which could have walked to the table unassisted at need, and the odor of which drove Frédéric from his seat. He went to bed in the other room, bidding the servant wake him early in the morning, as he had no desire to prolong his stay at the inn. Monsieur Ménard deemed it his duty to remain with the baron, who plied him with bumper after bumper and went into raptures over the taste of the cheese, which, he said, reminded him of what he had eaten in Switzerland, thereby putting an end to the ex-tutor's desire to lunch or sup in a chalet.

"Yes, Monsieur Ménard," said Dubourg; "if you should go to Gruyère, a small Swiss village noted for its cheeses, which are its only source of wealth, you would smell a league away the chalets in which they are made. When you have passed a night in one of them, you smell the cheese for a week, an excellent thing for the lungs. But you must feel the need of rest, Monsieur Ménard; pray go to bed. I propose to pass the night writing."

"Monsieur le baron, I shall never dare to take the liberty—before you——"

"Why not, pray? Diogenes went to bed in his tub, before Alexander; and Crates did not hesitate to show his rump to his fellow citizens."

"It is you who order me to do it, monsieur le baron."

"I don't order you to show me your rump, Monsieur Ménard; but I urge you to go to bed as if I weren't here."

Fatigue and the white wine combined to make sleep essential to Ménard, so he did not wait to be urged again; he went behind the flowered curtains, and prepared to retire. Meanwhile, Dubourg, seated at a table in a corner of the room, pretended to look over papers and take notes, but he was really waiting impatiently for the tutor to fall asleep, in order to give the postilion of the berlin the signal to go; for he was afraid that Ménard would wake early, and it would be very embarrassing if the carriage were not then at a safe distance from the village. For this reason, he was anxious to hasten the postilion's departure.

The gate was not closed; Goton alone would see what took place; Dubourg knew how to assure her discretion.

It was a quarter of an hour since Ménard had disappeared behind the curtains. Dubourg thought that he must be asleep, and was about to go downstairs, when he heard a suppressed groan from the direction of the bed.

"Aren't you feeling well, Monsieur Ménard?" he asked, partly opening the curtains.

What was his surprise to find poor Ménard, in shirt and drawers and a cotton nightcap, standing beside the bed, and trying in vain to reach the top with the aid of a chair which was too low to bring his short legs on a level with the

mattress.

"What, Monsieur Ménard! not in bed yet?"

"No, monsieur le baron; I have been trying in vain for ten minutes to climb up into my bed. Isn't it an outrage? I call it making fools of their guests to give them beds that reach the ceiling! Everybody isn't six feet tall; and unless one's a giant——"

"Come, come, don't get excited, Monsieur Ménard; why didn't you call me to help you?"

"Oh! monsieur le baron, I shouldn't have presumed to take the liberty."

"You were wrong, for you can't pass the whole night trying to climb into bed."

Without awaiting a reply, Dubourg bade Ménard stand on the chair; then, placing his hands upon a certain rotund portion of the professor's anatomy, he put forth all his strength to lift him into the bed.

"*Sic itur ad astra!*" he said.

"*Labor improbus omnia vincit*" rejoined Ménard, trying to seize his bolster.

"Ouf!" exclaimed Dubourg.

"I am there, monsieur le baron!" cried Ménard, delighted to be safely in bed at last.

"That's very lucky! Good-night!"

"A thousand thanks, monsieur le baron!"

When he left the bed, Dubourg was careful to remove the chair that stood beside it, thus making it certain that Ménard would not rise until he, Dubourg, chose. This precaution might result in placing the tutor in an unfortunate position; whether it did so, the sequel will show.

Ménard had not been in bed five minutes before he was snoring vociferously.

"Good! I am safe now," thought Dubourg; and, taking his light, he went down noiselessly into the innyard. As he passed the living-room, he glanced in: two of the peddlers were asleep on the table, the others were still drinking; but everything indicated that they would soon follow their companions' example.

Dubourg found his postilion, and, putting a five-franc piece in his hand, ordered him to start at once. In a very few minutes, the horses were harnessed, and the noble palatine's berlin was out of the village.

"But how are you going to manage about going away to-morrow?" queried Goton, who had just joined Dubourg in the yard.

"Oh! we have another carriage, an excellent post chaise, which is being repaired for us; as to what I have just done, I am going to tell you what you must say; do you understand, Goton?"

As he spoke, he slipped two five-franc pieces into the girl's pocket; it was a larger sum than the poor drudge often earned in six months at that wretched inn, and the sight of the two great coins made her as docile as a lamb.

"Oh! that's enough," she said, as Dubourg put his arms about her robust figure; "that's enough! I'll say whatever you want me to; anyway, that carriage was yours, and you could do what you please with it. *Jarni!* you tickle me! don't pinch so hard! Oh! what a man!"

"Where is your room, Goton?"

"My room? I haven't got any room; I sleep in the little barn over there, with the cow. *Dame!* I don't have anything but an old straw bed on the ground, because the missus says there's no use of wearing out sheets. But it ain't cold there, anyway; Bebelle keeps me warm."

"Who's Bebelle?"

"Why, she's our cow. Oh! she's so soft and warm! But how he pinches! Dieu! what a pincher you are!"

"Come to your room; we can talk better there; with you, Goton, the barn becomes a boudoir, and straw, feathers."

"What's a boudoir?"

"Come, and I'll tell you."

"And what about the peddlers?"

"They don't need you any more; haven't they paid their bills?"

"Yes. Anyway, master knows 'em."

"In that case, there's no need of your sitting up any longer."

"But suppose they should want anything?"

"Two of them are sound asleep already, and the two others will very soon be in the same condition. Come, I tell you; it's nonsense to sit up till daylight for them. You need sleep, Goton."

The servant was half vanquished. She ceased to resist Dubourg's arguments, and allowed him to lead her to the cow-barn, which they both entered, closing the door behind them. The door had no other fastening than a hook on the outside; but the girl slept there without fear, as there were no robbers thereabout.

But one of the peddlers was not asleep; he, too, was engrossed by thoughts of Goton, and he was waiting for his companions to lose themselves in slumber before attempting to join the seductive servant.

This man had noticed that one of the strangers was prowling about Goton, and it had irritated him; but he had not dared to watch him too closely, being still held in respect by the recollection of the pistols.

When all three of his comrades had their heads on the table, he rose softly and went out to look for Goton, knowing the location of her bedroom. He took no light, in order not to betray his whereabouts, and crept stealthily toward the cow-barn.

He was still some yards away, when he heard two voices saying some very pretty things to each other; he crept nearer, and grasped the thread of the conversation distinctly enough; for Dubourg and Goton, thinking that their only neighbors were animals, were talking together without restraint.

The peddler was furious, but how could he be revenged? He had no desire to pick a quarrel with Dubourg; it would be a waste of time to call the landlord, for that worthy man and his spouse always locked themselves in their room to avoid being disturbed; besides, who would dare to assume the task of getting the hostess out of bed? and, after all, what did it matter to them that a guest was with their servant? they probably did not consider themselves

responsible for Goton's virtue.

The peddler determined to play some trick on the amorous couple. He could think of nothing better than to hook the door on the outside, which he did very softly, then stole away, delighted with his exploit, and saying to himself:

"They won't get out of that place till someone lets 'em out; for the door's a stout one, and I defy 'em to break it down."

He joined his companions; day broke ere long, and their business required the peddlers to leave the inn. They were soon ready, and, as they shouldered their packs, they listened to their confrère's story of the trick he had played on the stranger. They all applauded him, being overjoyed to be revenged on a man who had refused to be frightened by their cudgels; and they went their way, laughing at the thought of the scene that would take place at the inn in the morning.

During these occurrences, Ménard did not continue in the same tranquil state in which we left him. The white wine, with which monsieur le baron had filled his glass so often, produced its due effect. Ménard woke; he turned over and put out his hand to find the chair, which he expected to use as a means of descending from his bed; for in such wretched inns there is never a night table. But to no purpose did he stretch out his arm and feel about in all directions. He could find no chair! In that case, how was he to climb down from that bed, which reached to the roof? yet he felt sure that it was becoming absolutely necessary. He listened, but could hear nothing; he put aside the curtains—the most profound darkness reigned in the room. Monsieur le baron must have gone to sleep in his chair, as he had planned to do; but, in any event, how could he presume to ask the Palatine of Rava to give him the—— No, he could never do that! On the other hand, to jump out of bed was to run the risk of hurting himself, or at least of not being able to get back. It was most embarrassing, and poor Ménard, sitting up in bed, could not decide what course to pursue.

Necessity knows no law, says an old proverb; besides, monsieur le baron was so kind and good-natured and obliging! This thought emboldened Ménard; he coughed, gently at first, then a little louder; and finally he ventured to call, in a low tone:

"Monsieur le baron—if you are not asleep, may I presume to ask you to assist me? I am sadly embarrassed, monsieur le baron."

But at that moment Baron Dubourg was with Goton, busily engaged in teaching her what a boudoir is, and that a garret, a thicket, a loft, a cave, a kitchen, a cellar, or a barn may deserve that name when one is in either of those places with one's love. And Goton understood the lesson perfectly, because she was quick-witted, and because Dubourg, who had had some experience, was an excellent teacher.

"Monsieur le baron must sleep very soundly," thought Ménard. "What a cursed place this is! this infernal bed, where I can't turn over without pricking my legs—I believe the mattress is stuffed with oat straw! Well, no matter what happens, I must try to slide down."

He had put one of his short legs over the edge of the bed, when he heard a tremendous uproar in the room; a chair was overturned, a jug that stood on it fell to the floor and broke, and a number of dark objects scuttled along the wall and went out through the door. Ménard was stiff with terror.

"Monsieur le baron, monsieur le baron!" he called, in a stifled voice; "is that you?"

There was no reply. The poor man had not the courage to leave the bed, but buried his head under the clothes; his fright causing him to lose all power of restraint, it soon became unnecessary for him to get out, and he fell asleep without being further disturbed; for it was neither thieves nor hobgoblins who had caused the tumult in his chamber, but simply two cats, which, finding the door open, had paid a visit to their usual place of abode. While fighting over a bit of rabbit, which monsieur le baron had tossed under the table while declaring that it was delicious, the beasts had overturned a chair on which was a jug of water, and the noise had so terrified them that they fled incontinently, abandoning the subject of controversy.

Meanwhile, the day had broken. The innkeeper quitted his chaste partner, who rose at six but was not dressed until nine. Frédéric woke, and so did Ménard, the latter being very uncomfortable for reasons which you can guess. Dubourg, having no further instruction to give Goton, desired to return to his room, and Goton found it harder than usual to leave her pallet, because Dubourg's lessons had fatigued her. But the pretended baron tried in vain to leave the shed. For five minutes he pushed and shook the door, which did not yield.

"Goton—Goton, did you lock the door?" he asked.

"Naw! it don't lock," replied the girl, rubbing her eyes.

"But I can't open it."

"Push hard."

"I am pushing as hard as I can, but it won't open."

"Bah! you city folks haven't got any strength!" said the servant; and she struck the door a violent blow with her fist, but without effect.

"*Jarni!* someone must have hooked it outside."

"Who in the devil can have played us such a trick?"

"*Pardi!* it must have been one of the peddlers—because they had their eyes on me, don't you see? and perhaps they saw that you was in here."

"I haven't any desire to pass my day in this shed."

"I'll milk the cow for you."

"Much obliged."

"And you can tell me something."

"I don't know anything more. This smell of cow and filth goes to my head."

"Oh! you said just now that this shed was a little—what d'you call it?—a pretty little *bouloir*, with me."

"Oh! there's a great difference between *just now* and *now*. A place ceases to be agreeable, Goton, when you are compelled to stay in it. But it's broad daylight; if that window wasn't so small, we could get out through it."

"Oh! you can't do that."

"Ah! I have an idea! We must make the best of it. Bring that stone here, Goton; stand on it with me, so that our

heads will be near the window, and then shout as I do."

"What will I shout?"

"What I do."

Dubourg put his face to the round hole over the door, and began to cry at the top of his voice:

"Help! thieves! stop the carriage! thieves!"

"Where's the thieves?" whispered Goton.

"Will you do what I tell you to?" repeated Dubourg.

"All right; I'll yell, if it amuses you," rejoined the servant. And her strong voice, reinforcing Dubourg's, soon aroused the whole household and a good part of the village.

The innkeeper ran to the spot as fast as his left leg allowed, it being two inches shorter than the other. Frédéric came out of his room; Ménard sat up in bed, and succeeded, with his pupil's aid, in reaching the floor. He dressed in haste, and went downstairs close on the heels of Frédéric, who had recognized Dubourg's voice and was more curious than alarmed, suspecting some new invention on the baron's part. They all went out into the yard, where they were joined by the neighbors and a number of laborers on their way to work, who had been attracted by Dubourg's reiterated shouts of:

"Thieves! stop the carriage!"

They looked about, but saw no carriage; whereupon Goton roared:

"Monsieur le baron's carriage has run off!"

The shed door was opened at last, and Dubourg rushed out like a madman, raving and swearing, heedless of the fact that his trousers were stained with filth.

"What's the matter, monsieur le baron?" queried Ménard, in dismay.

"The matter? my berlin—that scoundrel of a postilion! he has run away and taken it with him—with fifty thousand francs in gold that I had in one of the pockets!"

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"My father's berlin! the equipage of the Potoskis! It isn't the money that I regret—but a berlin in which the Princess of Hungary—— Ah! my friends, scour the country in all directions—follow every road—a hundred louis to the man who brings it back!"

"A hundred louis to the man who brings back the carriage!" said Goton.

"They will be very smart if they overtake it," said Dubourg, in an undertone; "it must be near to Paris now."

"But how did you come to be locked into the shed with Goton?" inquired the innkeeper.

"I should think you might guess that. I heard a noise in the yard during the night; I came downstairs softly and found my rascal harnessing the horses, intending to make his escape while we were asleep. Unluckily, I had no weapons, and the postilion is a much stronger man than I am. I attempted to go to call you, but the villain seized me, and, despite my resistance, forced me into the barn, where this girl was sleeping, and locked us in there. We began at once to shout for help; but you sleep like dead men."

"Yes, yes, that's how it was!" said Goton, understanding now why Dubourg had told her to shout *thieves*.

"You must go to monsieur le maire," said Ménard; "you must have the police ordered out.—There's a mayor here, of course?"

"Yes, monsieur; the wine merchant; but he'll have to send to the next village for the police, and that will take two hours."

"Don't be disturbed, my dear Ménard," said Frédéric, with a smile, "we have a comfortable post chaise to take the place of monsieur le baron's berlin."

"But fifty thousand francs in gold, monsieur le comte!"

"Oh! it isn't the loss of the money that distresses me," said Dubourg; "my fortune can stand that loss. Luckily, I still have fifteen thousand francs in my wallet, to pay my expenses for some little time; but I especially regret my wardrobe; there was a great trunk under the carriage, full of clothes and linen."

"Certainly," observed Frédéric, with a mischievous glance at Dubourg and Goton, "you need a change of clothing now; you must have fallen while you were in the barn."

Dubourg looked at him with an expression that signified: "I don't know why you need have called attention to that!" as he replied:

"I certainly didn't go in like a lamb; ask Goton how the rascal handled me!"

"Oh! yes," said the servant, "he threw you down more'n four times."

"At all events, my friend, my wardrobe is at your service," said Frédéric.

"And mine too, monsieur le baron," added Ménard, bowing to Dubourg; and he went back to his room to finish dressing, the baron having promised to go and lodge a complaint with the mayor.

Frédéric's postilion came at last to inform the travellers that the chaise was ready. Ménard came down from his room, thanking heaven that they were to leave that inn, which had been so disastrous to them. Goton came down behind him, and whispered to Dubourg:

"One of your friends ain't very well brought up; a man of his age do such things as that! If my little brother did it, he'd get a licking."

In two words, Dubourg learned what had happened; he could not help laughing at the catastrophe, for which he was responsible; while Ménard glared angrily at the servant, who put out her tongue at him, shrugged her shoulders, and followed him about, saying in an undertone:

"For shame! what a dirty trick! a man fifty years old! who ain't learned to be clean!"

The carriage awaited the travellers, and they took their seats with much satisfaction: Dubourg, overjoyed to be rid of his berlin; Ménard, impatient to leave Goton and the inn, for which he had conceived an intense aversion; and Frédéric, because he was much more comfortable in the roomy, well-hung post chaise than in monsieur le baron's wretched berlin.

Ménard sighed once or twice for the seat that the Princess of Hungary had occupied; but he still had to console him the King of Prussia's snuff-box, and the prospect of drinking tokay from Tekely's cellar.

VI

THE LITTLE WOOD

Our travellers reached the next village without mishap, and stopped there to breakfast. Ménard admired the tranquillity with which their noble companion bore the twofold loss of his carriage and his fifty thousand francs.

"I am a philosopher, Monsieur Ménard," said Dubourg; "and I care little for money; indeed, I think that I should prefer mediocrity to a too exalted station: *Magna servitus est magna fortuna*."

"You are no ordinary man, my dear Dubourg," said Frédéric; "there are so many people whose philosophy does not outlast their prosperity, like the coward who boasts of his courage when the danger has passed."

"I certainly am not ambitious," rejoined Ménard; "and I know how to bow to circumstances; but I consider that it requires great strength of mind to give up without regret a good table and a good bed; and when I say a good bed, I don't mean a high one."

Dubourg observed that when they had breakfasted it was Monsieur Ménard who paid the bill.

"Don't you carry the purse?" he asked Frédéric, in an undertone.

"No; my father gave the funds to Ménard."

"The devil! that's a nuisance. What will he think, when he sees that I never pay?"

"Why, after your saying that you had been robbed, did you add that you still had fifteen thousand francs in your pocket?"

"Oh! why, why! because I wanted to play the great man, and not let your companion imagine that you would pay my expenses."

"I don't dare to ask Ménard for the money; I should be afraid of hurting his feelings."

"Never fear; I'll undertake to make him turn it over of his own motion."

"How?"

"You will see."

"When you hold the purse-strings, don't play the swell too much; remember that we shall not have any more for a long while."

"Can it be that you believe that I am still a rattle-head and gambler, as I was in Paris? No, my dear Frédéric, I am too well pleased to be travelling with you, to make a fool of myself; I tell you again, I mean to be a second Mentor."

"Yes; your performance in the cow-barn is a very promising beginning."

"Oh! but I had to invent some lie to account for the berlin."

"And that made it necessary to lock yourself in there with Mademoiselle Goton! you ne'er-do-well!"

"Bah! don't make yourself out such a Cato! If Mademoiselle Goton had had melancholy eyes and a sentimental cast of countenance, you would have gone with her to pasture the cows."

"Well, at all events, I beg you not to do so much gasconading with poor Ménard, who believes every word; for, to remove any possible suspicion from his mind, I have taken pains to tell him that I know your family intimately, and that you are highly esteemed in Paris."

"You have done very well. I only tell him as much as I think necessary to carry out my part; you don't seem to remember that I call myself a Polish nobleman."

"That's the reason, I suppose, that you talk about nothing but Bretagne!"

The travellers resumed their journey. Before reaching the town where they proposed to pass the night, they had to ride through a dense forest; and Dubourg, who had his scheme all prepared, began operations by giving a serious turn to the conversation, for he was well aware that one's frame of mind adds to or takes from the size of objects, and that in real life, as on the stage, one must know how to prepare and lead up to situations, in order that they may produce the greatest effect.

"I know nothing more delightful than travelling," said Dubourg; "why is it that one's pleasure must always be lessened by the thought that some unfortunate accident may upset all one's plans?"

"It is so with all the pleasures of life," rejoined Frédéric; "can you name one upon which we can rely for the morrow? It is a great joy to be loved by the woman you adore; but when you feel sure that you are not indifferent to her, when you rely on her heart and her oaths, some young Adonis appears, who fascinates her; some handsome soldier, who turns her head; some scintillating wit, who charms her mind—and that woman, faithful until then, betrays you at the very moment that you feel most confident of her love. Alas! the happiness of our whole future often depends only upon some trivial circumstance, and crumbles and falls like a house built of cards."

"Monsieur de Montreville talks very wisely," said Ménard; "we are often sadly disappointed in our hopes; how many times have I dined at a famous restaurant, when the soup was a failure!"

"A philosopher endures such disasters, in fortune, in love, or in pleasure," said Dubourg; "but there are things against which even philosophy cannot prevail; as, for instance, being attacked and murdered by brigands on the highroad."

These words made Ménard shudder; his face lengthened, his expression became anxious, and he turned to Dubourg, whose features wore a gloomy look in which there was nothing reassuring.

"Such affairs are, in truth, very unpleasant for travellers. They say, monsieur le baron, that travelling is very dangerous in Italy. You have travelled so much, that you can probably tell us."

"Unquestionably there are brigands in Italy, Monsieur Ménard. The peculiarity of that country is that the roads are most dangerous at noon, for no one but the brigands dares to face the hot sun at that time of day. However, if

there are highway robbers in the Apennines and in Germany and England, unfortunately there's no lack of them in France. It's quite as dangerous now to travel in France."

"What! in France, monsieur le baron? I thought that the roads were perfectly safe."

"Then you don't read the papers, Monsieur Ménard?"

"Very rarely."

"If you did, you would see that the forests of Sénart, Bondy, Fontainebleau, and even Villers-Cotterets, all have their bands of robbers."

"Mon Dieu!"

"Unfortunately, the villains are becoming more savage day by day. They used to content themselves with robbing you, but now they beat you with clubs, and you're lucky if you leave their hands alive."

"The deuce! the deuce! if I had known this!" muttered Ménard, looking about him uneasily. They were just entering the wood.

"Oh! don't be alarmed, Monsieur Ménard," continued Dubourg; "ordinarily, the robbers confine their attentions to the one who has the money; he has to pay for the others: they tie him to a tree and strip him as bare as a worm, to make sure that he has nothing hidden in his clothing."

"That does not quiet my apprehensions at all, monsieur le baron; for, as it happens, I have charge of the money for our journey."

"Oh! if I had known that, I wouldn't have told you. I thought that Frédéric—— But in that case you must sell your life dearly. You are armed, of course?"

"I never use weapons, monsieur le baron."

"Then you must learn to use them; at this moment, we are driving through a forest where three friends of mine were killed."

"What's that! in this wood? It does seem very dense."

And Ménard glanced fearfully to right and left. It was beginning to grow dark, and that fact added to his terror.

"Drive at full speed, postilion!" he cried, in a trembling voice.

But the postilion, who had received his instructions from Dubourg, did not quicken his pace. Frédéric said nothing, but seemed lost in thought, and Dubourg took his pistols from his pocket and examined them carefully, glancing into the woods from time to time.

"Parbleu! Monsieur Ménard," he said, taking from his pocket a shabby green wallet, in which he had placed his last restaurant bill to make it appear well filled, "this contains my whole fortune for the moment. The fifteen thousand francs which I now have for my travelling expenses are in this wallet; as you have been obliging enough to take charge of Frédéric's funds, I am sure that you will consent to be my cashier, too; there is no need of having two of us to pay our hotel bills; it's much better that you should do it all."

As he spoke, he handed Ménard the wallet; that worthy looked at it, considering what it was best to do; although flattered by that mark of confidence, he was not tempted to accept it.

At that moment, they heard a shrill whistle in the woods.

"Ah! what does that mean?" exclaimed Dubourg, glancing about with a terrified expression.

"Perhaps we are going to be attacked, monsieur le baron."

"Faith! I am afraid of it."

"And Monsieur Frédéric is asleep; pray wake him."

Frédéric, pretending to be fast asleep, was an amused listener.

"There's no need of that.—Take these, Monsieur Ménard," said Dubourg, handing the tutor his wallet and his pistols; "they are loaded."

"Keep them, keep them, in heaven's name, monsieur le baron. I can't take this wallet. On the contrary, if you were willing, you would be much better able than I to take care of these."

And poor Ménard produced in one hand his wallet, and in the other a purse filled with gold, and fixed his eyes upon Dubourg with a suppliant expression.

"Really," said the latter, "I don't know if I ought to undertake—— Perhaps Frédéric will be offended if——"

"Oh! no, no, monsieur le baron; I am sure that he will approve of my action."

"Here are four men with rifles coming toward us," said the postilion.

"Great God! we are lost!" cried Ménard.

"Give them to me, quickly," said Dubourg, taking the wallet and the purse; "I see that this is a matter for me to attend to."

Ménard hid under the seat; the postilion shouted and swore, and lashed his horses; Dubourg leaned out of the chaise and fired both his pistols in the air; Frédéric pretended to wake up; the carriage flew like the wind, and in five minutes they were out of the wood.

"We are safe!" said Dubourg, assisting Ménard to rise.

"Really, monsieur le baron?"

"We are out of the woods; there's no more danger. We had a narrow escape, eh, Frédéric?"

"And the robbers, monsieur le baron?"

"I killed two of them."

"I saw the other two run away," said Frédéric.

"Ah! monsieur le baron, how lucky we were to have you with us!"

They arrived in due time at their destination. Dubourg was delighted to be the treasurer of the party, and he inaugurated his functions by giving the postilion a gold piece for whistling in the forest.

VII

DUBOURG CONTINUES TO PLAY THE GREAT MAN.—HIS METHOD OF MANAGING THE TREASURY

Dubourg had never had in his possession so large a sum of money as that which Ménard had intrusted to him. Young men, as a general rule, are not in the habit of hoarding money, and Dubourg, who was devoted to cards and pleasure and good cheer, thinking only of the present, oblivious of the past, and never worrying about the future, had not the faintest idea of economy.

When he was a clerk in a government office, his salary was always so largely hypothecated that he never received more than a third of it, and that third never lasted more than three days, during which period, to be sure, Dubourg lived like the chief of a bureau.

In the banking-house, being compelled to work hard, he took his revenge by ordering dainty breakfasts brought to the office; and his accounts at cafés and restaurants consumed a large part of the amount the cashier paid him at the month's end.

At the notary's, he had contracted, with the other young men in the office, the deplorable habit of playing écarté. It was worse than ever there: the month's pay vanished in one evening, and he was in luck when he did not pledge the next month's as well.

In the employ of the solicitor, being constantly abroad with the lady whom his employer intrusted to him, he lost the habit of working; he passed his time in dissipation, and strove to follow the fashions and rival the young dandies of the capital. During that period, his tailor, his bootmaker, and his stableman had divided his income.

When his kind old aunt sent him money, it was never a large amount. The largest was the five hundred francs which he had extorted by the fable of his marriage and his triplets; we have seen what use he made of that.

Eight thousand francs—for the amount was almost untouched—was, in Dubourg's eyes, a fortune of which he would never see the end. To be sure, it did not belong to him, strictly speaking; but he could direct the spending of it; he could do exactly as he pleased, for he was certain of not being called upon for an accounting. He did not propose to appropriate a single sou, but he did propose to put it to such use as would do honor to him to whom it belonged, and he was not sorry to be able to enjoy it with him.

He ordered a delicious supper, which was served in their apartments, the finest in the house.

When he saw all the dishes with which the table was laden, Frédéric exclaimed:

"Why, are you mad, Dubourg?"—for he continued to call him by that name before Ménard, who had become accustomed to it—"here is supper enough for ten!"

"I have an excellent appetite, my dear Frédéric, and am disposed to do full honor to it; I'll wager that Monsieur Ménard will second me."

"With the very greatest pleasure, monsieur le baron; that affair in the woods made a hole in my stomach."

"But you surely have condemned all the other guests of the house to a bread and water diet."

"Faith! they may eat what they can find; it seems to me natural that we should make up to ourselves for the miserable meal we had last night at that horrible inn."

"I quite agree with monsieur le baron; we are sadly in need of restoring our strength."

"But——"

"What the devil! do you want to travel like wolves? and eat at table d'hôte like paltry pedestrians? A man should support his rank, my friend, and I judge, from the feeling, that my stomach isn't inclined to backslide."

"Monsieur le baron talks very judiciously; you must support your rank," said Ménard, accepting a chicken wing which Dubourg offered him; "that is your father's wish, you know, Monsieur Frédéric."

"Yes, my friend," said Dubourg, filling his glass with the oldest wine that the cellar of the inn contained; "I think you should certainly yield to your father's wish; and, on my word, all things considered, I don't see why I should retain my incognito any longer. We're a long way from Paris. I am done with it; I resume my titles, and I propose to be treated with the honors that are due me."

"Oh! Dubourg, Dubourg! you will get us into some scrape," said Frédéric, in an undertone; but his friend paid no heed; he was excited by the wine, and he had never felt in such high spirits. He drank glass after glass, while Ménard, with a glutton's delight, helped himself to mushroom pie, the odor of which tickled his olfactory nerve.

"What do you think of my plan, Monsieur Ménard?"

"That has always been my wish, as you know, monsieur le baron."

"It is settled; I am baron, palatine, et cetera; and we will make it manifest wherever we go."

"Certainly, monsieur le baron; the nobility of your manners will always cause you to be recognized for what you are."

"Bravo, Monsieur Ménard! spoken like a true boon companion! But as to Frédéric, he is unworthy to sit at our table. A little more of this hare, Monsieur Ménard?"

"With pleasure, monsieur le baron."

"We must be philosophical—when we can't help it; but true philosophy consists in making the most of life, in enjoying one's self whenever the opportunity offers. *Dulce est desipere in loco*, says Horace. Eh, Monsieur Ménard?"

"Yes, monsieur le baron; but Juvenal advises infrequent indulgence in pleasures: *Voluptatis commendat rarior usus*."

"Juvenal probably had a weak stomach."

"That is very possible, monsieur le baron."

"Another glass, Monsieur Ménard; to the memory of Anacreon, Epicurus, Horace, and all good livers!"

"We forget Lucullus, monsieur le baron."

"True; another bumper, to Lucullus!"

By dint of drinking to the memory of the ancients, the two were beginning to lose all memory of the present.

"Faith!" cried Dubourg, rising from the table; "I defy all the palatines of Rava, Cracow, and Krapach to eat a

better supper!"

"Take care what you are saying, you infernal babbler!" muttered Frédéric.

"Never you fear," retorted Dubourg, speaking louder than ever; "I'll answer for everything, I tell you; and Papa Ménard is a man whom I esteem and love, and whose eyes I will close with pheasants or truffles."

Luckily, Ménard was in such a condition that he could not distinguish clearly what was being said. Bewildered by the frequent libations in which he had indulged with his noble companion, he left the table to go to his room. He felt his way along the walls till he reached his bed, which he had ordered to be made very low. He retired, well pleased with the feast he had enjoyed and with the baron's manner of doing the honors of the table; he considered that he had done exceedingly well to intrust the financial arrangements to him, for he himself would not have dared to order so delicious a repast; and he foresaw that the baron, who seemed to be both a gourmand and an epicure, would continue to feed them on the fat of the land, as he had abandoned his incognito. In a word, Ménard was delighted with their travelling companion, and he fell asleep musing upon the pleasures and the honor which he should enjoy on that journey.

On the following day, Frédéric attempted to talk prudence to Dubourg, who instantly retorted:

"Do you want to take the funds? Do so, give such orders as you please; it's your right. But, absorbed as you always are in melancholy reflections, you won't feed us decently; and when you are travelling for pleasure, it seems to me that food is a most essential thing to look out for."

"But be reasonable, at least."

"Oh! you are greatly to be pitied, aren't you, for having two men with you to keep you amused—one by his wit, the other by the way he puts himself outside of a partridge."

"But what's the meaning of this idea of playing the great man before everybody?"

"Because we shall have more sport. Besides, you are a count; I must be a baron at least, in order to travel on equal terms with you."

"But the money will go much faster."

"Bah! we shan't see the end of it for a long while yet; and then, you have a father, and I an aunt."

"I advise you to rely on them!"

"At all events, you see that your mentor approves of my method."

"Parbleu! you make him tipsy, and he doesn't know what he's saying."

"Don't worry; I'll answer for everything."

When they resumed their journey, the horses, which belonged to Frédéric, went like the wind. Ménard was slightly dazed by the rapid motion, but he said to himself: "These nobles always travel at full speed;" and clung to the door to keep from falling.

At every inn, they were treated with the greatest respect, as men of high rank. Everywhere they had the best rooms, the daintiest dishes, the oldest wines. And Ménard was delighted, enchanted, because he believed that monsieur le baron had put his fifteen thousand francs with the sum he had handed him, and because he judged him to be too large-hearted and generous to give a thought to the difference between their contributions.

In due time, our travellers reached Lyon, having paused on the way only to admire an occasional view and to give their horses time to breathe. But they proposed to pass several days in that city. Young Montreville was very glad of an opportunity to see it and its suburbs, and, above all, to visit the shores of the Rhône; and his two companions consented, with pleasure, to tarry some time in a city where they could live as well as in Paris.

They alighted at one of the best hotels. The noise made by Dubourg, the distinguished aspect of Frédéric, and the pains that Ménard took to repeat again and again: "You have the honor of entertaining Monsieur le Baron Potoski, Palatine of Rava, and the young Comte de Montreville," attracted universal attention and consideration to the young men, who seemed disposed to spend money freely, which is the best of recommendations at a hotel.

They were quartered in a superb suite on the first floor. Their meals were served in their rooms, and everything had to be of the best. Dubourg was the one who gave all the orders; Frédéric interfered with none of the details, beyond saying to his friend:

"Be careful what you do."

Whereupon Dubourg would reply: "Never fear," with such confidence that the young count finally allowed him to do as he pleased, without remonstrance.

As for Ménard, he was more enthusiastic than ever about the baron, to whom he was indebted for such an agreeable life. Frédéric often went out alone to walk along the bank of the Rhône; fascinated by the beautiful landscape he discovered, he sometimes did not return to the hotel until night or the following day. Dubourg, like those liars who end by believing in their own false-hoods, had so identified himself with the part he was playing, that he would have struck anyone who expressed a doubt as to his rank; he amused himself, during his friend's absences, by displaying his magnificence in the city. Leaning nonchalantly on Ménard's arm, who, with his hat on the back of his head, the better to see and be seen, carried himself very straight, walked with much precision, and strove to assume an air that was both dignified and affable, when he went out with monsieur le baron—Dubourg walked all over the city, with a huge three-cornered hat, adorned with a black plume and a steel buckle, which he wore after the style of one of Molière's marquises. To be sure, the rest of his costume hardly corresponded with his hat; but it was no longer fashionable to wear embroidered coats for walking, and Dubourg had confined himself to having silver tassels attached to his military boots, considering that there was a something Polish about them. He left his coat open, because that gave him a more careless air, and he made frequent use of a huge eyeglass hanging from his neck by a pink ribbon.

His extraordinary garb attracted every eye. Some took him for an Englishman, some for a Russian or a Prussian; but if some curious individual stopped and looked after him with a smile on his face, Dubourg would flash a glance at him that put an end to any inclination to laugh at his expense, and conveyed the impression that the stranger, whoever he might be, was not of a disposition to endure being laughed at.

But it was necessary to be in the neighborhood of our two friends only a very short time to ascertain the identity of the gentleman in the plumed hat, who sauntered along so gracefully with his glass at his eye; for Monsieur

Ménard talked very loud, especially when he saw that someone was noticing them, and never failed to emphasize the "Baron Potoski," or "Monsieur le Palatine," when he addressed his companion; sometimes, indeed, he went so far as to call him "Monseigneur de Rava et de Sandomir."

They had been in Lyon a week. Frédéric had not begun to tire of visiting the beautiful suburbs of the city, but Dubourg was beginning to tire of exhibiting himself in the public streets, arm in arm with Ménard. They had been to all the places of resort, all the theatres, and all the cafés; everywhere, Dubourg played the great nobleman, and Ménard unwittingly acted as his accomplice; for the poor fellow was entirely honest, and deemed himself highly honored to promenade with his pupil's noble friend, who was always able to produce an apt quotation and bewildered him by his anecdotes of travel in the four quarters of the globe.

For several days, Dubourg had been urging Frédéric to leave Lyon, and he always postponed their departure to the next day, when one morning Dubourg received a letter which put an end to his desire to go away. This letter was addressed to *Monsieur le Baron Potoski, Seigneur Polonais*. Dubourg read the superscription twice. Who could have written to him, and by that name? He asked the landlady who had brought the letter, and was told that it was a servant in livery, who requested that it be delivered to monsieur le baron in person.

Dubourg hastened to break the seal, and read as follows:

"Monsieur le Baron Potoski is invited to pass this evening with Madame la Marquise de Versac, who will be delighted to entertain the noble stranger, at his pleasure, during his stay in Lyon."

The marchioness's address was at the foot of the note, which Dubourg reread several times, and which diffused an odor of musk and amber through his room.

"The devil!" said Dubourg to himself; "an invitation from a marchioness! This is decidedly flattering! But how does she know me? Parbleu! a man very soon becomes known when he lives with a certain amount of style. Besides, people must be beginning to talk about me, after I've paraded the streets for a week with Ménard, like a white bear."

Dubourg summoned the landlady again, and asked her if she knew Madame la Marquise de Versac.

"The Marquise de Versac? I don't know her personally, but I know her very well by name. It's one of the oldest and richest families in the city, and I know madame la marquise has a magnificent country house on the river, four leagues from Lyon."

Dubourg asked no more questions; he was in raptures. He dismissed the landlady, and began to pace the floor, saying to himself:

"I shall certainly accept madame la marquise's invitation; the acquaintance cannot fail to be exceedingly agreeable to me, and, who knows? perhaps I may find there some baroness or viscountess whose head I can turn; who will marry me, and endow me with estates and châteaux! Well, what would there be so surprising in that? I am young, not bad-looking; I have a certain style, which must have attracted Madame la Marquise de Versac. But, deuce take me! what if she herself—— Ah! I forgot to ask about that."

Dubourg rang again, and the landlady reappeared.

"I beg your pardon, my dear hostess," he said; "but I have reasons for wishing to know if Madame la Marquise de Versac is married."

"She is still a widow, I think, monsieur; it's only three years since Monsieur de Versac died, and since then I haven't heard——"

"Very good, very good, madame," said Dubourg, dismissing her again; and he capered about the room, looking at himself in the mirror, and saying:

"She's a widow! there's no doubt about her being a widow still, or the invitation would be in her husband's name. Now, this becomes interesting: a very rich young widow, who has a magnificent country house, and who writes me that she will be charmed to entertain me! for that's what it says. Let's read it again: yes, 'delighted to entertain you.'—It seems to me that that almost amounts to a declaration. You shall entertain me, charming creature! I promise you. By the way, I forgot to ask if she was charming, but it can't be otherwise; at all events, I don't care so much for beauty, now; I am reasonable, I am more attracted by solid advantages. This very evening she shall see the noble stranger. But, damnation! when she finds out that the palatine is only a humble bourgeois! After all, I am an honest Breton, and an honest Breton's as good as any other man; besides, we haven't come to that yet. I must begin by captivating her. When a woman is fascinated, does she recognize ranks and distances? Love equalizes everything: the lord of the thunder loved simple mortals, and the shepherd Paris had it in his power to lie with the loveliest goddesses in Olympus. To lie with Madame de Versac, I'll give her all the apples she wants."

Ménard made his appearance while Dubourg was strutting about his bedroom, trying to assume a courtly air. As soon as he caught sight of the tutor, he thrust the letter into his face, crying:

"*Tolle, lege*, my dear Ménard."

Ménard recoiled, because the odor of musk exhaled by the letter made him ill.

"Doesn't that smell rather like a marchioness, eh?" said Dubourg, inhaling the perfume ecstatically. "Well, Ménard, what do you say to this letter?"

"I see nothing surprising in it, monsieur le baron; you must be accustomed to receive similar ones wherever you go."

"True, you are right, Ménard; I don't mean to imply that I am surprised; I say that the note is well turned, eh?"

"Very well turned, monsieur le baron."

"It was evidently written by a woman who knows her man, wasn't it?"

"Certainly, monsieur le baron, she must know him."

"But I mean that it doesn't resemble such notes as—as little Delphine had the presumption to write me."

"Who was this Delphine, monsieur le baron?"

"Oh! she was a little countess, on Boulevard du Temple, whose receptions used to be attended by a large number of noblemen of my stamp."

"Monsieur le baron will accept Madame la Marquise de Versac's invitation, of course?"

"Accept it? most assuredly. Let us dine at once, Monsieur Ménard, so that I need think of nothing but dressing. Where's Frédéric?"

"Admiring some new view, no doubt; he told me that he should not return till evening; I think he intends to leave Lyon to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oh! we'll see about that; we have all the time there is, and we're very comfortable here, aren't we, Monsieur Ménard?"

"Very, monsieur le baron; but, you know, we are traveling for——"

"I know that we shouldn't leave a city till we know it thoroughly, and Frédéric can't know this city yet, as he's always in the suburbs. You must persuade him of that, Monsieur Ménard."

"I will do my utmost, monsieur le baron."

Dubourg ate little dinner; he was too much engrossed by thoughts of his evening to have any appetite; a child does not eat, when his father has promised to take him to the play. We are big children; the anticipation of a new pleasure always produces the same effect on us.

Dubourg deliberated concerning his toilet. If he had had time, he would have ordered a dress-coat; but he must needs be content with one of Frédéric's, who was much more slender than he, so that he could never button it. Should he go in top-boots? That would be rather too informal, his hostess being a marchioness. But he had no trousers; Frédéric's were too small for him, and it was not the same with them as with a coat, which one is always at liberty to leave unbuttoned. Ménard would lend him a pair, but they would be too large; so he decided to go in boots; he was a foreigner, a Pole, that fact would be his excuse; moreover, his silver tassels pleased him immensely.

At eight o'clock, Dubourg had been dressed more than an hour, and was pacing the floor of his room, his plumed hat under his arm, practising dignified bows, graceful smiles, and a noble bearing. He had put the whole contents of his treasury in his pocket, and, having no watch, he thought for a moment of taking his steel loop from his hat and placing it in his fob; but it might be recognized as having been on his hat, so he contented himself with a red ribbon, of which he showed only the end. The clock struck nine at last, the hour at which one may decently appear in society; a carriage was waiting; he entered it, and gave the driver the address indicated on the note.

The carriage stopped in a lonely street, before a house of poor appearance. Dubourg alighted. A lackey, there being no concierge, stood at the door of the house, apparently posted there as a sentinel; and he lost no time in ushering Dubourg up a dirty staircase, at the foot of which were two lamps that seemed surprised to be there. But Dubourg was going over in his mind the sentence he had prepared for his salutation to the marchioness, and he did not notice the uncleanness of the house.

The servant opened a door on the first floor and entered an anteroom, wherein the eye sought in vain any article of furniture; although it was dimly lighted, the spots of grease on the walls and the soiled, discolored floor could be plainly seen. But the servant led Dubourg through this room at a rapid pace, and, opening another door into the salon, announced in a loud tone:

"Monsieur le Baron Potoski!"

At that name, there was a great commotion in the salon, and a lady rose and rushed forward to meet Dubourg, expressing in the most cordial terms her pleasure in receiving him as her guest.

Dubourg answered whatever came into his head; he walked into the room, saluting to right and left, and dropped into a chair beside the Marquise de Versac, whom he then took occasion to scrutinize. He saw that he had been wise not to indulge his imagination in advance. The mistress of the house was a woman who seemed to be fully forty-five years of age, despite the care with which she had blackened her eyebrows, reddened her lips, and whitened her complexion. She was fashionably dressed, but her gown, which had a long train, seemed to embarrass her; her head was overladen with flowers and ribbons, and a triple necklace of pearls embellished a long, yellow neck, rising pitifully above a pair of fleshless shoulders, which the marchioness was barbarous enough to expose to all eyes, as if they were pleasing to the sight.

Dubourg did not stop to examine all that; he remembered what his landlady had said to him, and tried to think the marchioness charming. While she addressed him in the most flattering terms, he cast a glance about the salon.

An antiquated chandelier, suspended from the ceiling, lighted the room, which was very large; the hangings must once have been handsome, but were beginning to show too many signs of age. The floor was covered with an immense rug, which was never made for a salon. The covering of the furniture was of two colors: there was a blue ottoman and yellow chairs; and the latter were not alike. In default of a clock, there was an enormous jar of flowers in the centre of the mantel, and a number of candlesticks on either side. Several card-tables of different sizes completed the furnishing of that salon, which seemed to Dubourg to be quite as venerable as Madame de Versac's family.

Having examined the room, Dubourg turned his attention to the company. There were only three ladies besides the marchioness. One, who seemed to be about sixty years old, and who was called the baroness, talked incessantly of her estates, her châteaux, her property, and her servants; she talked so loud that there was not a moment's silence. A young woman, who was rather pretty, but seemed rather awkward, and did not open her mouth except to laugh or to say *yes* or *no*, was called the Vicomtesse de Fairfignan; while the third, who was apparently about thirty years old, and whom they called Madame de Grandcourt, was half reclining on the ottoman, evidently disposed to flirt; for she cast languorous glances at all the men, and made abundant use of her eyes, which had been handsome, but were so encircled with black that her eyebrows seemed to extend all the way round.

There were seven or eight men in the company; all of them seemed to be counts, or barons, or chevaliers, but not one of them, either in dress or bearing, gave any sign of wealth or rank. Monsieur le chevalier had a frock-coat, the sleeves of which were so short that they were far from reaching his wrists; and when he drew his handkerchief, he took great care to turn his back and conceal it from the company.

The count wore torn lace wristbands, and a ruff stained with liquor and tobacco. He seemed to take great satisfaction in displaying his hands, which were covered with huge rings with red and yellow stones; but the blackness of the hands themselves produced a curious effect beside the wristbands and the jewels.

The baron, who had his hair powdered, and seemed much embarrassed by his queue, which kept getting inside his collar, wore a new black coat and an old pair of nankeen trousers, over which dangled charms in the shape of

fruit and shells.

The other men were dressed in the same style.

"Sacrebleu!" thought Dubourg, astounded by the aspect of all those noble personages; "if my landlady hadn't told me what she did about the Marquise de Versac, I should imagine that I was at an old-clothes dealer's, with a parcel of counts from Rue Vide-Gousset."

Meanwhile, the conversation did not flag. Everybody talked and laughed at once. They manifested the greatest consideration for Baron Potoski; the marchioness overwhelmed him with attentions, the old baroness invited him to visit her in the country, the viscountess smiled upon him, and Madame de Grandcourt flashed glances at him the meaning whereof was not at all equivocal, while the men applauded everything he said. Dubourg was flattered by these attentions, for the shrewdest and cleverest men generally allow themselves to be cajoled by anything that flatters their self-esteem.

Punch, liqueurs, and sweetmeats were served, and the whole company pounced upon them. The old baroness drank like a porter, the viscountess stuffed herself with cakes, and the languorous Grandcourt swallowed two glasses of punch in rapid succession, exclaiming that it was not strong enough.

Dubourg imitated his neighbors; he helped himself to punch, and complimented Madame de Versac on the liveliness of her company.

"Oh! we don't stand on ceremony," she replied; "what's the use of tedious formalities between people who are all as good as one another?"

"True, you are right; I like this sort of thing," said Dubourg, beginning already to feel the effects of the punch. "Etiquette is a burden that people of sense should leave at the door."

"Ah! Monsieur de Potoski, you talk like Barême!" said the old baroness, returning to the punch. "You are a palatine of the old stock."

"Not very old, madame."

"But the best, at all events," said Madame de Versac, resting her foot lightly on Dubourg's; whereupon he turned and tried to gaze tenderly at her, at the same time passing his hand behind the marchioness, who allowed him to take liberties without seeming to notice it, which Dubourg considered very patrician behavior.

"For my part, I like to talk nonsense," said the young viscountess, who was beginning to venture upon a sentence or two, now that she had eaten. "It makes me tired when[B] everyone's sober-faced."

[B] "*Ousqu'on* est serieux," instead of *quand on*, etc.

The viscountess's *ousqu'on* made Dubourg wince; Madame de Versac noticed it, and made haste to whisper to him:

"She's a German; she speaks with a strong accent."

"But aren't you going to give us something to do this evening, madame la marquise?" said the chevalier, pulling at his sleeves to lengthen them.

"That's so, my love," said the baroness; "why don't we play cards?"

"Ah! yes, let us do something," said Madame de Grandcourt, rolling her eyes seductively; "I must always be doing something."

"Perhaps Monsieur de Potoski does not play?" said the marchioness, turning to Dubourg.

"I beg your pardon, madame; I shall be very glad to play."

"In that case, I will start the tables. You are sure that you care to play, baron?"

"With great pleasure, madame," said Dubourg, overjoyed to have an excuse for removing his hand, which he was tired of holding behind Madame de Versac's back.

Several games of écarté were begun. The chevalier proposed a game of *creps* for the ladies; whereupon Dubourg said to himself:

"It seems that the ladies of the best society have tastes very different from their sisters of the bourgeoisie; perhaps madame la marquise is fond of *biribi* too."

Monsieur de Potoski found himself at an écarté table with the count, whose lace cuffs did not prevent his dealing the cards with rare skill. The game soon became animated. A tall, thin gentleman, who stood near Dubourg, bet rolls of twenty-five louis on his game, which he placed on the table without unrolling them, and which passed rapidly into the count's pockets, the tall man, whose threadbare costume might have led one to take him for an unfortunate petitioner for alms, seeming to pay no heed whatever to his loss.

"These men play a very noble game," said Dubourg to himself; and, not choosing to be outdone by the person who was betting on him, he doubled his stakes, and his money passed into the hands with the lace cuffs. But the punch circulated freely; to please Madame de Grandcourt, it had been made much stronger; the company began to get excited and the game became animated.

Madame de Versac seated herself beside Dubourg.

"I mean to bring Monsieur de Potoski good luck," she said, sitting close against him, and showing a row of teeth set like a wild boar's tusks.

"I trust that you will change the luck, madame!" observed Dubourg, who had already lost more than a thousand francs, which he was determined to win back. Madame la marquise made no other reply than to place her foot lovingly on his. With each game that Dubourg lost, she bore down a little heavier, and tried to make him forget his bad luck by saying sweet things to him; but Dubourg did not listen.

"I hope to see you often, Monsieur de Potoski."

"Yes, madame.—Ten louis more, this time."

"I am a bold player," said the count; "I'll take whatever you bet."

"Yes, of course, monsieur le comte will give you your revenge," said the marchioness, "if you lose to-night."

"If I lose!" muttered Dubourg; "I should say so! almost two thousand francs! What a breach in my cash-box!"

"You must come to my country house on the Rhône, my dear Potoski. I insist on your coming."

"Yes, madame la marquise; yes, most certainly.—The king is always in the other hand! it's the most extraordinary thing!"

"We will walk in my park."

"Beaten again!"

"We will enjoy the fresh, cool breezes in the evening."

"It's stifling here!"

"Pray take something."

"I should be glad to take back just what I have lost."

"Do you remain long in Lyon?"

"The devil take me if I know!"

And Dubourg, who had lost three thousand francs, and was tired of feeling madame la marquise's foot on his, rose abruptly and walked about the room.

Madame de Grandcourt was stretched out on a long chair in a corner. A short man with whiskers and moustache sat on a stool almost at her feet; he had passed one arm about his charmer's waist, and the hand of the other was screened from view by the folds of a faded satin gown.

The old baroness and the young viscountess were playing *creps* with the chevalier. The faces of the ladies were much flushed; the baroness had a glass of punch before her, and was gazing with glassy eyes at the dice, shrieking and disputing over a ten-sou piece which she would not admit that she had lost. The viscountess had recovered the use of her tongue by eating sweetmeats, and she indulged in frequent solecisms which must have opened Dubourg's eyes if he had been himself; but he was not; his losses had disturbed his mental balance, already shaken by the punch and liqueurs. He strode about the salon, looking without seeing, listening without hearing the marchioness's compliments, and passing his hand across his forehead as if to tranquillize his thoughts. He tried to go away, but returned again and again to the card-tables, saying to himself:

"I absolutely must win back my three thousand francs!"

He took a seat at the *creps* table and called to the count, who was talking in a corner with the man in the threadbare coat who staked rolls of louis which no one saw.

"Monsieur," said Dubourg, raising his voice, "I trust that you will not refuse to give me my revenge at this game, at which I may perhaps have better luck."

"With great pleasure," replied the count with the lace cuffs.

He hastened to the *creps* table, which the viscountess and baroness instantly quitted; indeed, they soon left the salon, as did Madame de Grandcourt; but Dubourg was too intent upon his game to observe the disappearance of the ladies.

All the men formed a circle about the *creps* table. Dubourg was allowed to choose whether he would punt or be banker. He chose the latter, and madame la marquise, seated close beside him, took pains always to pick up the dice and the box and hand them to him. Dubourg lost; he no longer knew what he was doing; he threw dice and dice-box on the floor. Someone proposed *trente-et-un*, and he accepted; that finished him; in less than half an hour, the rest of the contents of his cash-box vanished. He felt in all his pockets, in his fob—not a sou! he had lost everything, and the money was not his! He did not speak, but paced the floor for some moments, pale and haggard, biting his lips, clenching his fists, and uttering a fierce oath from time to time. The candles began to go out; the counts and chevaliers whispered together and seemed embarrassed; the marchioness withdrew to a corner of the salon, not deeming the moment favorable for treading on Monsieur de Potoski's foot.

At last, Dubourg, throwing off his depression, seemed to have determined upon his course. He went to get his hat, which he had placed under a chair, and left the room, slamming the door violently behind him; he passed through the anteroom, where four tall fellows, only one of whom was in livery, were busily drinking, opened the door into the hall, and started downstairs. Not until he was halfway down, and attempted to put on his hat, did he discover that he had a wretched tile, without band or lining, which someone had substituted for his fine hat with a plume.

"By heaven, this is too much!" he exclaimed, turning back; "not content with having filched my money, they propose to filch my hat too! Ah! my worthy counts and chevaliers, we'll see about that!"

Dubourg rang the bell violently; no one came. He rang again, and beat the door with his hands and feet, until at last it was opened.

"What do you want?" demanded the servant in livery.

"What do I want? I want my hat, which your chevalier of I-don't-know-what has taken instead of his own miserable tile."

"There's no hat of yours here."

"What's that, you blackguard! you dare to tell me that?"

"Hold your tongue, monsieur! don't make so much noise in the house; madame la marquise don't like it."

"Go to the devil with your madame la marquise, who lets people pinch her wantonly so as to fleece them! I insist on going in; I'll find a way to get back my hat."

"You cannot go in! Help, my friends! Here's a man who means to make trouble!"

The three others ran to his assistance. They seized Dubourg by the shoulders; he struggled and fought to no purpose, being the weaker party. They forced him down the stairs, yelling and calling them curs and thieves, as well as their employers. The four tall rascals made no reply, but pushed him into the street and shut the door in his face.

"Ah! the villains!" he cried, rearranging his clothes, which he had come near losing with all the rest in the struggle he had had. "Ah! the scoundrels! What a fine evening I have had, to be sure! Ouf! I've a good mind to stone the house and break the windows. But, no, I think I'll call—probably the watch will pass before long."

He stood in the street a moment, undecided as to what he should do. But it was very late, the street was deserted, and by remaining there he ran the risk of being arrested himself; he reflected that he was a stranger in the city, and that he had assumed a title which did not belong to him. All these reasons led him to decide to wait until morning before he sought to obtain justice at the hands of madame la marquise. Meanwhile, it behooved him to find the way back to his hotel.

But how could he show his face before Frédéric and Ménard, after losing all the money they had intrusted to him? He had nothing left, and they owed a considerable sum at their hotel.

Dubourg tore his hair and beat his breast as he strode through the streets of Lyon. At last he arrived at the hotel, and addressed himself in the following words:

"Whatever happens, I must end by making the best of it. Even if I should pass the night chastising myself in the street, it wouldn't bring back a sou to my purse. So I may as well go to bed; to-morrow, we'll see about getting out of the scrape."

VIII

BEHOLD HER!

Frédéric, when he returned to the hotel during the evening, found Ménard seated alone before the remains of a chicken with which the quondam tutor had passed a part of the time since Dubourg's departure. Surprised not to find the latter, the young count inquired of Ménard as to his whereabouts, and was told that monsieur le baron had gone to pass the evening with one of the leading families of the city, from whom he had received an invitation.

It seemed very strange to Frédéric that Dubourg should receive invitations at Lyon, where he knew nobody, and he feared that this "leading family" might be an invention of his friend. However, he was careful not to convey his suspicions to Ménard, but simply informed him that he proposed to resume his journey the next day.

"Monsieur le baron isn't in such a hurry as he was," said Ménard; "he is very well pleased with Lyon."

"Why, only this morning he urged me to leave the place!"

"This invitation seems to have changed his views."

"Monsieur le baron may do as he pleases, but we shall start to-morrow."

Ménard made no reply, but went to bed, considering that his pupil was taking great liberties with such a man as the palatine; and Frédéric did the same, although he was somewhat disturbed by Dubourg's absence.

Early the next morning, Ménard and the young count met in the room where they were accustomed to meet for breakfast. But Dubourg did not appear.

"Can it be that he stayed out all night?" asked Frédéric.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said one of the servants of the hotel; "monsieur le baron came in about three o'clock this morning; he seemed very tired, and he is still in bed."

"What folly to sit up all night when we were to start to-day! But where in the devil has he been?—Go and tell him that we are waiting for him."

After some time, the servant returned and announced that monsieur le baron was sick and could not rise.

"The rascal must have been drunk last night," thought Frédéric; and, followed by Ménard, who began by rubbing his nose and temples with vinegar to ward off contagion, he went to Dubourg's bedroom. They found him in bed; he had pulled his nightcap over his eyes and tied his handkerchief over it, and his face wore such a piteous expression, that one would have thought that he had been confined to his bed in agony for three months.

Ménard halted in the middle of the room and held a smelling-bottle to his nose, saying in an undertone to Frédéric.

"Mon Dieu! how he has changed!"

"What's the matter with you, in heaven's name, my poor Dubourg?" said Frédéric, taking the hand of the sick man, who had employed every known means to give himself an attack of fever.

"Alas! my dear friend, I feel very ill."

"How did it come on?"

"Ah! it was brought on by something that happened—a terrible adventure; the shock of it was the cause of my illness."

"You must see a doctor, first of all."

"I will go for one, and an apothecary too," said Ménard, who was anxious for an excuse to go out into the open air.

"No, no, my dear Monsieur Ménard," Dubourg interposed, in a faint voice; "I don't like doctors; we have plenty of time. Hippocrates himself said: *Vita brevis, ars longa, experientia fallax*."

"Very true, monsieur le baron; but the same Hippocrates says in another place——"

"Oh! for heaven's sake, drop Hippocrates!" cried Frédéric, fancying that he could read in Dubourg's eyes that he was not so ill as he chose to appear. "As you won't have a doctor, do at least tell us the cause of your illness, this terrible adventure——"

"Yes," said Ménard, taking pains to seat himself as far as possible from the bed, where he could get the air from the hall. "Let us know if it might become contagious."

Dubourg sat up in bed; he raised his eyes heaven-ward, uttered two or three plaintive groans, pulled his nightcap still further over his eyes, and began his tale in a most heartrending tone.

"The excellent Ménard has undoubtedly told you that I received yesterday an invitation to one of the first houses in the city. At all events, that is what our landlady assured me—otherwise——"

"Yes, he told me that—what next? explain yourself!" said Frédéric, impatient at Dubourg's roundabout way of reaching the facts.

"Gently! I am in no condition to go so fast, my dear Frédéric.—Well, I started out in a cab last night, after making a careful toilet."

"Yes; I noticed that you took one of my coats."

"You know perfectly well that I lost my wardrobe with my berlin."

"Well?"

"By some fatality, it happened that I put the purse containing the whole of our fortune in the pocket of your coat."

"Ah! this begins to look bad," whispered Frédéric, while Ménard, even more disturbed than he, began to draw his chair nearer.

"Well? go on."

"Well, monsieur le baron?"

"Well, my dear and noble friends, on leaving that brilliant society, where, to tell the truth, I stayed rather late, I found no carriage at the door. I was alone, in a street that I did not know. Suddenly four cutthroats leaped upon me. Alas! I had no weapons, but I defended myself like a lion. But all in vain! They beat me and threw me down, and the worst of it is that they robbed me of all the money I had about me."

"Great God! and you had our funds?" cried Ménard.

"I did."

"And your own fifteen thousand francs?"

"Everything—every sou, I tell you. There is nothing left, except what you two have about you. They took everything, even my superb hat, with its steel buckle worth sixty francs."

"What a catastrophe! what are we to do?" exclaimed Ménard, who was terribly distressed to think that, after living like lords, they were reduced to living by their wits.

Frédéric said nothing; he was suspicious of Dubourg's tale; and that worthy, perceiving his incredulity, tried to overcome it by crying every minute:

"What a fatality! to be attacked and robbed! Such things happen to nobody but me!"

"Indeed, monsieur le baron, you do seem to be unlucky," said Ménard, remembering the theft of the berlin.

"With whom did you pass the evening?" inquired Frédéric.

"With Madame la Marquise de Versac."

"With Madame de Versac! That's very extraordinary, for I saw her yesterday at her country house."

"You saw her! What do you mean? Do you know her?" cried Dubourg, in a voice that did not at all resemble an invalid's.

"Madame de Versac came to my father's house several times, when she was in Paris last year. In the summer, she lives at her country house. I saw her there yesterday, I tell you, and she reproved me gently for not coming there to stay with her; she certainly did not come back to the city."

"Great God! what do I hear? How old is this marchioness?"

"Not over twenty-eight; her town house is on Place Bellecour."

"Ten thousand cigars! that was a contraband marchioness! What an infernal fool, not to have discovered it!"

Dubourg jumped up and down in his bed, rolled himself up in the bedclothes, snatched off his nightcap and threw it on the floor, while Ménard cried:

"Monsieur le baron is mad; I am going to fetch an apothecary!"

The tutor left the room, and Frédéric was not sorry, for it gave him an opportunity to have an explanation with Dubourg; but for several minutes he absolutely refused to keep still; he was in a frenzy at the recollection of the soi-disant counts and chevaliers. He dressed in hot haste, swearing that he would find his baron with the watch-charms, his threadbare chevalier, and his blackleg with lace cuffs; that he would break the baroness's remaining teeth, beat the viscountess, and horsewhip madame la marquise.

At last, Frédéric succeeded in making himself heard.

"So you gambled last night, you wretch, did you? and that is where our funds have gone?"

"Ah! my friend, beat me, kill me! I know that I am a good-for-naught. But, really, you would have done the same in my place. When a person assumes a respectable name—— For my part, I went there in all confidence, hoping to make an advantageous match. I heard people all about me talking of nothing but 'my estates, my châteaux, my servants, my millions'—as I would say 'my cane' or 'my hat.' And then, they dazed me with attentions and liqueurs. Still, I ought to have noticed that there was a suspicious look to it all; but what can you expect? Unluckily, I am not accustomed to good society. I took the pressure of one woman's foot for patrician manners, and another woman's blunders in grammar for a German accent. We played cards,—I confess that I love cards,—and they stripped me of everything, even to my hat! But they haven't seen the end of it!"

"Where are you going?" said Frédéric, trying to detain his friend, who had taken his shocking old hat as if to go out.

"Let me go, let me go! I am going to hunt up my blacklegs, and perhaps—— Wait here for me."

Dubourg opened the door just as Ménard returned with an apothecary's clerk, who had a sedative potion in each hand.

Dubourg roughly pushed the tutor aside when he tried to stop him, and descended the stairs four at a time, while the tutor collided with the apothecary, who fell to the floor with his potions.

"We must send somebody after him," said Ménard, thinking that Dubourg was in a high fever. Frédéric had some difficulty in inducing him to dismiss the apothecary, by assuring him that the baron was very much better.

Dubourg betook himself to the residence of his false marchioness, whose address he had retained. He was obliged to go on foot, and he no longer assumed the air of a great noble. The eyeglass would have accorded but ill with the wretched tile, which was not half large enough for him. But at that time he was thinking exclusively of his money, not at all of his costume. When he reached the house he had visited the night before, which he readily recognized from having scrutinized it carefully in the night, he entered the hall, the door of which was open, went upstairs, and looked and listened, but neither saw anybody nor heard a sound. He rang at the door of the apartment from which he had been ejected so roughly, but no one answered the bell. He rang again and again, with increasing violence, until the bell-pull came off in his hand, but the door remained closed.

"Open, you rascals, you blacklegs! or I'll go for a magistrate," cried Dubourg, putting his mouth to the keyhole.

Finally an old woman appeared on the landing above and asked him why he was making such an uproar.

"I want to speak with the people who live here on the first floor," he replied.

"There's no one living there now, monsieur; it was let furnished to a woman who went away this morning before daybreak."

Dubourg was petrified. He realized that he could not hope to recover his money. He returned slowly and dejectedly to the hotel, and joined Frédéric and Ménard with an expression of utter dismay.

"Well, what about the robbers?" inquired Frédéric.

"Ah! my friend, they have fled."

"I was sure of it."

"But you have entered a complaint with the magistrate, surely, monsieur le baron?"

"I have done all that there was to do, Monsieur Ménard; but I fancy that we may say good-bye to our money."

"In that case, what are we going to do?"

"That is what we must consider.—How much money have you, Monsieur Ménard?"

"Not more than two louis."

"And you, Frédéric?"

"I have about ten."

"That isn't enough to pay our landlord, for we must owe him at least three hundred francs."

"What! hasn't he been paid?"

"Who ever heard of making people of our sort pay in advance?"

"But think how extravagant we have been!"

"We had to live; and what difference does it make whether we owe one hundred francs or three hundred, as we can't pay?"

"However, we cannot leave this hotel without settling our account, and we cannot continue our journey without money."

"That would be rather difficult, to be sure," said Ménard.

"I see but one way to get any," said Dubourg, "and that is to apply to Monsieur le Comte de Montreville. He certainly won't leave his son in straits."

"Ask monsieur le comte for money, when it isn't three weeks since we left Paris! What will he think?" murmured Ménard, with a sigh.—"What if monsieur le baron should write to his steward at Rava or Krapach?"

"Why, I would write in a moment, but it's so far!—It would take at least two months to get an answer, because at this time of year the mails are greatly delayed by avalanches."

"What, monsieur le baron, in summer?"

"Summer is the season when the snow melts. Pardieu! if it was winter, they could make half the distance on snow-shoes. We couldn't wait all that time in this inn; we must have money at once."

"My dear Ménard," said Frédéric, "you really must apply to my father."

"Well, I will write him what has happened to monsieur le baron——"

"No, no; you are the one he gave the money to, and you are the one who was robbed; it's useless to mention me. Just imagine that you were the one who was robbed last night."

"Come, my dear Ménard, write my father a most pathetic letter."

"The deuce! that's a very hard task."

"I'll dictate to you, if you choose," said Dubourg.

"You will oblige me very much, monsieur le baron."

So Ménard took the pen, and Dubourg dictated the following letter:

"Monsieur le Comte:

"I have the honor to inform you of our safe arrival at Lyon, where I was attacked at night, as I was returning to our hotel, and robbed of all that we possessed; which places us in a very embarrassing position, from which we beg you to extricate us as soon as possible. Monsieur your son is as well as Esculapius himself; the journey seems to have done him a vast amount of good. He bids me offer you his most respectful homage."

Ménard signed this letter, to which Dubourg desired Frédéric to add a few affectionate words. But Frédéric had never lied to his father, and he preferred to write nothing rather than to try to deceive him.

The letter was mailed, and they had no choice but to await the reply. Luckily, their landlord did not seem at all disturbed. Moreover, Frédéric had a chaise and horses, which, at need, would bring more than enough to pay their bill; that fact set his mind at rest, but he none the less urged his companions to spend less on the table. Dubourg, however, did not agree with him; he thought that such a course might arouse suspicions of their plight, and Ménard was once more of monsieur le baron's opinion.

Frédéric resumed his wanderings; but Dubourg abandoned his street promenades with Ménard; after parading his fashionable costume and playing the wealthy palatine on the public thoroughfares of Lyon, he did not care to show himself in a shabby hat and with a long face; he was convinced that people would divine that he was penniless: there are so many men who owe their self-confidence and their assurance entirely to the money they have in their pockets, which alone gives them aplomb in society.

Dubourg passed his days talking philosophy with Ménard, who was no philosopher, but listened attentively to the baron, whom he considered a man of profound learning, though he was no longer so overjoyed to have him for a travelling companion, because, when he recalled their adventures, from the time that the palatine had overturned them into a ditch, it seemed to him that Monsieur de Potoski carried about with him a monumental ill luck, of which they had already felt the effects.

After ten days, they received a reply from the count; it was addressed to Monsieur Ménard, but it was Frédéric

who, with a trembling hand, broke the seal.

"See what there is enclosed, first," said Dubourg.

They found a draft on a Lyon banker for six thousand francs.

"Good! here's something to help us endure papa's reproaches," said Dubourg; "now let's read his letter."

Monsieur de Montreville wrote to Ménard these few words only:

"I place no sort of credence in your fable of robbers, but I am very glad to forgive my son's first escapade; I trust, however, that it will make him more prudent. I send you some money, but do not rely upon the like indulgence again."

"He didn't believe us," said Frédéric.

"I am very much afraid that he is angry," said Ménard.

"Oh! don't be alarmed; he'll cool down. Hereafter, we will travel like three little pasteboard Cupids; we will be virtuous, orderly; in short, true philosophers—which need not interfere with our living well, because that is necessary for our health; eh, Monsieur Ménard?"

"*Credo equidem*, monsieur le baron."

"But no more pomp and parade; I resume my incognito."

"What, monsieur le baron!"

"Yes, Monsieur Ménard; at all events, with six thousand francs we couldn't play the grandee very long—I mean, live up to our rank."

"But, monsieur le baron, when you have received answers from Rava and Krapach?"

"Oh! then it will be different; but I fear we shall not have them for a long time. As to the funds, I think that we had better let Frédéric take charge of them. He is calm and cool, and that is what we need in a cashier."

"It's a great pity," muttered Ménard; "we lived so handsomely when monsieur le baron paid the bills!"

All their plans being made, they paid their hotel bill; it amounted to eight hundred and fifty francs for the three weeks they had passed there, so that the count's remittance was seriously impaired at the outset; but meanwhile they had been lodged and fed like lords. Dubourg's only sentiment was regret at their inability to continue the same mode of life; Ménard sighed as he thought of the delicious repasts they had enjoyed; and Frédéric observed to Dubourg, in an undertone:

"My friend, if we had continued to go so fast, we shouldn't have gone very far."

Monsieur le comte's horses were sold, and they arranged with a stable-keeper to journey from Lyon.

"These two halts have cost you dear, monsieur le baron," said Ménard; "a berlin and fifty thousand francs the first time, and fifteen thousand the second! A man could not travel long at that price!"

"My mind is at rest now, Monsieur Ménard; I defy anyone to rob me. Socrates found his house large enough to receive his friends, and I shall find my purse full enough so long as Frédéric pays for me."

Ménard had no reply to make to that; the comparison did not seem to him a happy one.

Instead of taking the road to Turin, Frédéric gave orders to drive toward Grenoble; he desired to visit that city and its suburbs, especially the Carthusian monastery, whose wild aspect astounds and almost terrifies the traveller. Dubourg was in no hurry to reach Italy; it mattered little to him in which direction they went. Moreover, since his last misadventure, he did not presume to offer his advice. As for Ménard, he was always ready to yield to Frédéric's wishes, but the name of the Carthusian monastery made him shudder; he was afraid that his former pupil would want to take up his quarters in some hermitage, and he felt no sort of inclination for a frugal life.

As they drew near the banks of the Isère, the country became more picturesque, more mountainous, and more impressive. The fields were interspersed with thickets; the brooks, after trickling across a plain, plunged in foamy cascades over steep cliffs. How different the scene from the noisy suburbs of Paris and the lovely landscapes of the Rhône valley! The picture was more serious, more majestic perhaps, disposing the mind to pleasant reverie, and wafting one's thoughts far from the turmoil of great cities.

"What a beautiful country this is!" said Frédéric; "I find here an indefinable charm which fascinates my heart as well as my eyes. How pleasant it is to drive along these shady roads!"

"And dream of Madame Dernange, I suppose?"

"Oh! no, Dubourg; she has been out of my thoughts for a long while, I assure you, as have all the rest of the coquettes I knew in Paris."

"Well, what do you dream about, then, in your long, solitary walks?"

"Alas! I don't know; I dream of a being I have never seen, a woman who is lovely, sweet-tempered, loving, and, above all, faithful!"

"And you look for her on the banks of a brook?"

"I don't look for her; I am waiting for chance to bring us together."

"If chance should wait for thirty years or so, you would both be a trifle mature."

"Oh! Dubourg, how irritating you are! you have no idea of love!"

"Love, my friend, is a doll that everyone dresses according to his own fancy;—isn't that so, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I cannot answer from experience, monsieur le baron."

In due time they arrived at Grenoble, where they dismissed their driver. Their arrangements there were not the same as at Lyon; but although the hotel was less palatial, they had an excellent table; poultry was abundant, and the wine very good. Monsieur Ménard and Dubourg made the best of it.

On the day following their arrival, Frédéric and his companions started off to visit the Carthusian monastery. Dubourg, having ceased to play the grand seigneur, was quite as willing to accompany his friend as to remain with Ménard, and the latter decided to go along, although he was a poor walker, and Frédéric, the better to enjoy the country, proposed to go on foot.

The monastery, which they reached after half a day's walk, first appears to the visitor surrounded by mountains

covered with firs, by fertile valleys and rich pasture lands. Approaching by Fourvoyerie, you follow a road hewn out of the solid rock, with a rushing mountain stream on the left, and a perpendicular cliff sixty feet high on the right. One inevitably feels an unfamiliar sensation, a blending of wonder and alarm, at sight of that wild landscape.

They stopped to examine the peak called L'Aiguille, which towers above the gate of the Grande Chartreuse. Frédéric was lost in admiration, Dubourg looked calmly at the rock, and Ménard sighed; but the hospitable welcome they received at the Chartreuse revived the poor tutor's spirits; while he agreed that there were many superb views in that region, he felt that he preferred his little fourth-floor room on Rue Bétisy to the most picturesque cell in the monastery, where, moreover, fast-days were very numerous. It is not given to everybody to appreciate the beauties of nature; and it was with extreme delight that Ménard started to return to Grenoble, although Frédéric proposed that they should sleep at the Chartreuse to avoid overtiring themselves. Ménard declared that he was not tired, and that the walk of five leagues had no terrors for him; so they set out, after dinner.

The sun was just setting and our travellers were still four leagues from Grenoble, because Frédéric paused every instant to call his friends' attention to a valley, a windmill, or a lovely view. Every time that Frédéric stopped, Ménard sat down on the turf, and they had much difficulty in inducing him to rise again. The worthy man was not a great walker, but he summoned all his courage and took the liberty of clinging to the arm of monsieur le baron, who was the most good-natured fellow in the world when he was not putting on the airs of a palatine.

Frédéric's attention was attracted by strains of rustic music.

"Come," he said, "let us go down in this direction; I see some villagers dancing below; let us enjoy the picture of their merrymaking."

"Come on," said Dubourg; "there are probably some pretty girls among the dancers."

"Let us go," said Ménard; "we shall have a chance to rest and refresh ourselves."

They descended a hill into a valley bordered by oaks and firs, where there were assembled the people of a small village which could be seen farther up the valley. It was the local saint's day, and the peasants were celebrating it by dancing. The orchestra consisted of a bagpipe and tambourine, but that was quite enough for their purpose. Happiness shone on every face; the girls wore their best gowns, and the coquettish costume of the village maidens of that province makes them most attractive, as a general rule. The older people were seated a little apart, chatting together and drinking, while their children danced.

Ménard seated himself at a table, and called for refreshments. Dubourg prowled about the dancers, making sweet speeches to the prettiest peasants; while Frédéric, after watching the picture for some time, walked away from the dance, along the bank of a stream which wound in and out among the willows on the edge of a dense forest.

He had walked so far that the notes of the bagpipe hardly reached his ears, and was about to return to his companions, when, on turning his head, he espied, within a few paces, a young girl seated on the bank, looking toward the valley with a bewitchingly sweet expression, and smiling at the dance, which she could see in the distance; but there was in her smile a tinge of melancholy which seemed to be a natural part of it. She was apparently fifteen or sixteen years of age. Her garments indicated poverty, but her charms made one overlook them. Beautiful fair hair played in curls about her innocent brow, her features were refined and delicate, her mouth graceful and smiling, and her soft blue eyes wore a pathetic expression of gentle melancholy which harmonized with the pallor of her complexion.

Frédéric stopped and gazed at the young woman; he could not tire of contemplating her. Why was she there, alone by the brook, while her companions were making merry and dancing? Why that melancholy expression? It was only a moment since Frédéric's eyes had fallen upon her, and his interest was already awakened; he longed to know all about her; it seemed to him that his heart already shared her sorrows.

At that moment, several couples passed along the path on their way to the dance. Frédéric accosted a peasant woman, and said, pointing to the girl sitting by the brook:

"Pray, who is that pretty child, and why doesn't she join in your sports?"

The villagers stopped and replied, with a compassionate glance at the girl:

"Oh! monsieur, the poor dear don't dance! That's Sister Anne."

Frédéric, surprised, expected some further explanation; but they went on toward the dance, repeating sadly:

"That's Sister Anne."

IX

WHAT WAS SHE DOING THERE?—THE VILLAGE DANCE

The peasants had gone, but Frédéric remained on the path among the willows, where the last rays of the sun cast but a feeble light. He was still gazing at the girl, who did not see him because, being no longer able to see the dance, she had let her head fall on her breast, and her eyes were fixed on the water flowing at her feet.

What did those women mean by those words: "Poor dear, she don't dance. That's Sister Anne"?

Frédéric was deeply impressed by the tone of commiseration in which this was said. The villagers seemed to pity the lovely child, and to consider it perfectly natural that she should take no part in her companions' pleasures.

What grief, what possible cause, could keep that pretty girl away from those scenes of merrymaking? Although her charming features wore an expression of gentle melancholy, she did not seem to be agitated by any recent sorrow; on the contrary, she seemed placid and calm; she smiled at the brook which rippled at her feet, and her soul was evidently as pure as the water in which her face was reflected.

The girl was, as it were, wrapped in mystery, and Frédéric longed to solve that mystery. Anything that concerned Sister Anne was no longer a matter of indifference to him. He walked toward her very softly; he was close beside her, and she did not raise her eyes.

"How is this?" said Frédéric, in a trembling voice; "you do not imitate your companions? They are dancing within a few yards, and you stay by yourself in this lonely spot?"

At the sound of Frédéric's voice, the girl turned her head and started back in alarm; but, in a moment, reassured by his gentle tone, she became calm again, and simply rose and moved away from the brook.

"Have you some trouble, some profound sorrow? Can it be that you, young as you are, are already acquainted with unhappiness? If it were in my power to lighten your burden, I should consider myself very fortunate."

The girl glanced at him with an expression in which melancholy resignation was blended with gratitude. She fastened her lovely eyes on his for a moment, then, with a graceful courtesy, started to walk away. He took her hand and gently detained her. She seemed surprised, yes, frightened, and withdrew her hand from the young man's, who was already pressing it.

"You are going away," said Frédéric, "without answering me, without deigning to say a word to me?"

The girl's eyes became even more expressive, as if animated by indescribable pain; in a moment, they were filled with tears, which trickled down her almost colorless cheeks.

"Great heaven! you weep! can it be that I am the cause?" cried Frédéric, seizing the poor child's hand again. She made a sign, as if to say that it was not his fault. A faint smile broke through her tears; but she withdrew her hand again, and, darting into the thickest part of the wood, as light of foot as a fawn, she speedily disappeared.

He took a few steps in the same direction; but it was quite dark, and he could not see where she went. So he returned to the stream and stopped at the place where she had been sitting.

Frédéric could not as yet fully realize his feelings, but he was conscious of a sentiment for that girl more tender, more intense, and at the same time much more delicious to his heart, than any of his previous passions. When he lost sight of her, his heart beat violently; it seemed to him already that she was something to him. What grace, what charms! But why that melancholy and that silence? They called her Sister Anne: what was the significance of that title of *Sister*? Did she belong to some religious order? But, no; her costume did not indicate anything of that kind, and she was free to go where she chose. But there was an air of mystery about her.

"Lovely girl!" thought Frédéric, looking toward the forest in which she had vanished; "I propose to find out all about you; I propose to see you again and to allay your grief. I feel that I love you already; yes, I love you; not as I loved all those coquettes who deceived me, but as you deserve to be loved; for I read sincerity and innocence in your eyes. Ah! how happy I should be, if you should come to love me some day!"

But it had grown quite dark; it was time for him to join his companions. Frédéric regretfully left the willow-bordered path where he had seen Sister Anne; but as he returned to the valley, he said to himself:

"I will see her again; I absolutely must! I won't mention her to Dubourg; he would laugh at me; he believes that all women are alike; he has no conception of love.—Poor child! I will soon find out why you don't take part in your comrades' sports."

The dancing had become very spirited; the villagers abandoned themselves with zest to the pastime; joy and happiness were depicted on every face. The songs of the drinkers blended with the music of the bagpipe and tambourine. The young men squeezed their sweethearts' hands as they danced, the maidens smiled sweetly at their lovers, the mothers at their little ones, and the old men at their bottles. Each smiled at what he loved best, as if in gratitude for the pleasure it afforded him.

Ménard, who had seated himself between two sturdy drinkers, listened calmly to the gossip of the neighborhood, eating a salad the while, and clinking glasses with his neighbors; for pride is unknown in the village, and Ménard never exhibited that sentiment inopportunely—that is to say, he knew enough to make it subordinate to his appetite.

Dubourg, forgetting his titles of nobility, had joined in the dance. He was capering about with a pretty brunette, with bright eyes, a retroussé nose, and an exceedingly shapely leg. The peasant girl was not at all intimidated by her elegant partner; on the contrary, she kept saying to him:

"Come, why don't you dance? you don't move at all!"

Dubourg performed his dainty little Parisian steps, which are so highly esteemed in the salons of the capital; but to the villagers that was nothing more than walking, and the girl said again and again:

"Can't you dance better'n that? What kind of dancing do you call that? Come, you must kick up your heels, or I'll take another partner!"

Thereupon Dubourg, who did not want her to take another partner, made a telegraph of his arms and legs, and kept them in motion incessantly. Ménard, watching his performance from his table, said to his neighbors:

"There's monsieur le baron dancing a polonaise with your young women! Look, my boys, that's the way they dance at Cracow, and on the Krapach Mountains! How dignified it is! how graceful! What pretty steps he takes *per fas et nefas*!"

Ménard's neighbors opened their eyes to their fullest extent, understanding nothing of what he said. But Dubourg's partner was content, and he, seeing that she was inclined to look favorably on him, ventured to steal a kiss; but she instantly retorted by boxing his ears, for the village damsels of the suburbs of Grenoble do not resemble the Gotons of the suburbs of Paris.

Frédéric stood near the dancers, but paid no heed to the animated picture before his eyes. He fancied himself still in the lonely path, and saw, in his imagination, the girl sitting beside the stream.

Dubourg joined him, having left his partner because he saw that he would have nothing but his capers and prancing for his pains, and because the cuffing the peasant had given him had cooled his ardor for the dance.

"Where on earth have you been?" he asked; "you left us at just the wrong time."

"I have been taking a walk."

"What a tireless walker you are! But it seems to me that it's time for us to walk to Grenoble, which is still four leagues away."

They joined Ménard, who complimented Dubourg on his dancing. Frédéric inquired the shortest way to Grenoble, and a young villager offered to guide them part of the way; but Ménard did not seem capable of walking four leagues, and even Dubourg was dismayed by the distance. The villager suggested his farm horse, on condition that they should ride him at a footpace. The suggestion was gratefully accepted by Dubourg and Ménard; the latter rode behind, clinging fast to the baron. Frédéric went on foot with their guide.

The weather was superb, and the fields were bathed in moonlight. The forests of fir rose majestically on their left hand, and the smith's hammer alone broke the silence of the night. As they passed a forge, a bright glare would efface for a moment the moon's bluish light, and cast a reddish gleam over the landscape. The voices of the workmen blending with the clang of the hammer inspired Dubourg to say to Ménard:

"Do you hear the Cyclops forging Jupiter's thunderbolts?"

And Ménard replied:

"Not for all the gold of Peru would I venture among those people alone, at night."

And he dug his heels into their charger, which did not quicken its pace. Dubourg and the tutor were a little behind the others, because the road was very stony and the horse could make but slow progress. The guide was a boy of twelve, ingenuous and frank like most mountaineers.

"What is this village we are leaving?" Frédéric asked him.

"Vizille, monsieur; it's the prettiest village round Grenoble."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes, monsieur; I was born here."

"Do you know——"

Before completing his question, Frédéric turned to see if his companions could hear him; but they were more than fifty yards behind. Dubourg was talking about Bretagne, and describing to Ménard how the people lived there. Frédéric saw that he could talk with their guide without any fear of being overheard.

"Do you know a young girl in the village, who is called Sister Anne?"

"Sister Anne? oh! yes, monsieur; of course I know her. She don't live just in the village, but her cottage ain't far away. Poor Sister Anne! who is there that don't know her, hereabouts?"

"Why, you, too, seem to pity her? Is she so very unfortunate, pray?"

"*Dam'*! of course I pity her; her story is very sad."

"Do you know it?"

"Yes, monsieur; my mother's told it to me more than once; everybody in our village knows it."

"Tell me the story; tell me all you know about Sister Anne; speak, my friend, and be sure not to forget anything."

As he spoke, Frédéric put a silver coin in the boy's hand; he was much surprised to be paid for such a simple thing, and artlessly began his story, of which Frédéric, walking close beside him, did not lose a word.

X

SISTER ANNE'S STORY

"Sister Anne's mother was a lady named Clotilde, who was sweet and pretty, so they say. She belonged to a rich family, and wasn't brought up like a peasant girl; she knew ever so much, but she and her husband came and lived in our village. Folks said it was a love match, and that Clotilde chose to have her lover and a cottage instead of the fine house she could have had with another husband.

"Clotilde and her husband lived happily for some time in our village; they had a daughter first, little Anne, who was as pretty as her mother—but you've seen her, haven't you, monsieur?

"Four years after, they had another child, a boy; and they were very glad, and the little girl never left her little brother. But, before long, the poor things had lots of trouble: a big storm beat down their crops, so they lost them; and poor Clotilde was taken sick. Then her husband couldn't see any other way to support his wife and children but to enlist. So he sold himself as a substitute, gave all the money to Clotilde, and went away.

"'Take good care of our poor children,' he says to her.

"Clotilde felt so bad to have her husband go away that she couldn't do anything for a long time, and little Anne took the whole care of her brother, because she loved him with all her heart. Her mother used to say to her:

"'Take good care of your brother; perhaps he won't have anybody but you to support him before long.'

"A whole year passed. Clotilde's husband used to write often at first, but all of a sudden his letters stopped. There had been a battle—for in those days they were fighting all the time.

"Poor Clotilde's husband was killed. The folks in the neighborhood heard of it, but no one was brave enough to tell her; and Clotilde kept expecting to hear from him long after he was dead.

"Every day, the poor woman used to go to the top of a hill, where you can see the road a long way in the direction of Grenoble; that was the way she expected to see her husband come. She often passed whole days sitting at the foot of a tree, looking at the road where she saw her dear husband the last time.

"When anybody saw Clotilde there, they'd try to comfort her by talking about her children, but she'd say in a sad voice:

"'Anne is with her brother; she never leaves him; she'll be a second mother to him.'

"You see, the little girl was only seven years old, but she surprised the whole village by her intelligence and her loving care of her brother. The poor little fellow didn't see anybody but her most of the day, but he always had all he wanted. His Sister Anne dressed him, put him to sleep, played with him, and tried to guess what he was going to want; so her name, Sister Anne, was the first word he ever spoke, and everybody in the village called her that, and spoke of her as a model of sisterly affection; she has gone by that name ever since.

"One day, Clotilde went out as usual, to go where she always used to go, and left Sister Anne with her brother. Their mother didn't come back at the usual time. The little boy kept on playing, but his sister kept looking out into the fields and saying:

"'Why don't mamma come?'

"When the night came, Clotilde hadn't come home. If Anne had been alone, she would have gone to the village and all around, to ask if anyone had seen her mother. But she couldn't leave her brother; he was a treasure that had

been given to her to take care of, and she couldn't think of leaving him for an instant. At last, the poor girl decided to put her brother to bed, for he was only three years old and needed his sleep; then she sat down by his bed to wait for their mother. Every minute she suffered more and more; she couldn't help crying, and she kept saying to herself:

"'Why don't mamma come? O mon Dieu! she can't have deserted us!'

"To make it all the harder for her, a terrible storm came up. The thunder made a frightful uproar, and Sister Anne was awfully afraid of it; so she put her head into her brother's cradle and called to her mother to come and save them.

"All of a sudden, there was a frightful crash that startled the whole village. Sister Anne was dazed by it, and didn't dare to open her eyes for some time. But when she did open them, and looked around, the cottage was filled with thick smoke. The poor girl looked to see where it could come from. The smoke got thicker every minute. Anne ran toward the window, but couldn't get to it on account of the flames. The lightning had struck the roof and set it on fire, and the two poor children were surrounded by flames on all sides.

"Then the girl thought of nothing but her brother; she took him out of the cradle and ran all around the room, shrieking at the top of her voice. But the danger was increasing all the time, and she lost her strength; the smoke suffocated her; she tried to keep on calling, but she couldn't.

"Everybody in the village ran to the cottage, of course, monsieur. They couldn't save the house, but they must save the children, anyway. They succeeded, by taking great risks, in getting into Sister Anne's room. They found her with her brother under their mother's bed; she was holding him tight against her breast, trying to save him from death; but it was no use; the poor little fellow was dead! Sister Anne had only fainted, and they succeeded in bringing her back to life.—But just imagine how surprised and grieved everybody was, monsieur, when they found that the terrible shock had made her dumb!—She opened her mouth, but could only make a sort of low, moaning noise. Since then, the poor girl has never spoken a word!"

"Great God!" cried Frédéric; "poor child! so that is the cause of the melancholy expression of her lovely face!"

"Yes, monsieur," resumed the boy; "Sister Anne is dumb; all that has been done since then to make her able to speak hasn't done any good. The city doctors said that the horrible fright, and her agony at seeing her brother die and not being able to save him, had taken away the power of speech, and that the same kind of shock might give it back to her, perhaps, but nothing else could. But the poor little girl still had a heart to feel her sorrow; she succeeded in making people understand all she had suffered. For ever so many years, she mourned for her brother and her mother; for poor Clotilde gave way to her grief the same night that was so fatal to her children, and they found her dead on top of the mountain, at the foot of the tree.

"The burning of the little cottage deprived Anne of her only place of shelter. But everybody in the village subscribed to help her; and a good woman named Marguerite, who lives in a little cabin in the woods, near the valley, took her in and adopted her. Marguerite was poor, too; but with the money collected from the richest people in the village, Anne bought a cow and a number of goats.

"For several years, she didn't seem able to do any kind of work. She passed her days sitting on the bank of a brook, or in the woods; she didn't listen to what anyone said to her, and couldn't seem to do anything but grieve for her father and mother and brother; but she got partly over her grief in time, and now she's more calm and resigned; she seems to appreciate what people do for her; she works like any country girl, and shows the greatest respect for Marguerite, who is very old and never leaves her cabin. Sister Anne is sweet and good and tender-hearted now, as she always used to be. She even smiles sometimes, but her smile is always sad. If she sees a little boy of her brother's age, it makes her excited and unhappy, and her eyes fill with tears. If you've seen her, monsieur, you know how pretty she is. She's sixteen now; even if she can't talk, she can make herself understood; her gestures mean so much, and her eyes speak so plain! We all understand her as easy as can be. But, for all that, it's a great pity she can't talk; for all the women say it would do her a lot of good."

"Poor child!" said Frédéric; "yes, it is a great pity, indeed! How soft and sweet her voice would be! how I would have liked to hear it! But her misfortune makes her even more interesting in my eyes.—And you say that she lives in the woods?"

"Yes, monsieur; but it's easy enough to find old Marguerite's cabin. If you take the path to the left from the one where the willows are, you'll come to a clearing; then go down a low hill, and the cabin is in front of you."

"Very good, my boy; thank you."

"But here you are at Grenoble; you don't need me any more, do you, monsieur?"

"No, my boy; here, take this with the other, for your trouble."

"Thank you very much, monsieur; if you ever need anyone in the village to help you, my name's Julien, and I'd be glad to work for you."

"Very well; I will remember."

The two horsemen dismounted; the young guide took their place, doffed his cap to the travellers, and rode away at a footpace. Frédéric, musing upon all that he had heard, walked in silence beside his two companions, who, as they entered Grenoble, were discussing the proper way to serve a *canard aux olives*—a discussion in which they had been engaged for some time, Dubourg insisting upon the method in vogue in Bretagne, and Ménard immovable in the principles he had learned from the *Cuisinier Royal*.

On reaching the inn, they retired to take the rest of which they stood in need after so tiresome a day. But Frédéric could not sleep; the dumb girl's face was constantly in his thoughts; he thought of her misfortune, of the pathetic story he had heard, and he said to himself:

"How dearly she loved her brother! What a loving heart! How she will love, when love makes itself known to her! What pleasure to awaken love in her heart! to read in her lovely eyes, which fill the place so well of the organ she has lost!"

This thought kept Frédéric busy all night. At daybreak, he rose, and, leaving his companions to enjoy the repose which he could not obtain, left the inn, ordered a horse, and galloped away toward Vizille.

A DAY IN THE WOODS

Love is the god who most agreeably employs our leisure; he scoffs at distances and disarranges time. A lover is never bored, even when he is not favored. Memories, schemes, hopes, afford constant occupation to a loving heart. Love is the god of all countries and of all classes; he finds his way into the humble cottage as well as into the palace. Love is as sweet on the heather as on the softest cushions; indeed, some persons go so far as to maintain that love is truer in the country than in the city; it ought, at all events, to be more natural there. The mountaineer, the woodchopper, the ploughman, may not devote his time to the fine arts, to financial schemes, to political intrigues; but everybody is at liberty to love, luckily for the human race. Some author, I know not who, has said with much truth: "The happiest time of a man's life is that which he spends paying court to his mistress."

What a pity it is that this time is so short! It is probably to renew their happiness that men change mistresses so often. Women do not treat love so lightly. It is their life's history, while with us it is only a romance.

Frédéric soon arrived at the valley where there was dancing the night before, and which was now as peaceful and quiet as the whole neighborhood. A few laboring men passed, on their way to work; here and there, a peasant could be seen in the fields. In the country, the evening's enjoyment does not impair the morrow's toil; the good people find their diversion in talking over the pleasures of the holiday, which will not return for a year; but the time will pass quickly to them: they know so well how to employ it.

Frédéric rode toward the little, willow-lined path; there he dismounted, tied his horse to a tree, and plunged into the woods. He looked for the maid on the bank of the stream, but she was not at the place where he had seen her the night before. So he went farther into the woods, recalled what his guide had told him, and took the path to the left. Everything was peaceful and calm; the dark foliage of the firs almost excluded the daylight. At last he came to a clearing, descended a hill, and saw a wretched cabin before him. The wood of which it was built had rotted in several places, and the thatched roof threatened to fall in. There was a small garden at the right, surrounded by a picket fence, a part of which had fallen.

Frédéric's heart ached at the aspect of the place, which was eloquent of utter poverty and of a lack of the prime necessities of life.

"And this is where she lives," he said to himself; "where she has lived, in poverty and solitude, ever since she was seven years old! Poor child! When your sublime self-sacrifice, when the catastrophe which resulted from it, deserved the homage of all mankind, you had only this wretched hut in which to weep for your brother and parents, and were fortunate not to be left without a shelter and without bread!"

He leaned against a tree and gazed at the cabin; his heart was so full that he could not go forward; he could only sigh and say to himself:

"She is there!"

Several minutes passed. Suddenly, the door of the cabin was thrown open, and a girl appeared in the doorway and looked out into the woods. It was she! The depressing aspect of that wild spot, the gloomy woods, the dilapidated cabin, all vanished! The girl's presence instantly made her surroundings beautiful.—The woman we love wields a tremendous power; she communicates her fascination to everything about her: by her side, the darkest cavern causes no fear, the wildest spot on earth seems a paradise.

Sister Anne went back into the cabin, and soon came out again with four goats, her whole flock. There was a cow in the little garden; she patted her as she passed, as if promising to return soon. Then, driving her goats toward a hillside where there was an abundance of grass, the dumb girl walked slowly behind them, with her head bent forward, raising it only to see that her goats did not go astray.

Frédéric had retained his position against the tree, which concealed him almost entirely, and watched every movement of Sister Anne. When she went toward the hill, he followed her noiselessly; he longed to be by her side, to speak to her; but he was afraid of startling her if he appeared too abruptly. She seemed so shy and timid: suppose she should run away from him again!

But she seated herself on a green mound, and took from her little basket a piece of bread and some figs; she was about to breakfast. Frédéric drew nearer and nearer, until he stood close beside her; and when she turned her head to look after one of her goats, she saw before her again the young man of the previous evening.

The girl made a movement which seemed to be due rather to surprise than alarm; indeed, there was nothing about Frédéric to inspire fear; as he stood before her, himself anxious and trembling, his glance was gentle and timid; his whole aspect and manner bore witness to the tender interest she aroused in him.

As she seemed disposed to rise and go away, Frédéric said to her:

"Do not fly from me, I entreat you, sweet girl; I should be very unhappy if I caused you the slightest fear."

The child smiled, and gave him to understand, by shaking her head gently, that she had no such feeling.

"I saw you last night by the brook," said Frédéric, walking toward her. Sister Anne looked at him, then lowered her eyes, smiling again, as if to say that she remembered him.

"What! you remember me? And you, sweet girl, have not been out of my thoughts for one moment. How could I fail to be impressed by the sight of such lovely features and such charms of person and of manner?"

The girl listened in surprise; all that he said was entirely strange to her ears. He sat down on the turf, a few feet away from her. This action seemed to surprise her still more; she looked at him again, with something like alarm, but the sentiment expressed in his eyes soon set her heart at rest. She looked at the ground, but it was easy to read on her ingenuous features that she was waiting curiously for him to speak again.

"When I saw you yesterday, I felt the deepest interest in you. But how that interest has grown since I learned —— Poor child! Ah! I know of your sad plight! I know all the misfortunes that have been heaped upon you."

The dumb girl's features became more expressive than ever; a heartrending memory seemed to agitate her. She groaned, raised her eyes to heaven, then turned them on the ground once more as a flood of tears poured from them.

Frédéric went to her side; he put one arm lightly about her, and took her hand, which he placed upon his heart.

"I have revived your grief," he said; "pray forgive me. Would to heaven that I could, on the contrary, help you to forget it by making you happy! Poor child! let me wipe away your tears. From this moment, you are no longer alone

on earth; you have a friend, there is a heart that beats in answer to yours, a heart that will beat for you alone, so long as it lives. Anne, dear friend, give me leave to love you, to share your grief, your suffering, to think constantly of you, to see you every day—oh! do not deny me this favor, or I shall be much unhappier than you are!"

Frédéric spoke with great animation; love excited him and made his voice sweeter than ever, his glance more seductive. The dumb girl listened to him at first with surprise; an unfamiliar sentiment disturbed her; she tried to withdraw her hand, but she had not the strength. Frédéric had ceased to speak, and she continued to listen.

But soon the remembrance of her condition, of her misfortune, destroyed the spell that was upon her. She looked at Frédéric with a melancholy expression, and, with a much bitterer glance at herself, withdrew her hand and pushed him away, shaking her head as if to say:

"No, you cannot love me; I am too unfortunate."

Frédéric understood her; he put her hand to his heart again, and said, pointing to the cabin:

"With you, I should be happy living here in these woods."

At that moment, they heard the sound of a little bell. It was a signal which notified Anne that old Marguerite had risen. She hastily called her goats together and prepared to return to the cabin.

"Will you come back?" asked Frédéric; "oh! do let me see you again to-day!"

She pointed to the sun, whose beams were just beginning to shine through the foliage, then rested her head on the back of her hand.

"When the sun goes to rest, you will go to the brook?"

Sister Anne made an affirmative gesture, then hastened back to the cabin, driving her goats before her. But she turned her head before she went in, and looked back to the place where she had left Frédéric, smiled at him, and disappeared. That glance and smile enraptured the young lover; he had already ceased to be a stranger to Sister Anne; that thought filled his heart with joy. It needs so little to make one happy, in love!

Frédéric went back to the place where he had left his horse; but, on the way, he asked himself whether he should go to Grenoble and return at night. It seemed to him more natural to remain in the village, to take a light lunch there, and then to wander about in the neighborhood of the cabin, which, even now, he found it so hard to leave. He cared little what his fellow travellers might think or say. They must end by accustoming themselves to his absences, for Frédéric had a feeling that he would come often to Vizille, or, rather, that he would rarely go to Grenoble. She whom he loved dwelt in those woods; Sister Anne was all in all to him; he no longer thought of the future, his station in life, or his father's plans; he saw only her, he had no wish to live except for her. To be sure, his love dated only from the night before, and he was only twenty-one.

In the village, whither he went to rest and breakfast, he talked about Sister Anne; and everyone seemed to take pleasure in praising her virtue, her sweet nature, her tender heart; but they generally added:

"The poor girl is greatly to be pitied; she stands a good chance of spending her life in that miserable hut; for what man would ever marry an unfortunate mute?"

Frédéric smiled and held his peace; but he was thinking that he had seen in Paris many women resplendent with beauty, charm, and talents, and that he preferred the dumb girl of the forest to them all.

He found in the village such refreshment as he required; he saw that his horse was bountifully fed; then, mounting him again, he rode back to the woods, where he fastened him to a tree near the stream, then bent his steps toward the lonely cabin.

The sun had performed but half his journey; but Frédéric hoped that, if he prowled about the little house, he might see Sister Anne, which would make it easier for him to wait patiently until evening.

As he approached the garden fence, which was only four feet high, he had no difficulty in taking in at a glance the whole extent of the garden. It was small, but they had made the most that could be made of it. Several fruit trees, a few grapevines, vegetables, and flowers, were growing together in that contracted space, where nature was at liberty to follow all her caprices.

As he looked about, Frédéric saw an old woman seated under a fig-tree. She was evidently very old, but her venerable face was the mirror of a calm and peaceful soul. He gazed at her for some time with profound respect; it was she who had adopted Anne, who had filled her mother's place.

The good old woman's face lighted up as the dumb girl approached her, carrying a wooden bowl filled with milk, which she placed on Marguerite's knees. The old woman patted her cheek, saying:

"That is nice, my girl, my dear child. Sit down here by my side. You know how I like to look at you while I am eating."

The girl at once sat down in front of Marguerite; she seemed to be on the alert to anticipate her lightest wish, and more than once she raised her withered hand and kissed it respectfully.

Frédéric did not stir; he could have passed hours watching that picture.

The old woman, after she had finished her meal of milk and fruit, rose, and with Sister Anne's assistance walked two or three times about the garden. Frédéric concealed himself when they passed, but he noticed that the girl glanced into the woods, as if looking for someone. Could that glance be for him! Ah! if so, how fortunate he would be! his heart dared to conceive the hope. He was tempted to enter the garden, to throw himself at the dumb girl's feet; but Marguerite's presence held him back.

At last they returned to the cabin, and Frédéric left the spot from which he could look into the garden. He wandered about the woods for some time. Everything brought the orphan's face before him; every tree, every bush spoke of her. Had she not lived in those woods nine long years? Her feet had trodden every foot of turf, and doubtless her eyes had rested on everything that surrounded her.

He walked slowly back to the brook, and sat down on the spot where he had first seen Sister Anne. It might be a long while before she came. Frédéric took his notebook and pencil from his pocket, and wrote—what? Poetry for Sister Anne; for is not every lover a poet? and are not poets more eloquent when they are lovers? We have the lines Tibullus wrote for Delia; Ovid immortalized Julia; Orpheus enchanted the Shades while seeking Eurydice; it was love that tuned Anacreon's lyre, love that inspired Sappho; Lesbia's charms aroused Catullus's poetic ardor, and Cynthia's imparted delicacy and passion to the flowing verses of Propertius. Does not Petrarch owe a large part of his renown

to Laura? without her, he might have been a poet; but would he have sung of love? To you, Eucharis and Eléonore, we owe the moving elegies of Bertin and Parny's charming verses.

Time passes very swiftly when we are writing poetry for her we love. Frédéric was still leaning over his notebook and writing busily, when he heard a faint sound; he turned his head and saw Sister Anne behind him, watching him with deep interest. She blushed when he detected her, but Frédéric set her mind at rest, and, bidding her sit down beside him, read what he had written.

Sister Anne had no idea what poetry was; but she understood Frédéric's meaning in what he read. The heart is the key to an unsophisticated woman's mind; the opposite is true of women of worldly training.

The girl was already less shy and embarrassed in Frédéric's presence; at sixteen, one is quick to make acquaintances, especially when one has no knowledge of the customs of society or of its laws. Frédéric was so gentle and kind and sympathetic! he pitied her, he talked of her sad story, and the poor orphan was surprised to find that there was somebody besides old Marguerite who was interested in her destiny. The village people always manifested much sympathy and pity for her; but there is in that sentiment something distressing to its object. But that was not what she read in Frédéric's eyes. He talked to her with deep interest and looked at her with affection, and she was already beginning to feel less unhappy.

But the approach of night found them still seated by the stream. They had been there two hours, to their great surprise. Anne rose and pointed to Frédéric's horse; then turned her eyes anxiously toward the village, the woods, and the mountains, and lastly upon Frédéric himself.

"I am going to Grenoble," he said; "I am staying there now with two friends, who may be alarmed by my long absence. But I will come again to-morrow, I will come every day. Do you think that I could pass a single day without seeing you?"

The girl smiled, and seemed more content; she went with him to where his horse was waiting; he pressed her soft hand to his lips, and finally made up his mind to return to the city. Sister Anne went to the edge of the woods, in order to follow him with her eyes as far as the twilight permitted. Not until she could no longer hear his horse's step, did she return slowly to the cabin, pensive and dreamy, surprised by the unfamiliar sensations of which she was conscious, but which she could not understand.

XII

HOW A MAN LOVES AT TWENTY

"Where in the devil have you been?" Dubourg inquired of Frédéric, who arrived at the inn just as his two companions were sitting down to supper.

"I have been—riding about the neighborhood."

"What a mania you have for travelling about the country! Are you going to lead the same kind of life here as at Lyon?"

"Possibly."

"That will be amusing for us! At Lyon, we could at least vary our amusements a little, see people——"

"Yes, the Marquise de Versac, and others, eh?"

"But here! why, we know the city by heart already. If one could make an acquaintance or two, obtain an introduction to a few houses—but when a man has no money, he doesn't dare to show his face anywhere, for it gives one an awkward manner that betrays one at once. If it's absolutely necessary, in every place we stop, for you to know the history of every tree, every stone, and every view, and to pause in rapt contemplation beside every brook, why, we shan't get to Italy for ten years! and your life won't be long enough for you to see half of Europe."

"I must say," observed Ménard, "that monsieur le baron's remarks seem to me most judicious. We move about as rapidly as a tortoise, *si parva licet componere magnis*."

"I could forgive you for making a minute examination of Naples or Florence; there are monuments there which one cannot contemplate too long. Gaze in admiration at the Coliseum or the Basilica of Saint Peter at Rome; walk on Mount Pausilippus or Vesuvius, and I shall not be surprised; but what do you find so extraordinary in this province? It is picturesque and romantic, I agree; but we shall find some much more remarkable views on our journey. Wait, before going into ecstasies, until you are on the glaciers of Mont Blanc, or on some peak of the Apennines; and don't stand a whole day in admiration before an old mulberry-tree overhanging a tiny stream; for there are trees, shrubbery, turf, and fountains everywhere—except in the African desert; and we are not going so far as that."

"My friend," said Frédéric, with a smile, "I have found here what one would seek in vain elsewhere; and that, to my mind, is of more value than all the wonders of the world."

With that, Frédéric went to his room and to bed, paying no heed to Dubourg, who called after him:

"For heaven's sake, tell us what you've found?—What in the devil can he have found, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I am trying to think, monsieur le baron."

"Gad! I wonder if it's the wallet that was stolen from me at Lyon."

"Or your berlin, monsieur le baron."

"My berlin! of course, that's all spent before now—that is to say, that rascal of a postilion has probably sold it to get money for drink."

"True, that is probable. What a pity! such a venerable carriage!"

"But what can he have found that's so delightful?"

"Perhaps it's a method of keeping eggs fresh on a journey."

"Bah! as if Frédéric ever gave a thought to such things!"

"But it would be a most valuable discovery, monsieur le baron. Somebody gave me a receipt for it once, and also one for making milk punch, but I was unlucky enough to lose them while moving."

"It is plain that we shall not find out what he has found, unless he chooses to tell us."

"I will go and think about it while I sleep, monsieur le baron."

"And I will go to sleep thinking about it, Monsieur Ménard."

Early the next morning, Frédéric again set out for the village. He rode down into the valley, left his horse in a field where the grass was as high as his knees, and walked rapidly along the path toward the woods; in a moment he was on the hillside with Sister Anne, who had already driven her little flock to pasture.

A deep flush overspread the girl's cheeks at sight of Frédéric; she smiled, and offered him her hand with a friendly air. She had begun to be impatient at his non-arrival; "Will he not come again?" she had said to herself, and had kept her eyes fastened on the path from the valley. She had known him only two days; but in a heart so affectionate and pure as hers, love is certain to make rapid progress. Was it, then, love that she already felt for the young stranger? Poor child! I am afraid so; and was it not natural? was she not at an age when love blends with all our other sentiments? and Frédéric was well adapted to inspire it.

"I am late," he said, "for my horse did not share my impatience; dear friend, I am so happy with you! I would like never to leave you."

Anne gazed earnestly at him for a long while; she sighed, pointed to the road leading to the city, then glanced at her cabin, as if to say:

"We shall always be separated."

"Leave that cabin, agree to come with me," cried Frédéric, eagerly; "and we will never part."

The girl rose with a gesture of dismay, and, pointing again to the cabin, imitated old Marguerite's tottering steps; then shook her head emphatically, while her eyes shone with a divine expression which said to Frédéric:

"No, I will never leave her."

"Oh! forgive me; I am wrong, I can see it now; your heart cannot be ungrateful; forgive me! love led me astray."

The dumb girl bore him no ill-will; she returned to her seat by his side, and a charming smile lighted up her features. Her beautiful hair, fluttering in the wind, caressed Frédéric's face, and she laughed as she drew it away. But he passed an arm about her waist, and held that lovely head against his heart. His eyes exchanged tender glances with Sister Anne's; his lips touched her cheeks, and the pretty dumb girl's sweet breath mingled with the air he breathed; are not such moments the sweetest in love, the happiest in life?

They passed thus a great part of the day. Frédéric remained in the woods, where Sister Anne brought him fruit and milk, so that he need not go to the village. Already the girl dreaded to have him leave her. She ran again and again to the cabin to see if Marguerite needed her; but the good old woman slept much of the day, and Sister Anne soon ran back to her new friend.

Toward evening, she remained longer with her adopted mother. Meanwhile, Frédéric went down to the stream and waited for her there, his notebook making the time pass quickly. When the girl surprised him writing, she heaved a profound sigh, and, looking sadly down at herself, seemed to say:

"I don't know anything; I never shall know anything."

"I will be your teacher," said Frédéric, in reply to her unspoken thoughts; "I will teach you to speak on paper."

At nightfall, the young man left his friend, who accompanied him sadly to his horse, and whose eyes said:

"Until to-morrow!"

A week passed away. Every morning at daybreak Frédéric left Grenoble, and rode to Vizille on the first horse he found in the inn stable. He passed the whole day with Sister Anne, and left her at nightfall.

When he was away from the dumb girl, Frédéric barely existed, and Sister Anne was no longer happy except when she was with him. Love had taken possession of her heart, without any resistance from her; it had made its appearance embellished by so many charms! why should she repel that sentiment which made her happy? Frédéric possessed every element of seduction; he kept telling her that he loved her and would love her all his life; she did not for one moment doubt his oaths; she did not know what inconstancy was. Why should he lie to her? She abandoned herself to the joy of loving. Her mouth could utter no loving words, but her eyes told him all that was taking place in her heart, and a single one of her glances was equal to the most loving protestations.

Frédéric tried to teach her to write, but love constantly interfered with the lessons he gave her. Seated by her side, pressing her to his heart, with full liberty to gaze at leisure on her lovely features, her intoxicating eyes—he stopped, and forgot what he was about to show her. She looked at him and smiled, and the lesson was forgotten. Frédéric strained her to his heart, his passions were aroused—but one is timid with innocence, especially when one loves sincerely.

But the most timid passion grows bold in time; the habit of seeing each other, of being together, of displaying their mutual affection, drew them closer together every day. They were always alone in the forest, and the forest is a very dangerous place for innocence. Could they long resist their hearts, the flame that consumed them? Frédéric became daring, and Sister Anne gave herself to him without regret, without remorse, for it seemed natural to her to make the man happy whom she was sure that she should love all her life.

In the transports of passion, Frédéric determined not to leave his sweetheart in order to go to Grenoble to sleep. The eight leagues, going and coming, kept them apart a few moments longer, and compelled him to leave her a few moments earlier.

"No," he said, "I do not propose to go away from you any more, not for an hour, not for a minute. When I cannot see you, why, I will sleep in the woods, on the grass, near your cabin. As if I could be uncomfortable there!"

The lovely girl threw her arms about her lover's neck, kissed him, did a thousand foolish things; her every gesture was eloquent of her happiness. He would not leave her any more; therefore she would be happy every minute. The poor child believed that it was possible. Suddenly, as if struck by a new idea, she led Frédéric to the cabin and pointed to a window; it was in the room where old Marguerite slept, and close beside it was another window, in the dumb girl's room; she led Frédéric there, laid her head on the back of her hand, drew him to her, and gazed passionately into his face. The young man understood her; he pressed her to his heart, and cried:

"Yes, I will sleep with you, always by your side! Ah! how happy we shall be!"

Thus did the child of nature soon discover what would forward her love; for to love ardently requires neither art

nor study; the heart is the best master. Several times, Sister Anne manifested a wish to present Frédéric to her adopted mother; she could not understand why he avoided her, until he said:

"Marguerite would not leave you so entirely at liberty, if she knew that you saw me every day; on the contrary, she would tell you that you must avoid me and not speak to me."

These words were enough to prevent Anne from returning to the subject. Forbid her to see Frédéric! order her to avoid him! why, that would be condemning her to weep all her life. She felt that she would not have the strength to obey; so it was much better to conceal her happiness from Marguerite. The good old woman was growing weaker every day; she rarely left her chair, where she dozed a great part of the time; so that it was very easy to conceal the truth from her.

The night succeeded that day on which Frédéric had won the sweetest of all triumphs and had known the intoxication of a genuine passion. But the approach of darkness did not drive him forth from the woods; on the contrary, it was to increase his happiness tenfold.

He did not give a thought to his companions, to their anxiety about him, or to their embarrassing position since he had all the money; he did not remember that he had a horse belonging to the inn; he had no thought for anything on earth but Sister Anne. Not even the memory of his father interfered to mar his happiness. The present was all in all to him; Sister Anne engrossed his heart and mind; he had never known a woman who could be compared with her. Could he find elsewhere in the world so much beauty, grace, innocence, and love? Her misfortune made her even dearer to him. Frédéric was very romantic, and he did not look upon love so lightly as most young men of his years; so that his conduct should appear less extraordinary to us. And then, too, the dumb girl was so pretty! In the first transports of love, a cabin, a forest, a desert, is what all lovers desire; but this intoxication is of short duration. Will Frédéric be more constant?

In the path by the stream, where they sat together so often, he waited until old Marguerite should fall asleep. Then Sister Anne was to steal out of the cabin and come for her lover.

Frédéric tied his horse to an old ruined hovel, where a woodcutter had once lived, and which he used as a stable.

The moon was shining brightly; it was reflected in the limpid water of the brook and made the sparse clearings in the wood as light as day. Frédéric listened intently for his sweetheart's footstep! The time seemed very long; every minute robbed love of a sigh. He tried to look beneath the black firs and distinguish the cabin. At last he heard a faint sound: it was she. He could not see her, but his heart told him that she was near. As light of foot as a fawn, as swift as the hunter's arrow, as beautiful as happiness, the dumb girl sped through the paths of that forest, whose every corner she knew. In an instant, she was beside her lover, who kissed her on the forehead and could not forbear to gaze long and lovingly at her. He was proud of his good fortune; the time and place, the joy that shone on her features, the mystery that surrounded them—all seemed to make Sister Anne lovelier than ever. Her hair, carelessly caught up so that a part of it played about her neck; her shapely figure, which a light gown veiled without concealing; and her eyes, so sweet and so overflowing with love, renewed Frédéric's transports.

"Come, come," he said; "lead me!"

The girl took his arm and led him through the dense woods. They soon reached and entered the humble cabin, which had become in his eyes the most delicious retreat. He shared Sister Anne's bed; how could he envy those who sleep in palaces? Happy lovers! let us leave them to enjoy their happiness.

XIII

DUBOURG PLAYS THE GRAND SEIGNEUR ONCE MORE.—NEW ACQUAINTANCES

On the day following Frédéric's first absence, Monsieur Ménard, having risen early, burst into Dubourg's chamber, crying with a triumphant air:

"I have found it, monsieur le baron; I am certain that I have found it."

"Found what?" said Dubourg, who was just awake; "your receipt for keeping eggs fresh?"

"No; but what it was that charmed monsieur le comte so yesterday; that wonderful place where he passed the day."

"Bah! you say you know where he was?"

"Yes! I would stake my head on it!"

"Tell me, then."

"It was the Château de Bayard, which must be in this neighborhood, in the valley of Grésivaudan."

"The Château de Bayard? Faith! it's quite possible; however, we'll ask him at breakfast."

But Frédéric did not appear at breakfast. Dubourg summoned one of the servants.

"Has our companion gone away already?"

"Yes, monsieur, at daybreak; he took the first horse that was ready, and went off at a gallop."

"Gone again! and left us here, perhaps for the whole day!"

"I am convinced that it's the Château de Bayard that has turned his head."

"Hum! I'm very much afraid myself that it's some more modern marvel. However, as we have nothing better to do, let's go and see the ruins of this château, and we can look for Frédéric there; what do you say, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I agree with you perfectly, monsieur le baron; but perhaps we shall do well to carry a pâté or a chicken, for we probably shall not be able to get a dinner at the château."

"You speak like the grammar, Monsieur Ménard; we will provide ourselves with supplies; it may not be very chivalrous, but it is prudent. Besides, we are travelling as amateur troubadours simply; and, however beautiful a view may be, however imposing a ruin, we belong to that class of small-minded mortals who must dine every day. Ah! Monsieur Ménard, we are not romantic! It was very lucky for us that we were not born in the days of Amadis and

the four sons of Aymon."

"Faith! that is true, monsieur le baron; for they didn't know how to truffle a chicken in those days, or cook *filets de sole au gratin*."

Dubourg inquired the way to the valley of Grésivaudan, Monsieur Ménard filled his pockets with provisions, and our travellers set forth. They were told that it was a short three leagues to the Château de Bayard; but Ménard suggested a halt every half-hour. The baron invariably complied, and produced a bottle of the best wine he had been able to find at their inn; Ménard spread his provisions on the turf, on a large sheet of paper, and the travellers renewed their strength. When Dubourg caught sight of some tempting fruit, he would climb the tree to obtain some for dessert; and finally he cut a number of branches and, by spreading his handkerchief over them, constructed a little tent, so that they could dine in the shade.

"One would hardly suspect that the man who does this is a noble palatine!" cried Ménard.

"Why not, pray?" rejoined Dubourg; "the Princess Nausicaa made her own lye; Augustus's daughters spun their father's robes; Dionysius the Younger was a school teacher at Corinth; the son of Perseus, King of Macedonia, was a carpenter at Rome, as Peter the Great was in Holland; so it doesn't seem to me that I derogate from my rank by making a tent in Dauphiné."

Monsieur Ménard, having nothing to reply, simply bowed, murmuring:

"*Variant sententiæ.*"

At last, our two travellers discovered the ruins of the Château de Bayard, of which only the four towers remain standing; but they did not find Frédéric gazing in veneration upon them.

"Well, do you see him, Monsieur Ménard?" said Dubourg.

"The château?"

"No; Frédéric."

"Not yet, monsieur le baron; but let us sit down and rest; unluckily, I am afraid that this is the last halt that will refresh us much, as our provisions are near the end, and we have only a quarter of a bottle left."

"We shall find plenty of springs, Monsieur Ménard."

"But they won't be like those of Cana in Galilee, monsieur le baron."

"Meanwhile, let's finish the bottle and this chicken. We are very well placed here to enjoy the landscape. This is a charming valley. See, Monsieur Ménard, what a picturesque effect these mountains make on our right; they're covered with snow, and that reminds me of Mount Krapach. See, the snow never melts up there."

"I see, monsieur le baron, that this is our last wing; and I shudder to think of the walk back."

"We'll go into some house—or a mill; there are plenty of those in this region."

"Do you mean that you have any money, monsieur le baron?"

"Not a sou; and you?"

"No more."

"The devil! this becomes embarrassing. Think of Frédéric carrying the cash-box off with him, and leaving us in the lurch, without stopping to think what will become of us! I am aware that we may live on at the inn, where we have an open account; but it isn't pleasant to be tied down to an inn while my gentleman is travelling about the country."

"One thing is certain, monsieur le baron, and that is that walking gives one an appetite."

"Morbleu! I am beginning to find this travelling decidedly monotonous; and if I wasn't afraid of my creditors ——"

"Your creditors, monsieur le baron?"

"I mean, if I hadn't the creditors of my government to settle with—that is to say, if—— But, hush! I see somebody—probably people who have come to inspect these ruins. They must live in the neighborhood, for they don't look as if they had taken a long walk."

Ménard looked up and saw a man and woman at their left, walking slowly toward the château. The tutor hastily thrust the bottle and napkin into his pocket, then he rose and joined Dubourg, who was walking toward the new arrivals with a graceful swagger which reminded Ménard of their promenades in the streets of Lyon.

"It seems that monsieur le baron proposes to lay aside his incognito again," he said to himself. Whereupon, he straightened the ends of his ruff and assumed a more dignified bearing.

Dubourg had replaced by a very simple round hat the shabby tile which had been left for him at the false Marquise de Versac's, but he had retained the little silver tassels on his boots; above all, he had retained the power to impart to his features an expression befitting the part he proposed to play. When he approached the couple examining the ruins, one would have judged from his manners, his voice, his language, and the way in which he looked about, that he was some foreign nobleman.

The gentleman and lady whom Dubourg seemed disposed to join were dressed in a style that indicated comfortable circumstances, but which smelt of the province and of a decided tendency to ostentation. The gentleman, who seemed to be about fifty years old, wore his hair powdered, and carried his hat in his hand in order not to disarrange his carefully curled locks; he had a black coat and trousers, and boots with tops which fell below the calf; he carried a cane, with which he pointed out the various objects of interest to his companion; and one could read on his face extreme self-satisfaction and contentment, heightened by an important air which, doubtless, he felt in duty bound to maintain.

The lady on his arm was at least forty years old. She had evidently been comely in the past, but she made the mistake of trying to appear only twenty; for, despite her mincing manners, her infantile speech, the curls behind her ear, and those that peeped out from beneath her hat, and a manner which she strove to render giddy and kittenish, one could readily see that she had passed her majority.

Dubourg walked toward the château, apparently without noticing the strangers further than to bow to them; he made a pretence of continuing his conversation with Ménard, speaking so loudly that he could be heard at some distance.

"This château reminds me of my grandfather's in the neighborhood of Sandomir. You know, my dear Ménard, the one where we endured such a long and bloody siege?"

Ménard opened his eyes as he met Dubourg's, but he instantly replied:

"Yes, monsieur le baron, I know."

"That tower yonder," continued Dubourg, "is very like the one on the western side of my castle of Krapach. I can imagine that I am still in the room where the Prince of Bulgaria slept, when he came to break bread with my father. Ah! my dear Ménard, I hope soon to give you some of that famous tokay I have told you of."

"Tekely's tokay, monsieur le baron?"

"The same; it has been a hundred and twenty-four years in bottle!"

The gentleman and lady heard every word spoken by Dubourg, who kept on toward the château, pretending to examine it, but taking care not to go too far away from them.

While Dubourg was speaking, the gentleman listened intently; his face soon assumed an expression of respectful consideration; he nudged his wife,—for his companion was his wife,—and, pointing to Dubourg, motioned to her to walk a little faster to overtake the illustrious foreigner.

At the foot of one of the towers, they found themselves in close proximity to our two travellers, who were just about to enter the ruins. Dubourg stopped, to allow the lady to go first; her husband paid him the same attention, and even bowed low to Ménard. These ceremonies duly performed, they entered into conversation.

"Does monsieur visit our country as an observer?" the husband asked Dubourg.

"Yes, monsieur; I am travelling—for my pleasure—with a friend of mine, the Comte de Montreville, of whom you may have heard, and Monsieur Ménard, a distinguished professor of literature and a Hellenist of the first order, who improvises poetry like an angel—especially at dessert."

The gentleman bowed to Ménard, who looked like an idiot when Dubourg said that he improvised readily, but he was very careful not to contradict him, none the less.

"Do you live in this province, monsieur?" queried Dubourg.

"Yes, monsieur," the lady replied, with a gracious smile. "We live two leagues and a half from here, at Allevard, where my husband bought a superb estate when he retired from the wine trade."

At this point, the gentleman nudged his wife, but she continued, apparently without noticing the hint:

"A trade we carried on for our pleasure, for my husband has always had a very handsome fortune; but one must do something."

"What do you say, madame? For my own part, I have a great esteem for trade, especially the wine trade. Certainly Noah didn't plant the vine with the idea that we should eat nothing but dried grapes. Gideon, a Hebrew captain, threshed his own grain, Saul was a cowherd, David a shepherd, Cincinnatus ploughed his own fields, Pope Sixtus V kept pigs, and Urban IV was once a cobbler; so I can see nothing surprising in the fact that your husband once sold wine."

"Surely not, monsieur," said the husband, bowing low to Dubourg.—"He's a noble philosopher," he whispered to his wife.

"But since we retired," continued the lady, "we associate with only the best people in the province: the mayor and his clerk, and landowners who are electors—aristocratic people. We lead a delightful life; my husband is almost the lord of the district."

"I certainly am looked upon in that light," added the husband, leaning on his cane. "It was in my power to be sub-prefect; but I should have had to move, and I am attached to my present home. We are so highly considered there! I entertain all the best people at dinner; we cultivate music and the arts—I am learning the violin just now; I have had a cabinet organ sent from Paris. My wife will play it; she has a fine ear."

"Pardieu!" said Dubourg; "talking of ear, Monsieur Ménard here has one of the finest bassos I know? As for myself, I play all instruments."

"Ah! monsieur," said the lady, with a smirk, "what a pleasure it would be to hear you! We have lots of amateur musicians at Allevard: monsieur le maire plays the bass-viol, and one of our neighbors is very strong on the hunting-horn. If monsieur should remain any length of time in this vicinity, we should be charmed to entertain him."

This invitation was accompanied by a very tender smile; Dubourg replied with an expressive glance, and the husband, well pleased, meekly lowered his eyes, while Ménard looked at his companion to find out what he was to say.

"Faith! madame," rejoined Dubourg, after their exchange of glances had lasted for some minutes, during which the husband contemplated the swallows, "it may be that my friends and I will remain some time at Grenoble. Monsieur le Comte de Montreville has a very pronounced liking for the banks of the Isère, and I am too fond of him to go away without him. We are like Orestes and Pylades, except that we are never seen together; and although we are expected at the court of Sardinia, and I have promised to pass the winter at the court of Bulgaria, it is possible, as I say, that our sojourn in this province may be prolonged for some time;—isn't that so, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I think as you do, monsieur le baron," said Ménard; whereupon the lady whispered to her husband:

"How affable he is for a baron!"

And the husband replied:

"He is affable just because he is a baron."

"Especially," continued Ménard, who had assumed a more important air since he had learned that their new acquaintance was a former dealer in wines, "especially as Monsieur le Comte de Montreville, my pupil, is of an exceedingly romantic turn."

"Ah! he is like me! he is just like me!" said the lady, with a sigh addressed to Dubourg; "I care for nothing but the romantic. I am mad over ghosts and elves—am I not, Monsieur Chambertin?"

"Yes, my wife has always been very fond of spirits," Monsieur Chambertin replied, with a smile.

"She had no lack of them with you," rejoined Dubourg.

"True, I had them all the way from twenty-four degrees to seventy."

"If madame should ever come to Poland," said Dubourg, "I trust that she will not fail to pass a few days at my castle of Krapach. She will see phantoms of all colors there; it's not so cheerful a place of residence as my castle at Cracow, but I would not part with it for two millions! And yet, it brings me nothing but snow; but I have my reasons for being attached to it—eh, Monsieur Ménard?"

"Peste! I should say so! a castle where you have entertained——"

"Hush, be still, Ménard; that doesn't interest Monsieur and Madame Chambertin."

"I beg your pardon," said Chambertin, bowing once more; "we are too flattered to make the acquaintance of a Polish nobleman—for I think that monsieur le baron is a Pole?"

"From my birth," replied Dubourg, turning his head away so that Ménard might have an opportunity to say to them in an undertone:

"Monsieur le Baron Ladislas Potoski, Palatine of Rava and Sandomir."

When he heard those titles, the former wine merchant was like one stupefied; he dared not take a step forward or back, while Madame Chambertin twisted her mouth in every conceivable way, and did her utmost to do away with it altogether, in order to seduce the Palatine of Rava.

"Did you come here to see the ruins?" queried Dubourg, after giving his name and titles time to produce their due effect.

"Yes," replied Monsieur Chambertin; "we have not seen them yet, and one should be acquainted with his neighborhood. This Bayard must have had a very fine château, to judge by what is left of it; but he was a very good sort of man."

"He was a chevalier, wasn't he, my dear?" said Madame Chambertin, in a mincing tone.

"Yes, my love; a chevalier of the time of Louis XIV."

At that, Monsieur Ménard coughed and glanced slyly at Dubourg.

"I like to see antiquities," continued Chambertin, "ancient monuments; they're interesting when one has a certain amount of education. Is monsieur le baron here for the same purpose?"

"Faith! we were in a decidedly bad humor when we met you," said Dubourg; "we walked here from Grenoble, as we were told that it was a short three leagues, and I didn't care to wear out my horses in this mountainous country; but I hoped to find some decent inn hereabout, where we could dine; or at least some means of getting to the nearest village; I offered some peasants as much as six gold pieces to obtain a horse for me, and not one of the knaves moved.—Isn't that so, Ménard?"

"It is quite true, monsieur le baron, that we couldn't find anything at all."

"Ah! my dear," whispered Madame Chambertin to her husband, "what a happy idea! what a chance!"

"I will seize it!" he replied; and he planted himself in front of Dubourg, with his feet in the third position. —"Monsieur le baron, if I wasn't afraid of presuming too far, if you would deign to accept a plain country gentleman's dinner, Madame Chambertin and I would be overjoyed to have at our table a distinguished nobleman and a professor of literature. My cabriolet is waiting for us close by, with Lunel, my jockey; we shall be at Allevard in an hour, and my cabriolet will take monsieur le baron to Grenoble this evening."

"Really, Monsieur de Chambertin, you are too kind," replied Dubourg, with a bow.

"He called me *De* Chambertin!" said the ex-tradesman to his wife.

"I heard him."

"Do you suppose he means to make me a knight?"

"I believe he's quite capable of making you something."

"I am almost tempted to accept your invitation," said Dubourg; "it will afford me the pleasure of becoming better acquainted with some most delightful people.—What do you say, my dear Ménard? Will it make Montreville anxious? Do you think that we might accept Monsieur de Chambertin's invitation to dinner?"

"Yes, certainly we may, monsieur le baron," replied Ménard, who was so excited by the prospect that he took from his pocket the paper napkin in which the carcass of the chicken was wrapped, and wiped his face with it, thinking that it was his handkerchief, and oblivious to the fact that he was besmearing himself with chicken jelly; but Monsieur and Madame Chambertin were in the seventh heaven and saw nothing of all that. To take home with them to dinner a great Polish nobleman, a palatine! who had put a *de* before monsieur's name, and who made eyes at madame—that was quite enough to turn their heads.

"The cabriolet will never hold four," said madame.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear; I will take Lunel's pony, and he will ride behind. Whenever monsieur le baron chooses——"

"Faith! let us go," said Dubourg; and he added in an undertone, as he offered the lady his hand: "All the ruins in the world could not prevail against you!"

They left the château, Dubourg with Madame Chambertin on his arm, while her husband ran ahead, and Ménard followed, trying to discover the source of the smell of chicken which pursued him everywhere.

At a turn in the path, they discovered the cabriolet, in charge of a little man of about his master's years, who looked more like a butler than a jockey; beside him was an animal which, judging from its size and ears, was halfway between a horse and an ass. Madame Chambertin entered the carriage with her two guests.

"Give me your nag, Lunel," said Monsieur Chambertin.

"And what am I to do, monsieur?"

"Get up behind the carriage."

"You know very well, monsieur, that I can't hold on there."

"Then you shall walk. The idiot! not to have learned yet to hold on behind a carriage!"

As he spoke, Monsieur Chambertin mounted the beast, and belabored him with his cane in default of a crop.

"Excuse me, if I ride ahead," he called to Dubourg; "but I have some orders to give."

"Oh! no ceremony for us, I beg you, Monsieur de Chambertin!" was the reply.

But the host was already far away; when he heard himself called *De* Chambertin again, he took the bit in his teeth.

Dubourg took the reins and drove, which did not prevent him from making many very gallant speeches to Madame Chambertin en route, or from motioning to Ménard to wipe his face. Lunel ran behind the cabriolet, consigning to the devil the strangers who were responsible for his master's taking his nag.

In due time they arrived at Allevard, a pretty village, through which flowed a mountain stream of considerable size that furnished power for a large number of windmills, iron foundries, and factories. Monsieur Chambertin's estate was on the right, just at the entrance to the village; it was a beautiful house, built according to modern ideas, and, as Madame Chambertin said, almost a château.

As they drove into a spacious courtyard shaded by tall lindens, Dubourg secretly felicitated himself on the chance meeting, and began to think that Madame Chambertin still possessed a very attractive figure and very bright eyes. As for Ménard, he had visions of a well-furnished kitchen, and he concluded that a man who owned such a charming estate deserved some consideration, although he was neither baron nor palatine.

Madame Chambertin escorted the strangers into a pretty salon on the ground floor, which looked on a beautiful garden behind the house. Everything indicated wealth, profusion, and absence of taste. There were two clocks on the mantel, another on a console, a fourth on a desk. The furniture was costly, the floor covered with rich rugs, the walls overloaded with pictures, and three chandeliers hung from the ceiling.

"This is my small summer salon," said Madame Chambertin, modestly. "If I had known that I was to have the honor of entertaining monsieur le baron, I would have had my large winter salon thrown open, where three sets can dance a quadrille without interfering with one another."

"We have more room than we need, madame; and I should be very sorry to cause you any inconvenience; this salon is perfectly charming; everything here shows the touch of the goddess of this blest abode."

"Ah! monsieur le baron—to be sure, I did arrange it. My husband wanted to put another clock in this corner, but he can do without it."

"It would be very difficult not to know what time it is here."

"This is rather a tasty rug, don't you think? I have a still finer one in my winter salon. You must use them a great deal in Poland, monsieur le baron?"

"Oh! we have carpets six inches thick in Poland; you sink into them as you walk, just as you do into a feather-bed. I hope to have the honor of sending you a specimen."

"Oh! monsieur le baron!"

At that moment, Monsieur Chambertin appeared, with such guests as he had been able to collect in a hurry, to dine with a great noble at his table. He had found only four persons at liberty: a former village notary and his wife, who were just about to sit down to their own repast, when their neighbor rushed in, greatly excited, and told them of the acquaintances he had made, and that he was to have the honor of entertaining at his house the noble foreigner and the professor of belles-lettres.

At that news, followed by an invitation to dine with the great man, Monsieur Bidault—such was the ex-notary's name—summoned his maid, and said:

"Clear the table, Marianne; put the pâté in the sideboard, the chicken in the pantry, and the fish in the cellar, and keep them all for to-morrow; we dine with my neighbor."

And Madame Bidault ran to her mirror, crying:

"Quick, Marianne! my gown with orange blossoms, my straw hat, my lace collerette; I can't appear in négligé before those gentlemen.—Aren't you going to dress, Monsieur Bidault?"

"Oh! I'll just put on my nut-brown coat, that's all.—Be sure that the fish is kept where it's cool, Marianne."

"Marianne, do fetch my dress."

Monsieur Chambertin hurried away to seek other guests, urging Monsieur and Madame Bidault not to be late. Poor Marianne, harried on every side, did not know which way to turn: she carried the straw hat to the cellar, and ran to her mistress with the platter of fish in her hand. At last, after twenty minutes of running hither and thither, the husband and wife were in condition to appear before the illustrious stranger. Monsieur Bidault, who had taken to writing poetry since he gave up his office, looked forward with pleasure to a discussion of the poetic art with the man of letters; and Madame Bidault, who prided herself upon having more style than anyone else in the neighborhood, was enchanted to exhibit her *savoir vivre* before a grand seigneur.

On leaving the Bidaults, Monsieur Chambertin went to the mayor's; but the mayor was in the fields overlooking his laborers, and would not return till evening. Then he hurried to the notary, Bidault's successor; but the notary was hunting, and his wife was in the midst of making preserves, which she could not leave.

But the time was getting short, so Chambertin had recourse to an ex-apothecary of Lyon, who had retired from business and bought a pleasant little house at Allevard. He was not a very distinguished individual to place before a palatine; but as there was no time to choose, he had to be content with what he could get; besides, Monsieur Fondant talked very little, so he was not likely to say foolish things.

So Chambertin burst in upon him, and, having no time to explain himself at length, said hurriedly:

"My dear Fondant, I have a noble palatine, from Poland, at my house; he's going to dine with me; I want you, come! and a man of letters, who's a Hellenist incognito. Make haste! they are distinguished men of the first rank; we dine in half an hour."

And he was gone. He thought that he might perhaps get his friend Frossard, the ironmaster, one of the richest landholders of the neighborhood. He hurried to his house and found him in the act of dining; he had already eaten his soup and beef, when Chambertin entered the dining-room, bathed in perspiration, and called to him from the doorway:

"Stop, Frossard, stop! not another mouthful!"

"What does this mean?" rejoined the ironmaster, holding his long knife in the air over a fat chicken he was preparing to carve; "not another mouthful! I fully expect to have a word to say to the thighs and wings; I won't leave anything but the carcass."

"Stop, I tell you, my friend! you must come to dine with me."

"Not to-day; it's too late, as you see."

"You must."

"I have eaten a third of my dinner already."

"That won't make any difference."

"I am very much afraid it will."

"I have two noblemen to dine with me, one a literary man."

"What do I care?"

"From Poland—Cracow—a baron—a scholar!"

"Well, what of it? that's no reason why I shouldn't eat my dinner."

"I want you to have the honor of dining with them."

"So long as I have a good dinner, my dear man, it matters little to me whether I dine with a baron or a miller."

"Come, come, Frossard, my friend, have a little more elevation in your ideas."

"My chicken is getting cold."

"You shall have some delicious hare *piqué* at my house; I also have a certain pâté de foie gras, which has just been sent to me from Strasbourg."

"Ah! the traitor will succeed in tempting me."

"We will have some of my old pomard, and some of that Saint-Péray you're so fond of."

"It is impossible to resist you."

"Will you come?"

"Yes; but not for your noblemen and your scholars; I don't know anything about them. I'll come for the hare and the pomard, which I know all about."

Monsieur Fondant was the first to arrive; but, being naturally timid, and more embarrassed than usual at the thought of appearing before two strangers, whom he supposed to be princes from the few words his neighbor had let fall, the ex-apothecary remained in the reception-room adjoining the salon where Madame Chambertin was talking with her guests; lacking courage to present himself alone, he waited for the other guests to arrive, so that he might steal in behind them.

Monsieur and Madame Bidault came at last, and so did the corpulent Frossard. Monsieur Chambertin, who had been giving orders to his cook, hurried forward to greet his guests. He found Monsieur Fondant in the reception-room, and, throwing open the door of the salon, presented Madame Bidault to monsieur le baron. During the exchange of salutations between the ex-notary and his wife and our two travellers, Frossard, who did not stand so much on ceremony, pushed Fondant, who seemed inclined to remain in the reception-room, before him; and Madame Chambertin, having made her company welcome, disappeared to give a moment's attention to her toilet.

"Monsieur le baron," said Chambertin, "I have got together a few friends, who, like myself, are overjoyed to have——"

"Faith! my dear man," said Frossard, dropping into an easy-chair, and interrupting his host without ceremony, "you came just in time; if I had put my knife into the chicken, I wouldn't have left it."

"That dear Frossard must have his joke," said Monsieur Bidault, slapping the ironmaster's leg, while his better half sat very stiffly in a chair facing Dubourg, who, half reclining on a couch, resembled a sultan passing his slaves in review; while Ménard, at a little distance, admired the ironmaster's appearance of robust health and the respectful bearing of Monsieur Fondant, who had seated himself near a window so as to be almost hidden by the curtain.

"If I had known earlier that I was to entertain monsieur le baron," said Chambertin, "I would have arranged a little soirée musicale—a little party; but I flatter myself that I shall be better prepared another time."

"You confuse me, Monsieur de Chambertin. Really, I shall not be able to leave this part of the country; and yet we are expected at the court of Bulgaria—as you know, Monsieur Ménard."

At these words, Madame Bidault drew herself up and pressed her lips together; Chambertin glanced at his neighbors with an expression that said: "What did I tell you?" while Monsieur Fondant disappeared altogether behind the hangings.

"In truth," continued Dubourg, "I am much pleased with this neighborhood, and the delightful people I meet here make it even more attractive."

At that compliment, everybody rose and bowed; a similar manœuvre was executed behind the curtains.

"But I thought that I saw Monsieur Fondant," said the ironmaster; "what in the deuce has become of him?"

"I am here, monsieur," said the ex-apothecary, in a hoarse voice, showing his face from behind the curtains.

"What are you doing there, a mile away from us all? Come out here, Monsieur Fondant. What's the news from Lyon? what do you hear there?"

Monsieur Fondant blushed to the ears, for he saw that the strangers were looking at him. He drew his handkerchief, blew his nose, moved his chair forward and back, and stammered at last, speaking through his nose to give himself confidence:

"How hot it is to-day!"

Luckily, Madame Chambertin returned, and her presence gave a different turn to the conversation. She had put on a thin muslin waist, trimmed with lace; she wore no hair other than her own, which was not very becoming, but she had donned her diamond ear-rings and a superb pearl necklace, which made her very seductive in the eyes of Dubourg, who went to meet her, and, as he offered her his hand, tenderly squeezed the ends of her fingers; to which she replied by a half-smile accompanied by a stifled sigh.

Monsieur Bidault had joined Ménard, whom he judged to be the man of letters, and repeated divers sentences from the *Perfect Notary*, accompanied by verses from the *Almanach des Muses*. Ménard, who, in his endeavor to copy Dubourg, sometimes assumed his self-sufficient tone, smiled patronizingly at Monsieur Bidault as he replied emphatically: "*Studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant;*" and Monsieur Bidault, who had forgotten Cicero when he was learning the Codes, replied by offering him a pinch of snuff.

Lunel, who had donned a short English jacket, in which he resembled a Limousin, announced that dinner was served.

Everybody rose; Dubourg offered his hand to Madame Chambertin, Frossard to Madame Bidault, and the others followed, Monsieur Fondant bringing up the rear.

They passed into a very handsome dining-room, where a sumptuous feast was spread. Ménard observed with satisfaction that there were four *hors-d'œuvre*, which always indicates a well-arranged dinner. Monsieur le baron was seated between Madame Bidault and Madame Chambertin; but his face was generally turned toward the latter, and the deep flush which from time to time overspread the cheeks of the hostess might have raised a presumption that her illustrious guest was talking to her under the table as well.

Ménard was between Messieurs Bidault and Fondant, the former of whom interlarded his conversation with insipid rhymes, while the other contented himself with filling his neighbor's glass. Ménard turned toward the ex-apothecary more frequently than toward the ex-notary.

At the second course, Dubourg, beginning to be convivially inclined, for he had done full honor to his host's pomard, began to talk recklessly about his châteaux, his vast estates, Poland and Bretagne; he confounded the customs of Rennes with those of Cracow, and the products of his native province with the snowstorms on the Krapach Mountains. But the company, listening with rapt attention to what he said, simply opened their eyes and ears the wider. The corpulent Frossard had a fellow feeling for the baron because he drank his wine without water, and looked upon Ménard as a scholar of distinction because he discoursed learnedly upon the method of cooking every dish. Monsieur Bidault was delighted to have an opportunity of displaying his poetic talent; his wife considered herself a beauty because Dubourg told her that she had a look of Mademoiselle de Scudéri. Monsieur Fondant was more at his ease because nobody paid any attention to him. Monsieur Chambertin was in ecstasy because he had a nobleman at his table; and Madame Chambertin rolled her eyes because the aforesaid nobleman frequently touched her knee with his under the table.

About nine o'clock in the evening, they made an effort to adjourn to the salon. Everybody had striven to hold his own with monsieur le baron, some from love of drinking, others for courtesy's sake, so that no one was quite firm on his legs; the ladies alone were able to stand erect, for they rarely lose their heads at table.

Amid the Bacchic fumes, Dubourg retained sufficient presence of mind to realize that they were six leagues from Grenoble, and that it was time to return thither. Monsieur Chambertin proposed to keep them overnight; but if they remained, they must do what the others did; Monsieur Bidault and the ironmaster had already taken a pack of cards, and Dubourg, who found it difficult to resist the attraction of the gaming-table, felt that he would cut a very foolish figure with no money in his pocket. The better plan, therefore, was to go, and come again. Monsieur Frossard challenged him to a game at backgammon in the near future, and Dubourg, who considered himself very strong at that game, hoped to recoup a part of his losses at the hands of the blacklegs at Lyon.

Ménard was so comfortable at Monsieur Chambertin's that he would have been glad to sleep there, and Madame Chambertin, who may have had some hidden purpose, tried to detain the young palatine. But he had his reasons for not yielding; and, seeing that his persuasions were of no avail, Monsieur Chambertin ordered Lunel to be ready with the cabriolet to drive monsieur le baron and his friend to Grenoble.

Dubourg took leave of his hosts, promising to return very soon and pass several days with them. This promise allayed their regret at his departure.

"Remember, monsieur le baron, that I rely on your word," said Monsieur Chambertin, with a low bow.

"We shall expect you," added madame, with a glance that said all that was necessary.

Dubourg replied by placing his foot on her husband's foot, which he mistook for hers, and cordially shook hands with his host, calling him his dear friend De Chambertin.

Lunel and the cabriolet were waiting; Dubourg and Ménard took their seats and started for Grenoble.

The swaying of the carriage soon put Ménard to sleep; and Dubourg, having no one else to talk to, communed with himself:

"This acquaintance will be very agreeable to me, and will vary the monotony of our stay at Grenoble. Those excellent people think I am a nobleman; there's no great harm in that, and it may well be that I have the air of one. Madame Chambertin still has a vivacious glance; her husband has excellent wine and an excellent table. That big ironmaster's as rich as Crœsus, and it seems that he likes a little game. Morbleu! if only I was still cashier! what a chance to repair our losses! I am sure that he hasn't an idea of backgammon. Such a man as that wouldn't notice a loss of five or six thousand francs. And Frédéric goes off and leaves us without a sou; passes his time no one knows where. I simply must find out what he does every day; I must watch over him, as poor Ménard here doesn't dare to say a word to him. A fine guardian monsieur le comte sent with him!"

It was very late when they reached Grenoble. Ménard woke up to alight from the carriage. When Dubourg saw old Lunel before him, hat in hand, he instinctively felt in his pockets; but finding nothing in any of them, he put his hand under Lunel's chin and patted his cheek, saying:

"All right, Lunel; good-night, my fine fellow! I am content with you."

Whereupon the old groom turned on his heel, and muttered all the way home:

"That was a fine *pourboire* the Pole gave me!"

XIV

A VISIT TO THE FOREST

When Dubourg and Ménard woke on the morning after their dinner at Allevard, Frédéric had been gone a long while.

"We will wait till to-night," said Dubourg, "and then we will speak to him."

"Yes, monsieur le baron," said Ménard; "you will speak to him."

But we have seen that Frédéric remained with Sister Anne very late every day, until he had decided to remain with her altogether. It was four leagues from Grenoble to Vizille; the horse Frédéric took in the morning, at random, went but little better in the evening, although he had rested all day; for inn horses are rarely good saddle horses. So that the beast sometimes took three hours to return from Vizille; and Frédéric did not urge him, for he was not then on his way to Sister Anne.

So that he returned very late, and Dubourg, after playing piquet with Ménard,—it was the only game the ex-tutor knew,—had ended by falling asleep over the cards; for, as neither of them had any money, they could only play on credit, so that the game never became exciting, although Ménard had at his service the King of Prussia's snuff-box, and took a pinch every two or three minutes, to give himself some resemblance to the great Frederick.

Seeing Dubourg yawn, Ménard suggested that they go to bed; and they postponed their conversation with Frédéric until the next day. But the next day also passed without affording them a sight of him.

Several other days passed in the same way. Dubourg's impatience increased; he was very desirous to return to Allevard, to follow up his conquest, and to play backgammon with the ironmaster. Monsieur Ménard, on his side, was no less desirous to drink some more of Monsieur Chambertin's pomard, and to sit beside Monsieur Fondant, who filled his glass so handily.

But they could not afford to walk to Allevard; it was essential that they should make their appearance there in a style befitting the rank they had assumed; above all things, they must have money in their pockets, if they wished to cut a figure at the card-table. Ménard was not convinced of the necessity of that; but as monsieur le baron thought that it was indispensable, of course he agreed with him.

"So that we absolutely must see Frédéric."

"Parbleu!" said Dubourg; "we'll wait till to-night; and to keep from going to sleep, we'll drink punch all night, if need be; what do you say, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I agree with you entirely, monsieur le baron, provided that we have some cake to go with the punch."

"We will have four cakes; we will play piquet for them, and Frédéric shall pay the bill."

In the evening, a huge bowl of punch was brought, and a plate laden with cakes. They began their game, and drank often to avoid falling asleep, thereby putting themselves to sleep rather earlier than usual. After they had drunk half a bowl each and eaten six or eight tarts and cakes, their heads fell forward.

"I am *capot*," said Dubourg.

"Show your hand," added Ménard.

They woke at daybreak, intensely disgusted to have fallen asleep; but, at all events, Frédéric could not have gone away so early, and they would find him at last. Dubourg called and shouted, but no one answered. He went down into the innyard and asked about his friend.

"He didn't come in last night," said the hostler.

"Didn't come in!" cried Dubourg; "are you sure?"

"Yes, monsieur; neither him nor the horse."

"The devil!" ejaculated Dubourg; "this begins to be alarming. To stay out all night—it's very strange."

He went up to tell Ménard, and that gentleman, after reflecting for fifteen minutes, inquired:

"What do you think about it, monsieur le baron?"

"Morbleu! that's what I ask you, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I don't dare to form any opinion, monsieur le baron—that's my opinion."

"It's very much like Brid'oison's."

They passed the day waiting for Frédéric, who did not appear. Dubourg was anxious about his friend, Ménard trembled for his pupil, and the innkeeper would have been disturbed about his horse if he had not had the carriage for security.

The next morning, at daybreak, Dubourg appeared at Ménard's bedside, with his hat on his head, and said:

"Come, we must find Frédéric."

"Let us find him, monsieur le baron."

"To find him, we must look for him."

"That is what I was thinking, monsieur le baron."

"That doesn't seem to prevent your lying quietly in bed."

"I am awaiting your final opinion."

"My opinion is that we should start at once. That young man has a face and figure so far from commonplace that we must be able to learn which way he went; he can't be lost!"

"We must hope not, for what would monsieur le comte his father say to me?"

"Get up, then, and come with me."

Ménard dressed and breakfasted, and accompanied Dubourg, who ordered saddles placed on two venerable farm horses, which the innkeeper intrusted to them with a bad grace, because their account was beginning to exceed the value of their carriage. At last they were mounted; Ménard warned his companion that he could not ride faster than a walk, and Dubourg replied that when one is making a search he does not travel rapidly.

When they left the inn, they inquired and were told which direction Frédéric had taken. All along the road, people had noticed the young horseman who passed every morning, urging his horse to his utmost speed, and returned very slowly in the evening. Dubourg soon learned beyond question that Frédéric rode to Vizille every day.

"What does he go there for?" queried Dubourg.

"He has probably found some charming view."

"I think it's more likely to be some charming face."

"What! monsieur le baron, you think——"

"Why, yes; Frédéric isn't fool enough to stare at nothing but trees and mountains all day. He was in search of a heart that would sympathize with his, a nature as loving as his own—in a word, a woman who would take his fancy;

and who knows that he hasn't found some artless, simple-minded peasant girl who has turned his head?"

"For my part, I'll wager that he spends his time looking at the Grande Chartreuse."

"Consider, Monsieur Ménard, that Frédéric is only twenty-one."

"Remember, monsieur le baron, that women have deceived him many times, and that he left Paris to avoid them."

"Is that any reason why he should never love another woman? Indeed, Monsieur Ménard, when a man runs away from a thing, it's because he feels that he couldn't resist it long."

"Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife, monsieur le baron; but it was not for fear of giving way to her."

"Joseph allowed himself to be seduced at last, Monsieur Ménard, for his posterity peopled Canaan."

Arguing thus, they arrived at Vizille. They inquired about Frédéric in the village; but the villagers, being busily employed, had paid little attention to the young man, who had dined at the inn only twice; for we have seen that he dined in the woods on what Sister Anne brought him. They had seen him several times, to be sure, but they had not noticed in which direction he went, or what he did in the village. So Dubourg and his companion left Vizille, knowing little more than when they arrived.

"All is lost!" cried Ménard, from time to time; "my pupil must have been eaten by wolves or killed by highwaymen, or else he has fallen over a precipice while watching a sunset! Poor Frédéric! so gentle, amiable, and well-informed! there is nothing left for me but to weep for you!

"'Qualis populea mœrens Philomela sub umbra
Amissos queritur fœtus!'"

"Oh! no, Monsieur Ménard; Frédéric hasn't been killed or eaten. There's no question here of a resemblance to Philomela weeping for her children; what we have to do is to find out where the young man has gone. Ah! look yonder—there's an animal who could give us some information about him, I fancy."

On leaving the village, they had gone down into the valley, and were now on the outskirts of the forest, where Frédéric's horse was wandering at will along the paths leading into the valley.

"That's his horse," said Ménard. "I know him by that white spot; I've seen him in the innyard; it's Frédéric's horse. And he's alone, without a rider. An additional proof, monsieur le baron, that the young man has fallen a victim to his imprudence. The horse undoubtedly threw him; my pupil is dead; he probably tried to climb one of these mountains; it was dark and he couldn't see the road at his feet. All is lost!"

"I believe, on the contrary, that Frédéric is in these woods, and that he left his horse here so that he could go where he chose. Let us adopt the same method in looking for him; but let's be more prudent than he, and tie our horses to one of these firs."

They dismounted, and entered the woods, Ménard still holding his handkerchief to his eyes, because he believed that Frédéric was dead or wounded, and Dubourg marching ahead and peering intently in every direction. Ere long he came quickly back to the tutor, with a triumphant air, and said, pointing to a grassy mound:

"Look! see if my presentiments misled me? there's the marvel of nature that Frédéric comes here to admire."

Ménard looked in the direction indicated, and saw, beneath a spreading tree, his pupil lying carelessly on the grass, holding in his arms a lovely girl, whose head rested against her lover's breast, and whose arms were about his neck.

"You were right, monsieur le baron," said Ménard, after a moment of speechless surprise; "that isn't the Chartreuse! it is more modern."

"That looks to me to be a lovely girl."

"And to me also, monsieur le baron."

"That sly dog of a Frédéric! It was decidedly clever of him to find such a pretty face in this desert. Do you still think that he shuns the ladies, Monsieur Ménard?"

"It doesn't look like it at this moment."

"Pshaw! Monsieur Ménard, Frédéric, although rather sentimental, is made like other men; but we must go and offer him our respects."

"That will disturb him, monsieur le baron."

"Parbleu! as he passes all his days here, he has time enough to make love."

Dubourg and Ménard walked toward the lovers; at the sound of their footsteps, Frédéric turned and saw them. The girl raised her eyes, and, at sight of the two strangers, pressed closer to Frédéric; and hiding her face against her lover's breast, seemed from that vantage-ground to defy all dangers.

"Bravo! my dear Frédéric, bravo!" laughed Dubourg. "I understand now why you get up so early. Upon my word, your conquest is a charming creature, and that little shy manner adds to the piquancy of her features."

The dumb girl, after a swift glance at Dubourg, turned her eyes again toward Frédéric, as if to ask him what it all meant.

Frédéric rose and the girl did the same, clinging to her lover and gazing uneasily at the two strangers; she seemed to fear that they had come to take him from her; but Frédéric reassured her, then kissed her affectionately, and bade her go and wait for him in Marguerite's garden. It was hard for Sister Anne to obey, for she dreaded to leave him; but again Frédéric promised to join her in a moment. The girl pointed to the strangers, and her eyes said:

"You won't go away with them?"

He embraced her again, whereupon she became calmer, and at last went away, not without turning her head many times to look fondly at Frédéric and sadly at the strangers.

"Very pretty, very pretty, on my word!" said Dubourg, looking after her.

"If her speech resembles her plumage," murmured Ménard, between his teeth, "she is the phœnix of the denizens of this forest."

"Why have you come here, messieurs?" demanded Frédéric, angrily.

"Why have we come? parbleu! to look for you, who desert us and leave us penniless at an inn, to come to make

love here in the woods with a peasant girl, who is very pretty, I agree, but who ought not to make you forget your friend and your venerable tutor."

Frédéric made no reply, but seemed to be absorbed in thought.

"Monsieur le comte," said Ménard, coming forward with an air of profound respect, "certainly it is lawful for every man to be susceptible to female charms; Adam was with Eve,—to be sure, he had no chance to be with any other woman,—Abraham with Hagar, David with Bathsheba, Samson with Delilah; and when such a man as Samson succumbed, how can we, who are not Samsons, be expected to resist? But still, monsieur le comte, *est modus in rebus*; you should not, for the sake of a new attachment, forget all that you owe to yourself, and descend from the rank in which destiny has placed you. Now, monsieur le comte your father did not allow you to take this journey for the purpose of living in the woods like a savage; whence I conclude——"

"My dear Monsieur Ménard," said Frédéric, emerging at last from his reverie, but making no reply to his tutor's harangue, "I have something of great importance to say to monsieur le baron; I cannot say it before anyone else, so oblige me by taking a turn up the valley; we will join you very soon."

"I cannot refuse you anything, monsieur le comte; I await your coming, with confidence."—And Ménard left the woods, saying to himself: "My sermon has had a good effect; the young man realizes his wrong-doing; he will mend his ways and return to us like the prodigal son, with a white staff in one hand and his horse's rein in the other."

Ménard was no sooner out of sight, than Frédéric walked quickly to Dubourg's side.

"Why did you bring our mentor here? why have you tracked me to this forest? am I no longer the master of my actions?"

"In the first place, the mentor is not a very alarming person; secondly, we were bound to find out what had become of you, as we heard nothing from you; and, lastly, could I believe that, for an amourette, you would become an Orlando Furioso?"

"An amourette! No, Dubourg; this is a genuine passion, and one that will last forever. I have never loved so passionately! I have never met a woman more worthy of my love. Ah! Dubourg, if you knew that sweet child's heart! she is an utter stranger to all the deceits and hypocrisies of the world; her heart is as pure and beautiful as her features. Ah! my friend, not in Paris, not in the brilliant salons of the capital, could I find a woman who would love me so dearly."

"Nonsense! but you are excited, and I see that it will be hard for me to make you listen to reason. This girl seemed to me to be very pretty, indeed, and I agree that she's a phœnix; but, after all, what do you propose to do? surely you don't intend to pass your life in these woods?"

"I don't intend to leave Sister Anne."

"Very good; then bring your Sister Anne along; let her come with us; make a baroness of her, if you choose, for the benefit of poor Ménard; I'll undertake to arrange it all; but leave these old fir-trees, under which you'll turn into an orang-outang in time."

"That isn't possible. In yonder cabin there is an excellent old woman, who has taken care of her ever since she was a child; she can't desert her."

"The deuce! so you have a whole family on your hands!"

"Go, Dubourg; return to Grenoble with Ménard; I will join you there in a few days, but I cannot leave her now."

"Return to Grenoble, eh? Do you imagine that I enjoy myself there, with your tutor, when I can't show my face anywhere?"

"Oh! I forgot. Take this wallet; it contains our fortune; take it, and do what you please with it. I have a few louis, that's all I need."

"Really, my dear Frédéric, you are mad! to think of living in the woods and making love all day with your little villager!"

"Ah! she's no ordinary woman. If you knew—poor child! But, no, I won't tell you anything; you can't understand my heart. Adieu, Dubourg!"

"You insist upon it? All right, I'll take the cash-box, and leave you. I know what men are, I have had more experience than you have: within a fortnight, you'll have had enough of this kind of life, and you'll come back to us."

"Yes, if Sister Anne will come with me."

"You will come without her, I am perfectly sure. Au revoir! make love at your ease; make it all day and all night; in short, make so much of it, that a fortnight hence you'll have had more than enough."

And Dubourg, having put the wallet in his pocket, hastened down into the valley, where he found Ménard sitting quietly by their horses.

"To horse!" he exclaimed joyfully; "make haste!"

"What's that? to horse? But I don't see monsieur le comte."

"Because he has stayed with his Dulcinea."

"He stays, and we go?"

"To be sure; for, having no passions in the forest, we might be bored here."

"But, monsieur le baron, I don't understand this at all."

"Monsieur Ménard, I am acting like a man who knows the human heart, especially that of a young man. If we had undertaken to thwart his wishes, Frédéric would have been quite capable of doing some insane thing. Instead of that, let us allow him to follow his inclination. I will answer for it that, in a fortnight at the latest, his love, being satisfied, will have calmed down, and he will have recovered his senses. There is no passion deep enough to stand a tête-à-tête of three consecutive weeks. Love is a fire which goes out of itself, because it never has sense enough to be sparing of its fuel."

"Faith! monsieur le baron, I begin to think that you are right."

"To horse, then, Monsieur Ménard, and *vive la gaieté*! To-morrow, I will take you to dine with our friend Chambertin."

"Really, monsieur le baron?"

"And I promise you that we'll make an entry into the village that will cause a sensation."

"I don't understand you, monsieur le baron; but you arrange things so well, that I rely on you."

And Ménard, overjoyed at the prospect of going to Monsieur Chambertin's the next day, dug his heels into his horse's sides for the first time in his life,—to be sure, he had no spurs,—and trotted along at Dubourg's side.

"Still, it's a great pity that my pupil has made this new acquaintance," he said; "a woman sometimes makes a man commit many follies! Cato said that wisdom and common sense were incompatible with a woman's mind."

"Oh! probably Cato was unlucky in love, Monsieur Ménard."

"Saint Bernard calls woman the *organum diaboli*."

"But Confucius declares that a woman's mind is the masterpiece of the Creator."

"Juvenal says that the thought of vengeance has more attraction for a woman than for a man."

"Which proves, Monsieur Ménard, that she bears some resemblance to the gods."

"And Origen says: 'Woman is the key to sin.'"

"I had always supposed that she was only the lock."

"Agnès Sorel enfeebled the courage of Charles VII."

"And another woman restored it."

"Joanna of Naples caused her husband to be strangled."

"Jeanne Hachette saved Beauvais."

"On the whole, monsieur le baron, it seems to be about an even thing."

Let us leave our two friends to return to Grenoble, discussing the nature of womankind,—a discussion which might lead them very far, and leave them without any additional knowledge of the subject; for a learned man has said that a woman's heart has as many varying moods as there are grains of sand on the seashore (and he must have been learned, indeed, to know the number of the latter),—and let us return to Frédéric.

He breathed more freely when Dubourg had left him, and ere long he heard the steps of the horses which bore his companions away. Thereupon, as well pleased as Crates, who cried, after throwing all his money into the sea: "Now I am free!" he felt more at liberty to abandon himself to his passion for the dumb girl, since he was rid of Dubourg and Ménard; and he hurried away to the cabin. Frédéric did not look beyond the present; he did not reflect; for he was twenty-one years old, and he was passionately in love!

Sister Anne was in the garden, trembling from head to foot; old Marguerite was asleep, and the girl could abandon herself without restraint to the sentiments which agitated her. The presence of those two men who knew Frédéric caused her a disquietude which became more painful with every minute that passed. To live without her friend seemed impossible to her now. Love was life itself to that heart of flame which had not learned, in that forest solitude, to control its passions. Her loving heart had flown to meet him who had said to her: "I love you." But when she gave herself to him, Sister Anne bound herself forever. Frédéric had taught her to know happiness; he had revivified her heart, withered by misfortune. When she finds that she has the power to please, a woman is born again. What would become of her, if she must renounce that hope at sixteen? Frédéric was all in all to her; and until that moment love had seemed to her the summit of earthly happiness. But there is no lasting happiness, especially in love. Only a few short days of bliss had passed, and already the poor child was beginning to know the suffering which that sentiment brings in its train.

At last, Frédéric appeared. She did not run—she flew into his arms; she cast her eyes about; he was alone, and her heart was more at ease.

"No," said her lover, kissing her; "I will not leave you. Where could I find a lovelier woman—one more faithful or more worthy to be loved? What do I care what they say? what do I care for a world to which no tie binds me? I am perfectly happy here. My father himself could not induce me to give you up!"

Another kiss on the girl's sweet lips sealed the promise he had made. The night with its darkness brought even sweeter moments, for the lovers shared the same couch; and in the arms of her who lavished the most loving caresses upon him, Frédéric repeated his vow:

"No, I will never leave you!"

But after a week, the days passed less swiftly for our lover; the poor girl's fond caresses no longer sufficed to occupy the time; he felt that he must have some occupation, that one cannot dream one's whole life away beside a mountain stream.

After another week, he went down into the valley, mounted the horse, which he had kept, and took several short rides in the neighborhood, to procure some provisions that they required, as he told Sister Anne; although he had done well enough without them at the beginning of his sojourn in the woods.

After another week, he began to gaze longingly in the direction of Grenoble. He was surprised that Dubourg did not return to inquire as to his welfare, and that Ménard too had forgotten him. Indeed, I believe that in his heart he was offended. Did he no longer love Sister Anne? Oh! yes, he loved her still. But time!—And, as Dubourg had well said, there is no love strong enough to stand a tête-à-tête of three weeks.

But let us not anticipate; let us leave him with the dumb girl, who loves him as dearly as on the first day, because—oh! ask some woman why!—and let us return to Dubourg, who once more has the funds for the journey at his disposal.

XV

FÊTE, DINNER PARTY, FIREWORKS, SURPRISE

On arriving at Grenoble, Dubourg ordered dinner, and the usual repast, common to all the guests, was served to them.

"What kind of a dinner is this? we must have something different to eat, and, above all, some different wines,"

said Dubourg, beginning to make an uproar because he had money in his pocket.

The host appeared, and informed the gentlemen that their account was already quite large, because, in addition to their board and lodging, their young companion had foundered all the horses belonging to the inn by overriding them. Dubourg's only reply was to take a five-hundred-franc note from his pocket and give it to the innkeeper, saying, with all the sang-froid of true grandeur:

"Take your pay out of this."

The host opened his eyes; his pinched nostrils expanded; his mouth, in his efforts to give it an amiable expression, split from ear to ear; he tied himself up in apologetic phrases, and ended by saying that he would at once make up his account, but that he hoped that the gentlemen would not leave him, and, if agreeable to them, he would give them muscatel with their dinner.

When he had gone, Monsieur Ménard, whose expression was almost as comical as the innkeeper's, said to Dubourg:

"Have you received funds from Poland, monsieur le baron?"

"Why, yes, to be sure, Monsieur Ménard. Parbleu! Money isn't apt to be scarce long, with me."

"But I didn't see the courier who——"

"You must have been asleep when he arrived. The main point is that we can go anywhere now, and not have to stand by, like misers, and watch other people play, which is not noble at all. To begin with, we will go to see our friend Chambertin to-morrow; but, in my judgment, we had better send a messenger to give him notice of our proposed visit, so that he may entertain us as we deserve. What do you think about it, Monsieur Ménard?"

"I think that cannot fail to have a good effect, monsieur le baron."

"Then find me a scullery boy, and dress him in your flannel waistcoat and my morning cap, to give him an English look. Meanwhile, I will go and write my letter."

Ménard went out to look for a boy to be transformed into an English jockey, while Dubourg composed the following epistle:

"Baron Ladislas Potoski, Palatine of Rava, etc., etc., has the honor to inform his honorable friend De Chambertin d 'Allevard that he will visit his château to-morrow, accompanied by Professor Ménard. Baron Potoski kisses the hand of Madame de Chambertin d'Allevard."

They handed the letter to the scullery boy disguised as a courier, who, in consideration of a five-franc piece, went off at once to deliver it at its address.

Monsieur and Madame Chambertin were about to retire when the messenger arrived. It was half-past nine o'clock; and in the country, when one does not cultivate letters, or music, or painting, or one's garden, the evenings seem interminable. Monsieur Chambertin had played the violin, and madame had sung a new romanza; then they had talked of the noble Pole, whom they despaired of seeing again; and monsieur had said: "I am amazed; he gave me his word that he would come." And madame had added, with a sigh: "It surprises me much more than you."

The noise made by the messenger caused Monsieur Chambertin to pause as he was about putting his legs under the bedclothes. He did not continue, although his wife said to him: "Do get into bed; the servants are there to answer the bell." But who could have come so late?

Someone knocked at the bedroom door; it proved to be Lunel, who announced through the keyhole a message from Monsieur le Baron de Potoski.

At that name, Monsieur Chambertin, who still held his leg in the air, ready to thrust it into bed, abruptly withdrew it and, losing his balance, rolled on the floor; while Madame Chambertin sat up in bed, and called loudly for a mirror to arrange her hair. Her husband rose meanwhile, and ran to get his dressing-gown, calling to Lunel:

"I am coming, Lunel; I am coming right away!"

"Give it to me instantly, monsieur," cried Madame Chambertin; "I am in a hurry, I shall never have time."

Monsieur Chambertin handed his wife something that she had not asked for, and ran to open the door. Lunel entered, followed by the jockey, while Madame Chambertin, furious at her husband's mistake, drew her bed-curtains together with a jerk, that she might not be seen in an equivocal position.

Monsieur Chambertin took the letter and read it; at each word, his face became more radiant; he could not contain himself, but called out to his wife:

"The baron is coming! He calls me De Chambertin d'Allevard! He kisses your hand, wife!"

And Chambertin ran to open the curtains, and came in collision with the object he had handed madame by mistake.

"Take care, monsieur!" said she; "what on earth are you doing?"

"D'Allevard, wife!" cried Chambertin, seizing the article in question and strutting about the room with it. "D'Allevard—just as if I were the lord of the district; indeed I am—almost—and I hope that, thanks to the baron, I shall soon be so altogether!"

"Put that down, monsieur; put it down somewhere!" madame cried to her husband, who was so excited that he had no idea what he was doing. She then ordered Lunel to give the messenger something to eat and drink, and said to the latter that his master and his friend would be received with the honors they deserved.

When the messenger had gone, Chambertin threw himself into an armchair, and madame replaced her head on the pillow; but the letter they had received made it impossible for them to think of sleep. Monsieur Chambertin read it again. He was especially flattered by the title *D'Allevard*.

"It's the name of the village," said madame.

"True; but by putting it after my name, it ennobles me."

"You know perfectly well, monsieur, that that's what everybody does in Paris; aren't there two of our neighbors who call themselves by the name of their town: Monsieur Gérard de Villers-Cotterets, and Monsieur Leroux d'Ermenonville? Six months ago, I told you you ought to call yourself Chambertin d'Allevard; but you never listen to me."

"My dear love, now that monsieur le baron has given me that title, I certainly shall not give it up; and I shall never sign my name any other way. To-morrow, wife, I give a party."

"I trust so, monsieur."

"Dinner, ball, concert, and fireworks. I believe no fireworks have ever been seen in the neighborhood, and they'll produce a tremendous effect. I shall invite all the best people among our neighbors."

"I'll have my hair dressed *à la* Ferronnière; that's very becoming to me."

"I'll have the whole estate illuminated."

"My dress with a train——"

"With colored lanterns."

"A pale blue girdle."

"Lamps in the courtyard——"

"My cherry-colored slippers."

"The largest I can find."

"A scarf."

"Festoons of flowers."

"My pearl necklace."

"And a fusillade!"

The landlord made up his account so that it came to just five hundred francs, and monsieur le baron was entitled to no change. Any other than Dubourg would have contested the charge of three hundred francs for laming three or four wretched horses which were too old to draw the plough; but he did not enjoy scrutinizing accounts; he contented himself with ordering a neat tilbury for the morrow, and two of the landlord's servants to represent his suite.

Dubourg then took cognizance of the contents of his cash-box; he found himself the possessor of forty-five hundred francs; that was more than he needed to win ten times as much. He trusted that the local ironmasters would make up the sum that the chevalier and the count with lace cuffs had filched from him.

The next day, about noon, Dubourg and Ménard prepared for their visit to Allevard, where they planned to arrive for dinner. As the innkeeper had been unable to find a tilbury in the city, his guests were obliged to be content with a yellow char-à-bancs with two seats. Dubourg and Ménard took their places on the first seat, and on the second they planted two little scullery boys, swaddled in jackets and trousers taken from different persons, and having on their heads old hunting-caps which came down to their noses and gave them a decidedly foreign aspect. Dubourg expressly enjoined upon them to pretend not to understand French, but to confine themselves to making signs, so that they might pass for two young Poles; and they solemnly promised to obey.

They set out, Dubourg driving; but although he had asked the host for his best horses, he could not succeed in inducing them to gallop; he had to be content with a very moderate trot, which necessarily delayed their arrival. Ménard was afraid that they would dine without them, and Dubourg was in despair because he could not enter Monsieur Chambertin's domain with the speed of a locomotive.

It was half-past five when at last they descried the roofs of Allevard. Dubourg exhausted himself trying to increase the speed of his horses. As they drew near Monsieur Chambertin's house, in front of which there was a large number of people, he said to Ménard:

"Poke them with your cane, so that we may drive up at a decent trot at least."

As Ménard put out his arm to comply, they heard a great outcry of: "Here they are! here they are!" Four musket-shots followed in rapid succession, two violins and a clarinet executed the overture to *La Caravane*; and the two nags, frightened by the reports and the music, shied and dragged the char-à-bancs up a hillside to the right of the road, instead of keeping on toward the house.

"This is charming, delightful!" cried Dubourg; while Ménard, who was afraid of being overturned, exclaimed:

"Take care, monsieur le baron; our horses are running away!"

And Monsieur Chambertin, who had been waiting to illuminate since two o'clock, said to his guests:

"See how well monsieur le baron drives; he went up that hill on purpose to give us a specimen of his talent."

But, when coming down the hill again, the horses went much faster, and at every instant the fragile carriage nearly overturned as it passed over the stones or sank into ruts; Ménard trembled with fear, the two jockeys cried out, and Dubourg said to them:

"Be still, you rascals! I told you not to talk French; don't be afraid, I'll answer for everything."

The carriage went like the wind; luckily, they were then headed toward the house; but instead of passing through the main gateway, the coursers ran full tilt at the wall. The shock was so violent that the two jockeys were thrown out on the grass. Dubourg jumped out, crying: "I will answer for everything!" Ménard alone remained in his seat, as if he were glued to it.

No one was injured. Dubourg went forward laughing to salute the company, declaring that that was the usual way of alighting from a carriage in Poland. Ménard, proud of having retained his seat, joined the party, displaying his ruff; and the two scullions pointed to their buttocks, without a word, when Lunel asked them if they were hurt.

Dubourg was welcomed most cordially. Monsieur Chambertin was in the seventh heaven, for the baron pressed his hand and called him his dear friend; Madame Chambertin was no less gratified, the illustrious stranger having whispered as he saluted her: "You have not been out of my mind one moment." And all the guests seemed overjoyed to be in the company of a great noble, who did not put on airs at all, and made everybody feel at ease.

Monsieur Chambertin had got together some forty persons: all the wealthy landowners of the neighborhood, the mayor, the notary, the clerk of the peace, ironmasters, and a few friends from Paris and Lyon—in short, all those whom he deemed worthy to meet monsieur le baron.

They took their places at the table, Dubourg in the seat of honor at madame's right, and Ménard, to his great delight, beside Monsieur Fondant, who talked no more than before, but was very attentive to him in the way of filling his glass and passing him food.

"I hope," said Chambertin, "that monsieur le baron will give us a few days, and Monsieur Ménard as well."

"Yes," said Dubourg, "we have arranged to pass several days in this delightful spot."

As he spoke, he touched Madame Chambertin's knee with his own, whereupon she swallowed a chicken bone to cover an imprudent sigh. Ménard bowed, and Chambertin rejoined:

"I have but one regret, and that is that you did not bring your friend the Comte de—the Comte du—you know whom I mean."

"Oh! he's an original," said Dubourg; "he shuns society. I left him my berlin and my servants, and brought only my two little Poles."

"Ah! they are Poles, are they? They are dapper little fellows; I took them for Cossacks."

At that moment, Lunel appeared and informed Dubourg that his servants were raising the deuce in the kitchen and refused to answer any questions.

"Parbleu! I should think so! they don't understand French."

"Allow the baron's people to do as they choose," said Chambertin, "and try to understand their signs."

"Very pretty signs they are," muttered Lunel; "they don't do anything but stick their fingers in the sauces and wipe 'em on their breeches!"

The high spirits of Dubourg and the learned Ménard enlivened the whole company. They talked and laughed and ate and drank. But whenever Dubourg spoke, Chambertin looked about and said:

"Sh! let us listen to monsieur le baron."

At dessert, Monsieur Bidault proposed to sing; but Dubourg observed that in good society it was no longer fashionable to sing, and Chambertin imposed silence on the ex-notary.

"Singing isn't fashionable," he said; "what were you thinking about?"

But the corpulent Frossard was in the habit of singing, and he was not at all abashed by what Chambertin said; whereupon the host, seeing that he could not prevent him from singing his drinking-song, requested the company to walk into the adjoining room, where the concert was about to begin, hoping that the ironmaster's ditty would pass for an aria.

A lady and gentleman regaled the company with a piece for harp and piano, with thirty-six variations. The mayor took his 'cello, and the notary a violin; a horn was presented to Dubourg, who had said that he played on all instruments, but who now declared that he could play only the English horn, and passed the instrument to Ménard, forcing him into a seat in front of a music stand. The tutor stared at him in amazement, but he whispered in his ear:

"Just blow into it, and don't look embarrassed."

Ménard, who had not spared his host's wine at dinner, was not afraid of anything; he took the horn and put the mouthpiece to his lips, blowing with all his might and rolling his eyes. They began a trio, Dubourg beating time. Whenever it was the horn's turn, not a sound was heard, because, try as hard as he would, Ménard could not find the mouthpiece; but Dubourg seemed content, and said, turning toward the company:

"I have never heard such sweet music! no one would believe that it was a horn!"

Everybody applauded, and Ménard, after it was all over, said to himself:

"I knew how to play the horn, and I never suspected it!"

The concert came to an end at last; Dubourg suggested a game, and the tables were soon arranged. Backgammon is not often played in a salon, but Dubourg said that they played nothing else at the Polish court; whereupon Monsieur Chambertin instantly produced a board, and declared that within a week he would have four in his salon. Dubourg and Frossard took their places, and Chambertin watched them play, although he did not understand the game at all.

Dubourg was in luck; he urged his adversary to increase the stakes, and tried to taunt him into doing so. He had won some twenty louis, when there was a tremendous report in the garden.

Cries of: "It's the fireworks!" arose on all sides, and everybody hurried into the garden.

"To the devil with the fireworks!" exclaimed Dubourg; "the dice are just beginning to fall well for me!"

But he tried in vain to detain the ironmaster, who was determined to see the fireworks; so Dubourg concluded to do as everybody else did.

He left the salon. The fireworks were at the end of the garden, and Dubourg fell in with Madame Chambertin, who was coming to see what monsieur le baron was doing, and, it may be, to seek an opportunity for a tête-à-tête. Dubourg offered her his arm; he was in excellent spirits, and, as he recalled the conversation under the table and the stifled sighs, he reflected that he was to pass several days in the house, and that he ought to show himself worthy of the welcome he had received. These considerations led him to take a path which did not lead to the place where the other guests were.

"Where are you taking me, pray?" madame asked, now and then. But Dubourg replied:

"I don't know at all, but let us go on."

They soon came to a small summer-house, which was not lighted and had but one window, a little farther from the ground than an ordinary ground-floor window. Dubourg opened the door, pushed Madame Chambertin in, and entered behind her, taking care to close the door.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Chambertin, who had provided the fireworks expressly for his friend the baron, was looking for him in the glare of a Bengal-light; as he did not see him, he ran hither and thither, crying:

"Come, monsieur le baron, come, I entreat you! Two pieces have been set off already, and they're just lighting the first transparency!"

Dubourg, who was probably not thinking of the transparency at that moment, heard Chambertin's voice, and called to him from the interior of the summer-house:

"I am here, I can see very well; don't worry about me; your good wife is obliging enough to explain the fireworks to me."

"What! I don't see you at the window."

"Because madame is afraid of the rocket-sticks; but we can see very well."

"Ah! that's good! I am delighted that you have a good place," said Chambertin, standing under the window. "I arranged the display myself; did you see the sun?"

"No, but I smelt it; it smelt something like the moon."

"Look at these little serpents; what perpetual motion! they go very well, don't they?"

"Wonderfully well."

"Pray explain the transparency to monsieur le baron, wife."

"Oh! monsieur le baron grasps it all very quickly," replied Madame Chambertin, in a voice upon which the smoke seemed to have had a serious effect.

"Look out! there goes the bouquet!"

The bouquet exploded amid applause and shouts of *bravo*! The company returned to the house, enchanted by the display, and Madame Chambertin came out of the summer-house with monsieur le baron.

"The bouquet was fine," said Chambertin, rubbing his hands.

"I am still a little dazed by it," said madame, tremulously.

"It was worthy of the lord of this domain," added Dubourg.

"Upon my word," said Chambertin, "I believe I am almost that."

"You are altogether, my dear friend; it is I who say it."

"When a man of your eminence assures me of it, monsieur le baron, I can no longer doubt it."

But it was after eleven o'clock, and that is unduly late in the country. Those of the guests who lived at some distance entered their carriages; those who lived in the village ordered their servants to light their lanterns; they took leave of Monsieur and Madame Chambertin, congratulating them on the magnificence of their party; they bowed deferentially to monsieur le baron, and departed to their respective abodes. Thereupon Monsieur Chambertin, thinking that his illustrious friend must long for repose, and seeing that the learned Ménard had fallen asleep in the salon, ordered the servants to escort those gentlemen to their rooms.

The finest apartment on the first floor had been prepared for the young nobleman, and a pretty room on the second for the professor, who, if he had been nothing more than that, would probably have been relegated to the attic, but who was treated with the highest consideration because he was the baron's friend and companion.

The whole household had retired. Ménard was already snoring like one of the blessed, which means that the blessed do not have bad dreams. Dubourg stretched himself out luxuriously in a soft bed, surrounded by rich silk curtains with gold fringe and tassels, and said to himself:

"Gad! it's mighty amusing to play the baron! these people overwhelm me with attentions, and fly to meet my lightest wish! And all because they think me a palatine! If I had introduced myself as plain Monsieur Dubourg of Rennes, they would have told me to go my way; and yet this other name hasn't made a different man of me. But all men have their share of madness—a little more or a little less. Instead of trying to cure it, which would be very noble, no doubt, but which strikes me as rather too difficult, one must flatter their mania to make one's self agreeable to them. This Chambertin is an ass, who, after trading in wine two-thirds of his days, is trying to play the grandee and to ape the airs of the nobility during the last third. What do I care for his idiocy? he is delighted to entertain a baron, and I will play the baron as long as I enjoy myself here. His wife is very willing that I should make love to her, and I'll do it as long as I haven't anything better to do; and it is more than probable that I shan't find anything better as long as I am in her house, because a coquettish woman who has seen her best days never invites any pretty girls who may rob her of attentions."

Reflecting thus, Dubourg was beginning to doze, when he heard a great uproar in the courtyard,—outcries, oaths, and roars of laughter,—and, in the midst of it, he fancied that he recognized the voice of one of his jockeys. He rose, partly dressed himself, and opened the window looking on the courtyard. He saw a number of servants assembled there, and old Lunel fighting for a chicken with one of the little Poles, while the other was shrieking and weeping in a corner.

The two scullions, faithful to the orders Dubourg had given them, had replied only by signs to the other servants; but Lunel, who was Monsieur Chambertin's steward, valet, and groom, all in one, was very ill disposed toward the baron's servants, as well as toward their master, whom he had driven to Grenoble, and from whom he had received no other *pourboire* than a tap on the cheek. The two boys had bruised themselves behind, when they were thrown out of the carriage; that was why, when trying to make themselves understood by signs, they frequently put their hands to the injured part: a gesture which seemed to Lunel most insulting, and he was convinced that the young Poles intended to make sport of him.

To be revenged on them, he had taken them up to a small room under the eaves, and left them there, supperless. The little fellows did not go to bed, thinking all the time that food would be brought to them, or that they would be called to supper. At last, tired of waiting, they went downstairs. Everybody had retired except Lunel, who was sitting up because he suspected that the baron's servants would not remain quiet.

The little fellows, spurred on by hunger, got scent of the store-closet, which was in the kitchen; and as one of the kitchen windows was open, they easily crawled in, and, making a hole in the canvas door of the closet, one of them seized a chicken which had not been touched, the other the carcass of a hare which still had some meat on it. They were about to fly with their booty when Lunel discovered them; he shouted *thief!* and struck at them with a whip with which he had armed himself. The scullions ran to the window and climbed through; one fell and bruised his nose; the other, being less awkward, was running off with his chicken, when Lunel overtook him and tried to wrest it from him. Thereupon a struggle began.

"You shan't have it!" cried the boy.

"Oho! you little rascal! you can talk French now, can you? I'll teach you to make insulting signs to me!"

Meanwhile, the one who had fallen cried:

"I've broke my nose; it's that old dodger's fault for not giving us any supper!"

It was at this crisis that Dubourg appeared at his window. All the servants had come down into the courtyard; and Monsieur Chambertin also appeared on his balcony, in his robe de chambre.

"What's the meaning of all this noise?" he demanded.

"Those are my little Poles."

"Yes, your Poles, who talk French now," retorted Lunel; "I caught 'em stealing in the store-closet."

"He didn't give us any supper," said the boys, "and he was waiting for us in a corner with a whip."

"A miracle!" cried Dubourg; "they have spoken! they understand! That whip seems to have taught them more quickly than any schooling!—Come, my young friends, come up here and let me hear you speak French, and you shall have some supper."

"And you, knave," shouted Monsieur Chambertin to his servant, "if you presume to lay a finger on monsieur le baron's Poles again, I'll have you horsewhipped, and discharge you!"

"They're no more Poles than I am a Turk!" muttered Lunel, as he walked away.

The jockeys went up to their master's apartments, with the chicken and the hare they had rescued from the battle; the servants returned to bed, and Monsieur Chambertin resumed his place beside his wife, who was dreaming that she was in the summer-house, and that they were about to set off a petard.

Dubourg concluded that it would be imprudent to keep with him two young imps who would surely get into further mischief. So, early the next morning, he gave them each three francs and sent them back to Grenoble, to the great contentment of Lunel, who did not like Poles.

The following days passed quietly; a few friends came to share Monsieur Chambertin's pleasure and to listen to all the fables Dubourg chose to tell them concerning his estates, his châteaux, his family, and his duties at the court of Poland. Ménard did not say much, but he ate and drank vigorously, and cited a Latin author now and then; so that the company, not understanding him, regarded him with renewed respect.

Dubourg gambled every evening, but only for small stakes. Frossard was absent, Monsieur Chambertin never got excited over the game, and Dubourg began to think that he would not double his capital. But the host's birthday was approaching, and on that occasion the house was to be turned topsy-turvy once more. Some very wealthy friends from Paris were expected, who would play as high as monsieur le baron wished. It was Madame Chambertin who had invited them, for she did everything that she could to detain the agreeable guest; and she said to her husband every day:

"You don't realize all the honor Monsieur de Potoski does you by paying you a visit; you have no conception of it!"

"I assure you, my dear love, that I am very proud of it, and that I will do all that I can to keep him."

"You will do well, monsieur; for his going would leave a great void in my life. He is a man who would be very hard to replace. He is noble to his finger-tips."

But everything was in commotion at Monsieur Chambertin's, where great preparations were being made for the approaching function, of which the charming stranger was again to be the hero. Monsieur Chambertin seemed determined to outdo himself; he sent for workmen, whom he employed with a great show of mystery in the garden, and they seemed always to be in the neighborhood of the summer-house. He was preparing a surprise for his guest; and as his last fireworks were talked about all over the neighborhood, he determined that the renown of his next display should reach to Lyon.

The great day came at last, and many guests arrived. Monsieur Chambertin was immensely pleased with the surprise he had arranged for the baron, and would not even take his wife into his confidence. The former wine merchant's circle was augmented by new faces. A sumptuous banquet was served; the dishes were exquisite, the wines delicious, and Dubourg did the honors of the table almost unassisted, because whenever he called his host "my friend D'Allevard," he was certain to turn his head.

"Twice happy the day that I met you!" he whispered to madame.

"What do you say? twice?" she replied, with a sigh; "oh! that is not enough! say rather four, or five, or six times!"

"Let us call it seven, and stop at that!" said Dubourg.

The dinner came to an end. Monsieur Chambertin had but one regret—that his friend Durosey, whom he had been expecting from Paris for several days, had not arrived. Every time that he heard friend Durosey's name, Dubourg said to himself:

"I used to know someone of that name in Paris; but where in the devil did I know him?"

He asked Chambertin who this Monsieur Durosey might be.

"He's a wholesale merchant, who has just retired from business with twenty thousand francs a year."

"In that case," thought Dubourg, "it can't be the man I knew, for I never associated with wholesale merchants."

They returned to the salon, where a rich landowner, who was very fond of écarté, seemed inclined to try his luck against monsieur le baron, when Lunel announced that Monsieur Durosey had arrived. Chambertin was delighted; he left the room, and soon returned with his friend, whom he introduced to the assembled company. Dubourg glanced at the new-comer and recognized the former keeper of a restaurant in Paris, to whom he owed a matter of four hundred francs, which had been standing two years, and which he had not found himself in a position to pay. Monsieur Chambertin, through vanity, had represented him as a wholesale merchant instead of a retired restaurant keeper.

The meeting was exceedingly disagreeable to Dubourg, but he did not lose his head; and when Chambertin came forward with Durosey, saying: "I present you to Monsieur le Baron de Potoski, a Polish palatine," Dubourg bowed and smirked, blinking his eyes, twisting his mouth, and making such grimaces that it was improbable that his creditor could recognize him.

Monsieur Durosey did not stop in front of Dubourg, who felt more at ease and resumed his game more tranquilly. From time to time, however, he glanced about the salon, and when he met his former entertainer's eye he fancied that the latter was scrutinizing him carefully; whereupon he resumed his facial contortions and grimacing, and tried to affect a sort of Saint Vitus's dance by constantly twisting his nose and mouth toward his left ear.

But his creditor's presence annoyed and embarrassed him; he could not pay attention to his game, he lost his head completely, and his money slowly but surely passed into his adversary's possession. Dubourg suggested doubling, then trebling, the stakes; the rich squire agreed, for he could not refuse monsieur le baron. A large part of the company stood about the table, which was covered with five-hundred-franc notes; and Monsieur Durosey planted

himself exactly in front of Dubourg, who could not raise his eyes without meeting his creditor's, and who, to fill his cup to the brim, had the worst possible luck. In half an hour, the travelling fund had passed into other hands, and Dubourg rose, saying that he was going to get some more money.

But as he was looking about for his friend Chambertin, to borrow a few thousand francs, with which he hoped to recover what he had lost,—for a gambler continues to hope until he is on his death-bed,—the former restaurant keeper, who had not lost sight of him, joined him in a window recess. It was impossible to avoid him.

"How is Monsieur Dubourg?" he asked, with a roguish air.

"Dubourg? what do you mean by Dubourg?" replied the pretended baron, working his nose and mouth more violently than ever.

"Oh! I have the honor to recognize monsieur," retorted the creditor, in a louder tone; "but I didn't know that he was a Polish baron——"

"Hush! not another word, my dear Monsieur Durosey," said Dubourg, seeing that it was impossible to hoodwink his interlocutor. "I didn't recognize you at first, but now I place you perfectly. I am delighted to see you."

"The same with me, monsieur. You seem to be in very comfortable circumstances now, staking five hundred francs at once at écarté, and I trust that you will pay me the four hundred francs you——"

"Yes, yes, with great pleasure; I will give them to you this very evening. When I left Paris, I forgot that trifling debt."

"But I called on monsieur more than twenty times when he lived on the fifth floor on Rue d'Enfer, and again on Rue de——"

"Hush! I know all about that; silence, Monsieur Durosey! Since then, I have come into my property, and my titles—I will pay you in a moment."

"Oh! in that case, monsieur le baron may be assured that this will remain a secret between us."

Dubourg walked away from Monsieur Durosey and once more looked about for Chambertin, when that gentleman entered the salon, crying:

"Come into the garden, everybody; we are going to set off the fireworks."

"I have a favor to ask of you," said Dubourg, walking up to him.

"After the fireworks, monsieur le baron, I shall be entirely at your service. Be good enough to go to the summer-house; I flatter myself that you will be able to see as well there as you did before; my wife will take you there."

And Chambertin hurried away, with a mischievous air, while Dubourg said to himself:

"Parbleu! it's decidedly amusing that he should send me to the summer-house with his wife."

He went into the garden and found Madame Chambertin, who remembered the last pyrotechnic display and was waiting for monsieur le baron for the second performance. Madame asked nothing better than to go again to the little summer-house, where they could see so well, and where they had such comfortable seats; which latter would be most essential, as she had urged her husband to make the display last as long as possible.

Bombs were set off, and rockets, and transparencies. But when the moment arrived for the closing piece, Monsieur Chambertin said to the company assembled in the garden:

"Turn toward the summer-house, and look at what comes next; that's where the surprise is to be."

Everybody turned in that direction, Monsieur Chambertin gave the signal, the walls of the summer-house fell away as if by magic, leaving the roof supported by four pillars, and a lighted match instantly set fire to four Bengal-lights, which had been secretly placed inside, together with a transparency on which were these words: *To Baron Potoski, from his grateful friend Chambertin*.

This was the surprise which Monsieur Chambertin had been mysteriously preparing for several days; but he did not expect the surprise that his friend the baron had in reserve for him: the explosion and the demolition of the summer-house had taken place so suddenly, that the couple inside had not even had time to cease their conversation, and it seemed to all the company to be exceedingly animated.

The men laughed, the ladies bit their lips to avoid imitating them. Ménard, who was in the rear of the crowd, called out:

"Pray explain the transparency!"

And Monsieur Chambertin was struck dumb.

All this was the affair of a minute; Dubourg required no longer time to realize what remained for him to do. He had not a sou, he had found a creditor, he could expect nothing from his friend Chambertin except a horsewhipping or a sword-thrust; so it behooved him to leave the house instanter.

The Bengal-lights had gone out; Madame Chambertin had fainted, which was the best thing that she could do. Dubourg took advantage of the smoke which succeeded the bright light; he jumped down into the garden, lost himself in the crowd about the summer-house, seized Ménard, who came running after him, dragged him into a dark path, and ordered him to hold his tongue at the risk of being murdered.

At the end of the path was a little gate leading into the fields; Dubourg opened it and pushed Ménard through, who had no idea where he was, and fancied that their friend Chambertin's house had caught fire. His companion locked the little gate and threw away the key.

"Come," he said, "forward at the double-quick! We have drunk the cup of pleasure, now we must put ourselves on a strict diet; it will do us good. Now is the time for us to say: *Non est beatus qui cupida possidet, sed qui negata non cupit.*"

"Amen!" said Ménard, as he trotted along by his side.

XVI

THE IMPROMPTU ACTORS.—AN EVENT WHICH CHANGED THE WHOLE FACE OF AFFAIRS

After they had run for more than a league, as if they were pursued, Ménard, utterly exhausted, stopped, declared that he could hold out no longer, and dropped on the turf. Dubourg thought that they could safely halt for a while, so he seated himself beside his companion.

"Will you kindly tell me now, monsieur le baron," said Ménard, when he had recovered his breath, "why we are running away like thieves from our friend Chambertin's, where we were overwhelmed with attentions, luxuriously quartered, and fed like epicures; where, in a word, we were treated with the regard we deserve?"

"My dear Monsieur Ménard, the jug that goes often to the well ends by being broken or filled, as you choose; and in this case I rather think both things have happened."

"What jug are you talking about? what have you broken? I don't understand you, monsieur le baron."

"So I see, and I will explain my meaning in another way. Did you notice that man they called Durosey, who didn't arrive at friend Chambertin's until this evening?"

"Yes, monsieur le baron."

"Do you know who that man is?"

"I heard it said that he was a retired merchant."

"Yes, he represented himself as such, the better to deceive me, no doubt. Did you notice what a forbidding face he had?"

"I noticed that he looked at you very often, monsieur le baron, with close attention."

"Parbleu! I should say as much; and he recognized me. Monsieur Ménard, that man is nothing else than a disguised Turkish spy, who has been sent in pursuit of me."

"Is it possible?"

"It is well known that I have pleaded the cause of the Greeks at several courts, and induced more than one prince to take up arms in their behalf. The Turks have sworn to have my life; this man is one of their agents, whom I recognized because I have often seen him at Constantinople; his presence is always followed by some disaster to me; I am sure that Monsieur Chambertin's house was surrounded by his confederates. They would have kidnapped me during the night,—and you too, because it is known that you are travelling with me,—and within a fortnight our two heads would have adorned the Castle of the Seven Towers, flanked by a horse's tail, the symbol of the Grand Turk's might. Tell me, now, whether I was wise to fly!"

"Mon Dieu!" said Ménard, looking behind him; "I believe that my strength has come back. Suppose we go on?"

"No, don't be alarmed, Monsieur Ménard; the rascals have lost our trail and won't dare to follow us."

"But how does it happen that Monsieur Chambertin receives as a guest——"

"Oh! my poor Ménard, you don't know mankind! With a dozen cashmere shawls, a collection of pastilles, a box of little bottles of attar of rose, you can make people do whatever you choose. However, I don't accuse Chambertin; he may very well have been deceived; but, just as the fireworks went off, I noticed several evil-looking men; and I at once determined to fly."

"You acted very wisely. But our carriage?"

"I certainly shall not go after it."

"Nor I. But what about our landlord at Grenoble, who owns it?"

"He has our post chaise to pay for it."

"But what are we to travel with hereafter?"

"With our legs, I fancy. Indeed, when one hasn't a sou to pay for horses, there's no use in having a post chaise."

"What's that, monsieur le baron? you haven't any money?"

"No, my dear Ménard; I lost all that I possessed, this evening. That Turk's presence confused me; I didn't know what I was doing, and I played like a fool."

"That was well done! Luckily, my pupil, Monsieur Frédéric de Montreville, has the money for our journey, and the only thing for us to do is to go and find him."

"How can we possibly rely on Frédéric's having any money. He has just made a new acquaintance, and new acquaintances, Monsieur Ménard, are always very expensive; we play the open-handed lover, we deny our charmer nothing. I am sure that that girl is making him spend money like water! At his age, a young man doesn't know the value of money, and has no idea of economy."

"But, monsieur le baron, I don't quite see how they could spend much money, living in the woods."

"You don't see? well, I do! It's first one thing, then another—no end to the whims. You don't suppose that they have stayed in their little cabin this whole month, do you? I can safely tell you, now, that Frédéric proposed to hire an apartment for the girl."

"But, monsieur le baron, did you not point out to him——"

"He's old enough to do as he pleases. However, don't get excited; I'll see him. I'll go alone first, so as not to anger him, and, if he is willing to listen to me, I'll bring him back. But, meanwhile, we must live. How much money have you?"

"About thirty francs."

"That isn't much; but if we are economical, it will last us some time; we shall have to live very sparingly; but that will do us good. These big dinners overheat our blood; it's very unhealthy to eat five or six rich dishes and drink several kinds of wine every day."

"Still, monsieur le baron, I am inclined to think that we were both getting fat at Monsieur Chambertin's."

"True; but that would have turned out badly for us; simple fare will check this tendency to corpulence. The pleasures of Capua enervated the Carthaginians; and Monsieur Chambertin's table would probably have produced the same effect on us, and I should have been distressed. I really must resume my incognito."

"Ah! I agree with you this time, monsieur le baron; for if those Turks should find you——"

"That's the reason why I think it wouldn't be prudent to return to Grenoble, where I might be arrested—I should say, kidnapped by those cutthroats. Besides, having no money, we should be ill received by our host, who would claim, I dare swear, that his carriage is worth more than ours. We will avoid passing through the town, and with your

thirty francs we will take lodgings in some little village."

"But when that's all gone, monsieur le baron?"

"Parbleu! then we'll see; there's no use of worrying beforehand. Frédéric can write to his father."

"I am afraid monsieur le comte will be angry——"

"I will write to my aunt."

"To your aunt, monsieur le baron?"

"I should say, to my steward. At all events, we will find some way out of it. Besides, suppose we should groan and moan—would that help matters at all? So let us make the best of it. Come, it's a superb night, and we have had a good rest—let's push on. Faith! there's nothing like travelling on foot, if you want to admire the landscape. Come, my dear Ménard, summon your courage! Since we have been together, we have had lots of ups and downs; have you ever seen me mope?"

"Ah! monsieur le baron, everybody isn't as philosophical as you are."

"I will train you. Think of the misfortunes of Marius, Hannibal, Prince Edward; of the poverty of the granddaughter of Henri IV; of the woes of Marguerite of Anjou; and of all the other people who have found themselves in much more difficult positions than ours—and complain again, if you dare!"

The travellers resumed their journey. Dubourg was a curious sight in his full dress, starched ruff, and thin pumps, walking beside Ménard, who wore silk short-clothes, black stockings, and buckled shoes, and who was compelled, in that costume, to climb hills, jump ditches, and plod along over ground that, at the best, was very uneven. Luckily, they had taken their hats when they went out to see the fireworks, otherwise they would have had to traverse Dauphiné as if they were calling on their neighbors.

At daybreak, they stopped at a peasant's house and obtained breakfast. Dubourg ordered an omelet and some native wine. They ate their repast under an arbor, surrounded by domestic animals who came to keep them company.

"How pleasant it is in the open air!" said Dubourg; "are all the gilded halls and antechambers on earth equal to this open country—to the perfect liberty which is ours at this moment?"

"It is certain," rejoined Ménard, driving away a big cat that persisted in putting its paws in his plate, "it is certain that we are entirely at liberty here,—that there is no suspicion of restraint—— Well, well, here's the dog now, trying to get my bread!"

"Well, Monsieur Ménard, every creature must live. In the time of our first parents, these innocent beasts shared their masters' meals; the lion ate from the hand of man, and the tiger gambolled at his feet."

"You must agree, monsieur le baron, that those animals have changed greatly in their disposition."

"Never mind; I love everything that recalls those days of innocence. When I look at this hen walking on our table, and this duck splashing in the mud at our feet, I fancy that I am living in the Age of Gold. Not until I feel in my pocket do I realize the delusion."

Unluckily, the eggs in the omelet were not fresh, and the wine was sour; Ménard made a wry face at every mouthful and every swallow, while Dubourg said:

"I know of no healthier food than an omelet. Whatever country you travel in, wherever you may be, if there are eggs, you have an omelet! Everybody knows how to make it; it's a universal dish, the dish of nature."

"If only the eggs were fresh!"

"Faith! this little taste of straw isn't unpleasant; at need, it will take the place of tarragon. And this wine—at all events, I'll guarantee that it won't do us any harm."

"It's infernally sour!"

"A proof that it's unadulterated."

Despite all that Dubourg could say to make Ménard approve of the breakfast, the tutor said, as they left the table:

"I think that we must go to hunt up Monsieur Frédéric de Montreville."

And Dubourg said to himself:

"He'll receive me cordially, when he knows that I have broken the bank again in less than a month! How in the devil am I to get out of the scrape? And how am I going to ask him for anything, when he gave it all to me? I can't go and preach to him—that isn't in my line. Indeed, I think that I shall have to induce Ménard to come and live in the woods with me; we will become hermits, and I won't play écarté any more."

The travellers made a détour round Grenoble, without entering the city. They halted in a small village, and Ménard spoke again of joining Frédéric. Dubourg lost his patience, and told him that he would go alone to Vizille to see what he could learn. He left the village, walked as far as a small patch of forest, lay down on the grass, slept there all day, and at night returned to Ménard, holding his handkerchief to his eyes and sighing as if his heart were broken.

"Well, well! what in heaven's name has happened to him?" inquired the tutor, anxiously.

"The ingrate! the harebrained fool!"

"Speak, monsieur le baron, I entreat you!"

"I suspected that he would do some insane thing. He has gone off with his fair one. They left the forest a fortnight ago."

"Great heaven! what will monsieur le comte say? what answer shall I make him, when he asks me what I have done with his son?"

"You must tell him that you lost him."

"Do you believe, monsieur le baron, that such an answer will satisfy him?"

"Then you can tell him that he lost himself. But be calm, my dear Ménard. I promise you that we will find Frédéric again. I have friends in all the courts of Europe; the young man will be restored to us."

This promise pacified poor Ménard to some extent, and Dubourg continued:

"Before we consider what to do about him, let us think of ourselves, for our position is not very splendid. We

shall not find resources in this wretched village; let us go to the nearest town; and, above all things, my dear Ménard, do try to get rid of that heart-broken look, which will inspire an exceedingly unfavorable opinion of us in every inn at which we stop."

The travellers resumed their journey, and at nightfall arrived at Voreppe, a small town about two leagues from Grenoble. Dubourg inquired for the best inn, and went thither with his companion. They entered the common-room, Dubourg with his head in the air and a determined bearing, Ménard with downcast eyes and a very modest mien.

Several guests were talking together in the room, awaiting the supper hour.

"Will the gentlemen eat at the table d'hôte?" the servant inquired.

"Yes, of course," replied Dubourg; "we like company—don't we, my friend?"

"Yes, monsieur le ba—yes, my friend," said Ménard, being reminded by a blow from his friend's elbow that there was to be no more mention of barons.

Dubourg listened to what the other guests were saying, but the conversation was far from interesting; the tradesmen discussed business, the townspeople talked gossip, and Dubourg failed to discover any Chambertin to dazzle. He paced the floor of the common-room, jingling the few copper coins which he still had in his pocket, and halting now and then in front of Ménard to offer him a pinch of snuff; and Ménard, for all his depression, looked with unabated respect on the snuff-box which was held out to him.

Suddenly a little man of some fifty years of age, in a cinnamon-colored coat, green breeches, cavalry boots, and a cap with a visor that might at need serve as an umbrella, entered the room, with the air of one full of business, and said in a very loud tone:

"They won't come! they can't come! and my performance has fallen through. I am desperate! my mind is going!"

The little man threw himself into a chair, and was instantly surrounded by all the gossips and guests of the inn.

"What is it, Monsieur Floridor?" queried the hostess; "have your actors gone back on you?"

"Yes, the most necessary and most important ones of the lot: the *jeune premier*, and the noble father, two talented actors, who would have completed my troupe. The *jeune premier* was to come from Cambrai, where he has played such parts as Colin and Elleviou for twenty years; he is a man of the most charming, consummate talent. I saw him a month ago, in *Sargine, or Love's Pupil*, for he has been playing the *ingénus* and young lovers for some years. Ah! how delighted I was! an affecting voice, and a superb figure! a little taller than I am. And in tragic parts—such fire! such spirit! I wept when I saw him do *Tartufe*. As for the noble father, he is a most invaluable actor. For thirty years he has been the delight of Beaugency, and I saw him act at Doyen's, in Paris, with marvellous success. He takes all sorts of parts—kings, fathers, tyrants, Cassandras—he can handle anything. He made a specialty of the *noble fathers'* rôles only because he lost his teeth, which does not prevent his displaying plenty of *bite* in his diction."

"And why ain't they coming?"

"Why, indeed! Because Colin has an attack of catarrh, forsooth! and the noble father, having had a row in a wine shop, is locked up for a fortnight. Such things never happen to anybody but me. After taking so much pains to make a pretty theatre out of the old stable, and succeeding too—for I flatter myself that our theatre is charming: an orchestra, pit, three boxes, and a gallery—all on the same level, and tastefully decorated! I would have left the Grenoble theatre out of sight! The people of this town would have been so delighted! They know a good thing when they see it, at Voreppe, and, although there's never been a theatre here, I am sure I should have made a lot of money! I had already let one box to the justice of the peace, who is admitted gratis with his family; and the principal men of the town had sent me word that perhaps they would come!"

The little man paused at last to take breath and wipe his face. Dubourg, who had not lost a word of what he said, seated himself in a corner, evidently meditating some new plan.

"It is annoying, sure enough," said the innkeeper; "I've ordered a new dress for my daughter to wear to the play."

"Annoying, do you say!" repeated Floridor, twisting about on his chair like one possessed; "why, it is enough to drive one to despair! I would give a hundred francs if I could replace my two actors, and a hundred francs is quite a sum, it's equal to one evening's receipts; but, no matter, I would sacrifice it to be able to open my theatre."

These words were overheard by Dubourg, who still held aloof, however, and seemed to pay no heed to what was being said.

"Ah!" said one of the servants; "I wish I knew how to act! it would just suit me to be able to earn a hundred francs."

"I had engaged my two artists for a month, at sixty francs each," said Floridor; "that's pretty high, but we have to pay for real talent."

"Can't you get anybody to take their places?"

"Who, pray? I have made a *tyrant* of the wigmaker, and a *confidant* of the carpenter's apprentice, who has a magnificent voice. I have persuaded the constable's wife to play the princesses, and I have made an *ingénue* of the cooper's widow; those are all I've been able to find in the town; but they do very well, they're jewels. As for myself, I act when it's necessary; but, as I have to prompt too, I can't take any long rôles. I have a well-supplied wardrobe: three Spanish costumes, with which the last rope-dancer paid his bill at the wine shop; an old lawyer's gown to make tunics with; two otter-skin caps to serve for turbans, and some curtains I bought at Grenoble to make into cloaks. We were to have opened day after to-morrow, with *Phèdre* and *Le Devin du Village*. In *Phèdre*, the carpenter was to do Aricie, because we have only two women; but he's a nice-looking boy, with no beard, and he'd have done very well. As for the other two *confidants*, Ismène and Panope, I intended to declaim their rôles from the prompter's box. We should have given *Le Devin du Village* without music, but that makes it all the prettier; the actors speak instead of singing, and it goes very well; I've seen it given so in many places. What a success we would have had! My Colin was to do Hippolyte; and my noble father would have been magnificent as Thésée. The wigmaker was cast for Théramène; the fellow has his lines at his tongue's end, he doesn't shave a customer that he doesn't recite 'em; and Hippolyte must needs have the catarrh, and Thésée get into a row at a wine shop! How am I to get out of the scrape? Oh! if some great actor from Paris or some foreign country would happen to stop here—one of those men who travel so much! But they never come to Voreppe!"

"Supper is served, messieurs," said the maid-servant.

"Your trouble won't interfere with your supper, I take it, Monsieur Floridor," said a tradesman.

"No, indeed. I shall eat my supper as a matter of habit, but I have no appetite. This calamity has cut off my arms and legs."

"But not his tongue," observed Ménard, in an undertone, as he prepared to take his place at the table; when Dubourg, stalking majestically forward, halted in front of him and declaimed, waving his right arm about as if he were trying to swim:

"'Oui, puisque je retrouve un ami so fidèle,
Ma fortune va prendre une face nouvelle;
Et déjà mon courroux semble s'être adouci
Depuis qu'elle a pris soin de nous rejoindre ici.'"[C]

[C]
Aye, since I find a friend so leal and true,
Methinks my fortune speedily will change;
Even now my wrath seems sensibly allayed,
Since she hath taken steps to join us here.

Ménard stared at Dubourg in dismay.

"You have found him?" he said; "who? my pupil? is he going to join us here?"

Dubourg trod on Ménard's foot, for he saw that Floridor, instead of taking his seat at the table, had stopped and was listening to him. He seized the tutor's arm, and cried:

"'Est-ce toi, chère Élise? O jour trois fois heureux!
Que béni soit le ciel, qui te rend à mes vœux,
Toi qui, de Benjamin comme moi descendue,
Fus de mes premiers ans la compagne assidue.'"[D]

[D]
Is it thou, O dear Élise? Thrice happy day!
Thank heaven, which doth restore thee to my prayers,
Thee, who, like me, Benjamin descended,
Wast of my early years the comrade true.

"Delicious! delicious!" cried Floridor, clapping his hands, while Ménard rolled his eyes about in amazement, looking for this Élise whom monsieur le baron addressed; and as he saw no one but the maid-servant, he asked her if her name was Élise.

"Is monsieur an actor?" inquired Floridor, walking toward Dubourg, cap in hand.

"I, monsieur!" he replied, pretending to be surprised and annoyed because he had been overheard. "I—I assure you, monsieur—what ground have you for such an opinion?" he demanded, in a gruff voice, like a villain of melodrama.

"What ground!" cried the little man, delighted beyond words, and seizing Dubourg's hand. "Ah! monsieur, you betrayed yourself just now without knowing it; but even without that I should have recognized you. That voice, that carriage, those noble and majestic attitudes! None but an actor of the first rank combines all these; and you are such a one; it is useless for you to deny it."

"I see," said Dubourg, smiling with an air of mock modesty, "that it is difficult to conceal anything from you. But my companion and I had fully resolved to retain our incognito."

"Your companion!" cried the little man, leaping for joy; "can it be that monsieur is an actor, too?"

"Unexcelled in tearful rôles, superb in tragedy, and absolutely natural in comedy," said Dubourg, while Ménard listened with the air of one listening to a language he does not understand. But Floridor did not allow him to remain in that benumbed condition; he threw his arms about Dubourg's neck, he threw his arms about Ménard's neck, and would have done the same by the maid if somebody had not stopped him.

"They are sent by heaven!" he cried, rushing about the room like a madman. "I shall open my theatre! we will play *Phèdre*, we will make the whole town weep with *Le Devin du Village*!—Master innkeeper, a bottle of your best wine. I have the honor of inviting to supper the two artists who are travelling incognito."

"What does this mean?" Ménard asked Dubourg, in an undertone.

"It means that we are the two first actors to the King of Poland, that yonder little magpie has already invited us to supper, and that he is going to do a great deal more for us; further, that you must support what I say, and try not to look like an idiot."

"What, monsieur le baron—you and I pass ourselves off as actors?"

"Actors are built like other men, Monsieur Ménard; Roscius was admitted to the presence of Sylla, Garrick is buried beside the kings of England, Molière was an actor, and none the less a great man; and two of the great authors of our own time have acted, and sacrificed none of their merit by so doing."

"But, monsieur le baron, I have never acted."

"Nor have I; but that doesn't alarm me."

"But suppose it should become known, what will people say?"

"It won't become known, as we are incognito."

"But I have no memory; I shall never be able to remember a rôle."

"They'll prompt you."

"But I am very timid, and I shall never dare to appear in public."

"When you are rouged and powdered, you'll be as bold as a page."

"I shall be execrable."

"We'll make him pay us a high price, and everybody will think we are superb."

"But——"

"Morbleu! there's enough *buts*. Just remember that it's only for three or four days; it's a little joke that will have no unpleasant consequences, and will give us the means of waiting for another remittance. Furthermore, when a man like myself, a Polish nobleman, an elector palatine, decides to do such a thing, I consider it very strange that a mere plebeian should presume to remonstrate with him. You will act with me, or I abandon you to the wrath of the Comte de Montreville, whose son you will never be able to find without assistance."

"I'll do it, monsieur le baron."

"That's very lucky for you!"

During this little dialogue, Monsieur Floridor had rushed into the next house, where the wigmaker lived, to tell him that two great actors, whose names he did not know as yet, but who were sure to be overflowing with talent, because they were travelling incognito, had arrived at the Soleil d'Or, and that he proposed to do his utmost to engage them to appear two or three times in the town. The wigmaker abandoned the town clerk's wife's hair, which he was engaged in curling, and hurried off to carry the news to all his customers; the customers told their neighbors, and the word was passed from house to house, as in the game of scandal. The town of Voreppe being rather small, all the townspeople knew before sundown that they had within their walls two dramatic geniuses who were travelling incognito.

Monsieur Floridor returned, and they took their places at the table. Dubourg seated Ménard at his side, so that he could whisper his replies to him, and the manager took his seat on Dubourg's other side. All the other guests treated the travellers with marked consideration, because they saw that Floridor did, and because we often do what we see others do, without very well knowing why.

The little manager talked incessantly, Dubourg from time to time declaimed such passages as came to his mind, and Ménard concentrated his attention upon his plate.

"May I not know," said Floridor, "with whom I have the honor of supping?"

"We did not intend to make ourselves known," said Dubourg; "but, after the flattering attentions with which you have honored us, it is difficult to conceal anything from you. You see in us the two first actors of Cracow, who are taking advantage of a furlough to travel in France and perfect ourselves in the French tongue, in which all our plays are given in Poland; so that our theatre is frequented only by the most distinguished people of the country—like the Bouffons in Paris."

"I understand, I understand! and what parts do you play?"

"Everything, from pantomime to grand opera. My comrade here, Wolowitz, is the Fleury of Poland, and I make bold to say that I am the Talma. Ah! if you should see us together in *Les Chasseurs et la Laitière*! but you don't give opera here, do you?"

"Pardon me: opéra-comique, without music, to be sure, because we have no orchestra as yet; but if you will deign to accede to our prayers, how happy our town will be to see two such artists as you!"

"It is true that we are terribly popular in Poland! Why, when we play anywhere, they always throw us something—it never fails.—Do you remember Smolensk, Wolowitz? We had given *Le Déserteur* and *Le Chien de Montargis*. You played the assassin. I say, do you remember the sensation we produced there?"

Wolowitz did not reply, because he had not yet learned his name; but Dubourg kicked him, under the table, and made him raise his head, whereupon he replied, still eating:

"Yes, monsieur le baron."

"You see, he continues to call me the *baron*," said Dubourg; "he imagines he is still on the stage."

Another kick informed Ménard that he had made a blunder, and he muttered in Dubourg's ear:

"Tell me your name, then; you can't expect me to guess it."

"When people saw on the bill-board: *Boleslas and Wolowitz*," continued Dubourg, with a glance at Ménard, "the theatre was always crowded to suffocation, and we staggered under the wreaths that were thrown to us."

"Oh! you'll get some here," said Floridor; "we will throw 'em to you. I've had a dozen made on purpose to have thrown on my actors' heads. You shall have verses too—quatrains; I've got all those things."

"You are right; they always have a good effect, they flatter the artist and dazzle the audience."

"Ah! Monsieur Boleslas, may I hope that you and your companion will consent to give us a few performances?"

Dubourg did not consent at once; they had made a vow, he said, not to act in any French theatre. Floridor urged them, implored them, and ordered a fresh bottle of wine. Ménard was touched by the supper and the little manager's compliments, and when they left the table he was ready to promise to play any part he was asked to take; but Dubourg did not yield so readily, because he desired to obtain a high price. Floridor did not leave his side, he was ready to kneel at his feet; he would make any sacrifice, he said, to open his theatre with such notable artists, and he finally offered them a hundred francs for four performances, which was a fabulous sum for acting in a stable. Dubourg surrendered, declaring that he did it solely to oblige him.

The little man was beside himself with joy; he instantly prepared three posters, which would be displayed in the town on the morrow, announcing to the people thereof that Messieurs Boleslas and Wolowitz, famous Polish actors, were to appear at their theatre.

"We should like to open with *Phèdre* or *Le Devin du Village*," said Floridor.

"Oh! bless my soul! it's a matter of indifference to us," replied Dubourg; "whatever you choose."

"Then we will begin with that."

"Very well, I will do Phèdre."

"Phèdre? do you mean to say that you play female parts too?"

"Oh, no! I meant Hippolyte. Wolowitz will make a glorious Thésée."

"Very good. For the *Devin* I only need a Colin."

"I'll undertake it. In four days we will be ready."

"Four days—that's rather too long."

"We must have a little rest."

"All right, four days it is. You will be announced to-morrow. Have you any wardrobe?"

"No; for we had no idea of acting."

"No matter; I will see that you have costumes."

With that, Floridor left our friends, and they went to bed, Dubourg laughing over this latest adventure, and Ménard murmuring:

"If monsieur le baron does it, why shouldn't I do it?"

When he woke the next morning, poor Ménard could not believe that he was really going to play Thésée; but Dubourg appeared, book in hand, and gave him his rôle, which the little manager had already sent, with the information that there would be a rehearsal at noon.

"Bah!" said Dubourg; "there aren't a hundred lines in your part. What's that to you, who have learned Horace and Virgil and so many other authors by heart?"

"That's all very well; but I have passed my life learning them, while I have only three days to commit this to memory."

"Don't be afraid, I'll answer for everything; besides, there's a prompter."

"That's true; I must depend on him."

"As long as you know your first speech, that's all that's necessary."

"Oh! as to that, I'm not at all alarmed:

"'La fortune à mes vœux cesse d'être opposée,
Madame, et dans vos bras met——'"

"Bravo! you say it like an angel."

"It's the curse that bothers me."

"See that you gesticulate enough, and it will be all right."

At midday, Monsieur Floridor came to escort them to the theatre, where the rest of the troupe was waiting for them. The aspect of the little hall, which they reached through a dovecote, where the box-office was located, amused Dubourg mightily, while Ménard collided with two old hogsheads which did duty as mountains.

The troupe manifested the greatest respect for the two new-comers, who rehearsed book in hand. Dubourg did not say a word that the others did not exclaim:

"How well that was declaimed! what talent!"

It was the same with Ménard; and the tutor, bewildered by the applause that was lavished upon him, was persuaded that he possessed a hitherto unsuspected talent for acting.

"Do you take snuff while you are acting?" queried Floridor.

"Why not? I take the part of a king, and the King of Prussia took snuff; witness that box, which——"

"In Poland," interposed Dubourg, "we take as much of it as we please on the stage; it's a recognized thing; indeed, it's a matter of tradition in many rôles."

"How glad I am!" said the constable's wife, who played Phèdre; "I didn't dare to take it when I was the princess."

"In that case," said the carpenter's apprentice, "I'll put a little quid in my mouth when I play Aricie, as Monsieur Boleslas deigns to allow it."

"Whatever you please; great artists indulge in innumerable whims."

"*Non est magnum ingenium, sine mixtura dementiæ*," observed Ménard.

"Do you hear him? that's Polish," said the manager to his troupe.

Three days were occupied with rehearsals; at last, the day of the performance arrived. Ménard knew only his first speech by heart; but he knew that very well, and Dubourg had told him that that was enough. The latter did not know a word of his part, but he was not at all disturbed. On the morning of the performance, he took care to secure the hundred francs which Floridor had agreed to pay, saying that it was the custom in Poland. The little manager counted out the sum, and Dubourg put it in his pocket.

The costumes they were to wear in *Phèdre* were brought to the inn.

"Don't we dress at the theatre?" Dubourg asked the manager.

"We have no dressing-rooms, so everybody dresses at home; but the weather is fine, and there's no inconvenience in that."

"Do you mean that I must walk through the town dressed as Hippolyte?"

"The theatre is only a few steps from the inn, and you can play the part in boots, as Hippolyte is a hunter."

"True."

"In default of a bow, which we haven't, you will carry an old musket, which I have had brought here for you; the ramrod will represent the arrows."

"That will do very well."

"As for the wig, I think you will be pleased; as Hippolyte must have hair falling over his neck, I have prepared a Louis XIV wig, which will fill the bill perfectly."

The manager took his leave, and Dubourg was assisted to dress by Ménard, who, as he did not appear till the third act, had plenty of time for his own toilet. Dubourg retained his black trousers, in which were the hundred francs; he thought it best to have the money about him, in case of accident. Over them he drew a very large pair of nankeen trousers, donned a white piqué waistcoat, and threw over his shoulders an ample cloak covered with rabbit skins, representing the skin of a tiger; then he put on his wig, daubed his face with rouge, took the musket in one hand and his handkerchief in the other, and betook himself to the theatre, urging Ménard to make haste, so that he would not be late for his *entrée*.

The auditorium was full, which meant receipts of about eighty francs. Floridor was in ecstasies; he ran to and fro from the prompter's box to the stage, in full view of the audience; for there was no passage under the stage, and the sheet which did duty as a curtain was hung on a rod and drawn aside, like the curtain of a magic lantern.

Dubourg arrived, bathed in perspiration, because the cloak covered with rabbit skins was very heavy and the wig was immense. The actors uttered a cry of admiration when he appeared.

"How handsome he is!" could be heard on all sides; "how well he represents Hippolyte!"

"Ah! I shall play Phèdre by inspiration!" exclaimed the constable's wife, with a passionate glance at Dubourg. But as Phèdre had a slight squint, and an enormous nose covered with snuff, Hippolyte did not return that amorous glance. He drew the curtain aside to look into the hall; when his face appeared, shouts arose on all sides; the ladies thought he was a lion. Thereupon Floridor came forth from his box, and addressed the audience thus:

"I told you that you would be pleased, enchanted!"—and he applauded with all his might, the spectators followed suit, and Dubourg bowed with majestic dignity, then retired behind the curtain.

Everybody was ready. Phèdre had a gown *à la* Mary Stuart, a mob-cap, and was covered with *mouches* to the end of her nose. Œnone, to give herself a malignant aspect, was dressed in red and black, because Dubourg had told her that such a costume indicated a woman of character. The carpenter, on the contrary, had sacrificed a nascent whisker in order to represent Aricie; he was dressed in a white cambric gown, with a garland of roses in his hair, and he imitated a woman's voice reasonably well, although he constantly chewed tobacco.

The wigmaker, who was cast for the part of Théramène, wore a François I wig and a Spanish costume, with his National Guards sabre for a sword. The rôles of the other two confidants were to be read by Floridor from the prompter's box. Only Thésée was missing, and he did not appear; but he was not to come on till the third act.

"Let us begin, the audience is growing restive," said the manager; "we mustn't keep them waiting any longer. Thésée will certainly be on hand for the third act."

"It is undoubtedly his costume that detains him," said Dubourg; "he's very particular about having his costume just what it should be, and he never puts in a pin except in the way tradition demands."

The manager, who was also prompter, stage manager, and scene shifter, struck the traditional three blows, then drew the curtain, which at first disclosed only half of the stage; but with the assistance of two spectators, who came on the stage, he succeeded in drawing it entirely aside. Thereupon he went down into his box, with a candlestick in his hand, and the play began.

When Dubourg stalked upon the stage, majestically enveloped in his cloak, the audience emitted a murmur of surprise, which was not precisely admiration; for, with his huge wig, the rouge trickling down his cheeks, and his old musket over his shoulder, Dubourg was far from attractive to look upon. Judging from the head they had seen a moment before, they had expected to see a magnificent man of lofty stature; but, on the contrary, the cloak seemed to crush him, and Théramène, being very tall, made him appear even shorter than he was.

"He's a Pole," said the spectators.

"He's terribly ugly," said the young women; "but he is said to have great talent."

Dubourg rolled his eyes in terrifying fashion, to give character to his face; while the unlucky Théramène, whose head touched the flies, was obliged to stoop, so that his wig should not sweep the spiders' webs from the ceiling of the palace.

Dubourg, who was not at all timid, shouted his lines like a deaf man, and gesticulated so wildly that, before the end of the first scene, Théramène had been struck twice by him. At the third blow, the wigmaker began to lose his temper, and muttered between his teeth:

"Sacrebleu! look out what you're doing! if you go on like this, I shall be like a baked apple before the end of the play."

But the audience were delighted with his spirited acting; they applauded and cried *bravo*! Dubourg continued as he had begun, but not without alarming one woman in the pit who, being singularly affected by his contortions, left the place.

The first act went very well; but the audience manifested some little surprise when, instead of seeing Panope appear, they heard the prompter reading the rôle in his box; but, as it was not long, they let it pass, especially as Floridor, turning toward the pit, explained:

"Messieurs, the rôles of confidants are almost always given in this way in towns of the third order."

But Thésée had not arrived.

"What in the devil can he be doing at the inn?" said Dubourg; "do you suppose he can't put on his costume?"

"Impossible!" said the manager; "I sent him a superb yellow tunic, and trousers of the same stuff; for his diadem he has a turban of the same color, that I use in *Mahomet*."

"Oho! so Thésée will be all yellow, eh?"

"That's traditional, and tradition is never wrong. But let's go on with the second act; we must hope that he will turn up."

They began the second act, which did not go so well as the first. Aricie, in a moment of passion, spat her tobacco into Hippolyte's face, whereupon the latter kicked her viciously just as her lover said to her:

"'Modérez des bontés dont l'excès m'embarrasse!'"[E]

[E] Be not so kind to me; your excessive kindness embarrasses me.

"That will teach you to be more careful," said Dubourg.

"If I wasn't a woman, I'd answer you in another way," retorted the carpenter, shaking his fist at him.

"I advise you to keep quiet!"

Floridor hurried from his box to reconcile Hippolyte and Aricie; he succeeded at last in pacifying them, and the performance continued. But, a moment later, Dubourg, being on the stage with Phèdre, waited for the prompter to give him his cue; but the cue did not come, because the prompter could not see.

"Snuffers!" he cried; "give me some snuffers!"

"What a stupid!" said Phèdre, and she stooped and took the candle, and gracefully snuffed it with her fingers. "There, my boy, that's the way we do when we have any instinct." And she replaced the candlestick in the box.

This little interlude was not agreeable to the audience, who had already begun to murmur at the quarrel

between Hippolyte and the princess; and one enthusiast, who was more exacting than the rest because he had occasionally attended the theatre at Grenoble, threw a raw potato, which struck Phèdre in the left eye. The constable's wife finished the scene in tears, and the second act came to an end at the same time, with indications that a storm was brewing.

Floridor, who came out of his box after each act, ran on to the stage to console Phèdre, who declared that she would not act any more. He tried to restore the courage of his actors by assuring them that the later acts would make amends for everything; he relied especially on the début of Thésée, who had not yet appeared, and to whom he looked to produce a prodigious effect. But Thésée did not arrive, and the anxiety became general.

"What can have happened to him? I'll run back to the inn," said Dubourg, "for his delay begins to surprise me; I'll bring him back with me at once."

"Make haste!" cried Floridor; "for if we keep the audience waiting, everything will be hopelessly ruined."

Let us see why Ménard, who was so scrupulously exact in everything he had to do, had not arrived at the theatre. After Dubourg left him, he turned his attention to his toilet; and that was no small matter to a man who had never been to a ball, had never disguised himself, and had worn the same costume for thirty years. Ménard scrutinized the tunic, the Turkish trousers, and the turban, in every part; he had some difficulty in making up his mind to put on those yellow garments and to besmear his *venerable* cheeks with rouge; he had to remind himself constantly of Roscius, Garrick, and Molière, else he would have abandoned the idea of acting. But he had promised, his word was pledged; monsieur le baron, a noble Pole, set the example, and he must needs adapt himself to circumstances.

After an infinitude of trouble, he succeeded at last in arraying himself in the costume of Thésée. He looked at himself in the mirror, smiled at himself, and concluded that he looked very well; he kindled his own ardor by reflecting that he was about to represent the King of Athens, repeated his lines to himself, especially his first speech, then left his room to go to the theatre, saying to himself:

"Thus the Fates decree!"

At that very moment, a traveller had arrived at the inn in a comfortable carriage. Everything about him denoted a man of wealth and of high rank. The innkeeper made haste to ask what he desired, and the traveller, who was a short, thin, old man, stern of face, inquired curtly what travellers had recently passed through the town, and, on receiving the landlord's reply, exclaimed:

"Shall I never learn what has become of them?"

"Will monsieur have supper?" inquired the innkeeper.

"No; I am not hungry. Let my horses be fed. I may go away again very soon. Give me a room where I can rest quietly for a few moments."

The traveller's tone did not invite conversation. The innkeeper at once took a light and escorted the new arrival to the stairs. As they were going up, they came face to face with Ménard, who was descending with majestic mien, declaiming:

"'La fortune à mes vœux cesse d'être opposée,
Madame, et dans mes bras met——'"

The little old man raised his eyes when he heard Ménard's voice; he gazed at him for some time in surprise, and exclaimed at last:

"Can it be possible that it is Monsieur Ménard whom I see in such a costume as this!"

Ménard looked at the traveller, and was transfixed with amazement when he recognized the Comte de Montreville, Frédéric's father, whose eyes gleamed with anger, and who, taking Thésée by the arm, marched him back abruptly to his room, planted himself in front of him, and began sternly to question him.

"What does all this mean, Monsieur Ménard? what is the meaning of that turban on your head, and this yellow costume that makes you look like an escaped lunatic?"

"Monsieur le comte, yellow is not a color to be scorned; in China, the marks of highest distinction consist of yellow waistcoats and peacocks' feathers."

"Morbleu! monsieur, never mind the Chinese, but answer my question: why do I find you rigged out like this?"

"Because I am to play Thésée this evening, monsieur le comte."

"You, play Thésée!"

"Yes, monsieur le comte; in *Phèdre*, which is to be given at the local theatre."

"What! monsieur le précepteur, you propose to act?"

"Why not, monsieur le comte? circumstances—— Besides, Roscius was entertained by Sylla, Garrick is buried at Westminster, and Molière——"

"Do you consider yourself on a level with those men, monsieur? Do you suppose that I sent you with my son, with the idea of your being an actor? Was it with that end in view that you undertook this journey? Did you think, as well as Frédéric, that you could deceive me for long? In a fortnight, you spent the eight thousand francs I handed you ——"

"We didn't spend them, monsieur le comte——"

"Silence, monsieur! I was willing to forgive that first escapade; I sent you more money, and I learned that, instead of continuing your journey, you had remained at Grenoble, and that my son was making the tour of Europe in Dauphiné."

"It's a superb country, monsieur le comte."

"I left Paris; I was determined to find out for myself what detained you in this neighborhood. I went to Grenoble, and failed to find you; I sought you in vain in that vicinity. And at last I find you here, in this absurd costume! I did not expect this, I admit.—But my son—where is he? is he acting, also?"

"No, monsieur le comte."

"Where is he, then?—speak!"

"He is lost, monsieur le comte."

"Lost! What do you mean? Answer me, monsieur!"

"That is to say, monsieur le comte, he has gone astray."

"Remember, monsieur, that I intrusted my son to you."

"We will find him, monsieur le comte. Monsieur le Baron Potoski is going to send couriers to all the European courts."

"Who is this Baron Potoski?"

"He's a Polish nobleman, a very intelligent young man, Palatine of Rava and Sandomir, who has a magnificent castle in the Krapach Mountains, which he heats with gas."

"Upon my word, Monsieur Ménard, I believe they have made you an absolute idiot!"

"No, monsieur le comte; I know what I am saying, and I am telling the simple truth."

"Where did you find this baron?"

"We found him on the road, near Paris; he overturned our carriage, by the way, and I was thrown into a ditch. But monsieur your son recognized Baron Potoski as one of his friends; so we joined him in King Stanislas's berlin, where I sat in the seat once occupied by the Princess of Hungary; and we have travelled with the baron ever since."

The Comte de Montreville paced the floor, stamping angrily, and looking up at the ceiling in despair. Ménard cowered in a corner, with his turban in his hand, afraid to move. After making the circuit of the room three or four times, the count returned to him.

"What has become of this baron?"

"He is playing Hippolyte, monsieur le comte; he is on the stage at this moment, and—— But, stay, here he is himself, monsieur le comte."

At this moment, in fact, Dubourg rushed into the room, crying:

"Come on, Thésée; we're waiting for you, to begin the third act."

But he stopped short when he saw the count, who exclaimed:

"I was sure of it! It's that scamp Dubourg!"

Ménard opened his eyes at that, and Dubourg contented himself with bowing low to Frédéric's father.

"Come, Monsieur Ménard, follow me," continued the count; "take off that costume, which you should never have put on, and let us leave this place at once."

The unhappy tutor did not wait for the order to be repeated; in an instant, he had cast aside the tunic and trousers; then he resumed his own clothes, took his hat, and stood humbly before the count, who said to Dubourg:

"As for you, monsieur, whose company has been so profitable to my son, remember that if I do not find Frédéric soon, my wrath will fall on you.—Come, Monsieur Ménard."

A moment later, the count and the tutor were in the carriage, from which the horses had not been taken; and they drove rapidly away from the inn toward Grenoble, where the count hoped to obtain news of his son.

Meanwhile, Dubourg, somewhat bewildered by what had taken place, considered what was likely to happen to him; the audience was waiting for Thésée, without whom the play could not go on, and the good people of Voreppe seemed disposed to be unamiable when they were dissatisfied. On the other hand, he had received from the manager his own pay and Ménard's; and now that Ménard had gone, how was their agreement to be kept?

While he reflected, a confused noise arose in the street. Dubourg ran to the window and saw Floridor approaching with several of the spectators, who were swearing and making a great uproar, declaring that the two Poles should act or they would thrash them.

"They will act," cried Floridor; "they will act, messieurs; I paid them in advance."

Dubourg realized the danger that threatened him; he hesitated whether he should give back the money, whether he should excuse himself by disclosing his colleague's departure, or whether he should leave the manager to settle with his audience. The last plan was the most agreeable to him; he was afraid of being beaten, even if he did return the money; moreover, he considered that his performance of Hippolyte was well worth what he had received. So he ran to another window, looking on the open country, and, hearing the crowd enter the innyard, he no longer wavered; he jumped down into the sorrel, picked himself up, wrapped himself in his cloak, and ran across the fields as if the whole town were at his heels.

The count and Ménard soon arrived at Grenoble, and alighted at the inn where our three travellers had sojourned, and which the tutor had pointed out to the count at his request. On the way, he had questioned Ménard closely concerning his son, and the replies he obtained satisfied him that it was nothing more than an amourette which detained Frédéric in that neighborhood; so that he was a little more at ease, having no doubt that his presence would suffice to bring his son to his senses.

When they reached the inn, Ménard had a scene with the landlord on the subject of the char-à-bancs which had been let to him and Dubourg. The landlord also spoke of Dubourg, saying that a creditor of the pretended Baron Potoski had come to Grenoble in search of him, and was now on his trail, meaning to have him arrested.

Poor Ménard had nothing to say; he was utterly overwhelmed when he learned that the man whom he had believed to be a Polish nobleman had done nothing but make sport of him ever since they had travelled together. The Comte de Montreville put an end to the innkeeper's talk by paying him what he demanded. They slept at Grenoble, the count proposing to go with Ménard the next day to the place where he had said that he last saw Frédéric.

But the next morning, as they were preparing to start, Ménard uttered a joyful exclamation, saying:

"Here he is, monsieur le comte; the lamb returns to the fold, the son to his father. Here is your son; let us kill the fatted calf!"

Frédéric was, in fact, entering the innyard at that moment, but he was very far from suspecting that he would find his father there.

The count hastened downstairs, followed by Ménard; he walked toward his son, with a stern expression, and the young man hung his head and seemed stricken dumb when he saw who was before him.

"I have found you at last, monsieur," said the count; "I have heard of your behavior, I have seen your boon

companion, I have learned that your travels have been confined to a miserable village and a forest near by, where you consider, doubtless, that you have acquired sufficient knowledge of the world. But I will abstain from reproaching you; I deserve reproach myself for giving you such a companion as monsieur. Let us forget it all, and return to Paris."

These last words went to Frédéric's heart; he had endured bravely his father's reproaches, but now he became confused, seemed to be deeply distressed, glanced behind him, and stammered a request for a delay of a day or two. But the count pretended not to hear, and said in a harsh tone:

"I am waiting for you, my son."

The carriage was ready; what was he to do? How could he disobey his father? Frédéric trembled with agitation; he was still hesitating; but the count took him by the hand and led him toward the carriage, and he dared not resist. He had had no time for reflection before he was already at some distance from Grenoble. He put his head out of the window and gazed in the direction of Vizille; he heaved a profound sigh, his eyes filled with tears, as he thought of Sister Anne, and he said to himself again and again:

"Poor child! what will she think?"

XVII

THE JOYS OF LOVE LAST BUT A MOMENT, THE SORROWS OF LOVE ENDURE THROUGH LIFE

Why does the love of a month bear so little resemblance to the love of a day? why is the love of a year still less passionate than that of a month? why are we so indifferent to the enjoyment of that which we possess without any obstacles, and why does our enjoyment sometimes cease altogether when we possess what we have ardently desired? It is because everything passes away in this world, where we ourselves are simply birds of passage; it is because men who are greedy of pleasure are always seeking new forms of pleasure, and to many of them love is simply a diversion. But you will say to me, perhaps: "I have been married three years, and I love my wife as dearly as I did the first day;" or: "My lover has adored me for six months, and he is more in love than ever." I have no doubt of it; there are exceptions to every rule, and everyone can invoke them in his favor; and, furthermore, I do not say that love vanishes; I mean simply that it changes its hue; and, unhappily, the last variations have not the splendor, the lustre, the charm, of the original color.

Frédéric still loved the pretty mute, beyond question; but he had been living with her in the woods for three weeks, and it began to seem a little monotonous to him. The great fault of lovers is to yield too freely to the intoxication of passion in the first days of their happiness. They are like those gluttons who go to the table with a tremendous appetite, and who eat so fast that they are filled to repletion before the repast is half served.

Sister Anne felt none of this ennui; she was happier and more loving with Frédéric than ever. As a general rule, women love more truly than men, and, moreover, the unfortunate orphan was no ordinary woman; to her, Frédéric was the whole earth, the universe. Since she had known him, her intelligence had awakened, her mind had developed; she had learned to think, to reflect, to form desires, to fear, and to hope; a thousand new sensations had made her heart beat fast. Before she knew what love was, her life had been only a dream, but Frédéric had roused her from it.

When she saw that he was depressed and preoccupied, she redoubled her attentions and caresses; she would lead him into the woods, and hide behind a bush or a clump of trees; then, suddenly appearing, would rush into his arms; and her childlike grace heightened the sweet expression of her features.

When night came, they returned to the garden of the cottage. Sister Anne, alert and light of foot, prepared in a twinkling their evening meal, which they ate as soon as old Marguerite had gone to bed. The dumb girl gathered fruit, brought milk and rye bread, then seated herself beside Frédéric, close against him, and selected for him what seemed to her the finest and best morsels. When her lover spoke, she listened in rapture; one could see that Frédéric's words echoed in her heart. Once he sang a love song, and the girl listened without moving a muscle, as if she feared to lose a note, then motioned to him to sing it again. Since then, her greatest joy had been to hear him sing; he had a sweet and flexible voice, and she would gladly have passed the whole day listening to him.

Thus did Sister Anne seek to enchain the man she loved. It was not the tactics of a coquette—it was love, pure and simple, and nothing else; whereas in the manœuvres of a coquette there is not the faintest trace of that sentiment.

Why, then, fools that we are, do we allow ourselves to be caught in the nets of the one, and repay with cold disdain the sincere love of the other? Because the coquette has the art to keep us in suspense; when she sees that we are well caught, she plays the cruel; if we seem a little cool, she excites us by giving us some cause of jealousy; if we seem overconfident, her mockery arouses our fears; if we are disgusted and ready to turn our back, she becomes tender, sentimental, passionate, and with a word brings us back to her feet. These constant changes do not give the heart time to grow cold. I was on the point of comparing us men to the epicures whose appetites are sharpened by a variety of dishes, but I refrain; you would think that I had studied the art of love in the *Cuisinier Royal*.

For several days, Frédéric had taken to making short excursions in the neighborhood. Sister Anne was alarmed at first; but he was away only a little while, and her fears vanished. Frédéric was beginning to think of the future, of his father. What would the Comte de Montreville say, if he knew that his son was living in the woods with a village girl? That question frequently disturbed Frédéric's repose, and as the days passed it recurred with increasing frequency.

Sometimes he said to himself:

"If father should see her, it would be impossible for him not to love her. But would he accept her as his son's wife? No, that is not to be expected; the Comte de Montreville is not in the least romantic; he is proud; he loves wealth, because he knows that money always adds to the estimation in which one is held; so there is no hope that he will allow his son to marry a penniless village girl."

To be sure, he could act without his father's consent; but, in that case, he must renounce his fortune, turn his talents to account, and work for his living; in any event, he must leave the woods, for he was beginning to realize

that it is absurd for a young man to turn his back on the world at twenty-one; that men are made for society; and that the being in love with a pretty woman is no reason for burying one's self alive with her in the depths of a forest.

These arguments assumed greater force from day to day; especially when he was away from Sister Anne, he abandoned himself to such reflections, and his absences became longer every day. The poor child groaned in secret; she counted the minutes that she spent without her lover; she ran down into the valley to watch for his coming, and she pouted—oh! so sadly!—when he had been long absent; but she was so overjoyed to see him again, that her dejection soon passed away; she forgot all her anxieties when she held him to her heart.

A month had passed. Dubourg and Ménard had not returned to inquire concerning his plans, and he was greatly surprised. He did not know, as we do, that his two travelling companions were at that time installed under their friend Chambertin's roof, where that surprise in the way of fireworks was being prepared, which disclosed to their host what you already know, but what he did not know, even after the event, so they say, because his wife convinced him that he had seen nothing but fire.

So that Frédéric was at a loss to understand the indifference of his friends, especially of Ménard.

"Something new must have happened to them," he said to himself. "Dubourg has probably performed some further crazy exploit. I did wrong to trust him with all the money I possessed."

The invariable result of his reflections was that he must go to Grenoble, to find out what those gentlemen were doing. But to join them after saying to Dubourg that he would never leave those woods again, that he had abandoned forever a false and wicked world, all of whose pleasures were not equal to the tranquil life of a cottage—that was most embarrassing, and that was why Frédéric could not make up his mind to go to the town; for a man often chooses to persevere in an act of folly rather than admit that he is wrong.

Meanwhile, Frédéric's absolute idleness had become a heavy burden to him; with the best will in the world, one cannot talk twenty-four hours at a stretch to a pretty woman, and the poor girl was unhappy because she saw that her lover was melancholy and often sighed. At last, one fine evening, Frédéric, finding that he could endure it no longer, said to her:

"To-morrow, at daybreak, I shall go to Grenoble, to learn something about my friends."

As if struck by an unforeseen blow, the girl did not move for an instant, then her bosom heaved, and two streams of tears gushed from her eyes. She pointed to the road to the town, then to herself, as if to say:

"And me? are you going to leave me?"

The poor child was unable, in order to detain her lover, to resort to the sweet, loving words and entreaties which it is so hard to resist. But how expressive her gestures were, and how eloquent her eyes! one had but to glance at them to read all her thoughts.

"I will return," said Frédéric, "I promise you; I will return, and I shall never love anyone but you."

These words at once allayed Sister Anne's grief, for she did not doubt her lover's word. Remember, mesdames, that Sister Anne did not know the world—a very painful knowledge sometimes, since it teaches us to renounce the illusions of the heart.

The evening passed sadly enough; for, although she did not doubt that he would return soon, the idea of her friend's departure was very cruel to that glowing heart, upon which love had bestowed an unalloyed happiness which she had thought would endure to the end of her life. Frédéric did all that he could to comfort her; but by giving fresh proofs of his love a man inspires greater love than ever. Surely, then, that is not the best way to lessen the pain of a separation; but it is the way that is usually employed.

The dawn was a gloomy one in the eyes of the young orphan. Can that be a pleasant day which is to part us from all that we love best? Frédéric climbed the hill to the road, holding the poor girl's trembling hand in his. There, having repeated his promises and bade her a most affectionate farewell, he rode away and vanished from his sweetheart's sight.

A heavy weight settled down upon the girl's heart. She could not see Frédéric, but still she stood there, still she sought him with her eyes. Suddenly she turned them upon her immediate surroundings; a groan escaped her, and she fell on her knees at the foot of an old oak, which she kissed with profound respect. Poor child! she was on the very spot where her mother had died while waiting for her father! She recognized the spot, and, clasping her hands, prayed fervently, and commended herself to her mother.

Sister Anne was in the habit of going several times a year to pray by the old oak, near which the unhappy Clotilde had breathed her last; but she had never been there with Frédéric. On that day they had climbed that hill, over which ran the road to the town, and Sister Anne, absorbed by her grief, had not noticed it.

Poor child! what melancholy presentiment oppresses your heart? You think of your mother's fate, and say to yourself:

"Shall I be as unhappy as she was?"

But she must needs return to the cabin; old Marguerite might need her attention. She walked slowly down the hillside, sighing as she looked back at the old oak. There he had parted from her, and there, as her mother had done, she would come every day to await his return.

She returned to her cabin, her goats, and her woods; she resumed her ordinary habits and occupations. But everything was changed in her eyes; the woods seemed gloomy to her; wherever she went, she was oppressed by ennui. Her garden no longer had any charm for her, her home was like a desert. Frédéric embellished everything, and Frédéric was not there! Before she knew him, her eyes looked with pleasure upon things that she now viewed with indifference; and yet, the things themselves had not changed; but she had lost peace of mind and repose, and nothing looked to her as it did before.

Frédéric had not said how many days he would be absent, and the girl hoped to see him soon; she did not dream that he had found his father at Grenoble, and that the Comte de Montreville was at that moment taking his son with him to Paris.

Each day, Sister Anne went to the hilltop with her goats, and her eyes were constantly fixed on the road to the town; she sought Frédéric there, even as poor Clotilde had sought her husband. She amused herself by tracing her lover's name on the ground with a stick; that was all that he had taught her, but she had practised writing the name so often with him that she had succeeded in writing it legibly.

Several days passed, and Frédéric did not return. Sister Anne still hoped, because she could not believe that her lover would break his promise; and every morning, as she went up the hill, she said to herself:

"To-day I shall certainly come down with him."

Vain hope! she must needs return alone once more to her cabin, to that abode whence repose had fled since love had crossed the threshold.

But a new sentiment diverted her thoughts from her sorrow. Sister Anne bore within her a pledge of her love for Frédéric; she was enceinte, but had not yet tried to understand the change that she observed in herself. In her simplicity, it had not occurred to her that she might be a mother; but that thought suddenly came into her mind. Thereupon an unfamiliar joy took possession of her heart; she abandoned herself in ecstasy to that newborn hope. She would have a child—a child by Frédéric! It seemed to her that he must love her more than ever. The thought filled her heart with joy. To be a mother! what bliss! and what pleasure to be able to tell Frédéric! The girl leaped and ran about through the woods; in her excitement, she did innumerable foolish things; she looked at herself in the brook and in the fountain; she was proud to be a mother, and would have been glad that people should see it when they looked at her.

Poor child! whose every action manifests your perfect innocence—enjoy to the utmost this sentiment newborn in your heart! That, at all events, will never grow less.

But the days passed, and Frédéric did not return. Sister Anne was certain that she was to be a mother, and she could not tell her lover the joyful news! There can be no pleasure without pain; hers was poisoned by the anxiety she felt at the non-appearance of the being whom she adored; and every day the old oak was a silent witness of her sighs and her tears.

XVIII

THE GREAT BEAST

We left Dubourg running across the fields to escape Monsieur Floridor, the angry audience, and the raw potatoes of which Phèdre had received a specimen in the eye; we must not forget that his flight was so sudden that he had no time to change his costume, that his head was still buried under the huge Louis XIV wig, which fell in great curls over his neck and shoulders, and that his body was enveloped in the cloak covered with rabbit skins.

For an hour he ran at full speed, crossing highroads, jumping ditches, stumbling through fields of wheat and tracts of ploughed land, with no idea where he was or whither he was going, for the reader will remember that these things happened late in the evening; consequently, it was dark, and, as it was raining, there was no moon to light his path.

He paused at last and listened; he heard nothing to indicate that he was pursued. The most profound silence reigned all about him; he tried to look about and find out where he was; he no longer was afraid of being caught, and he felt the need of rest. It was the middle of autumn, the evenings were beginning to be cool, and our fugitive was not at all desirous to pass the night in the open air, unprotected from the rain; to be sure, his wig took the place of a hat, and his cloak was as good as an umbrella; but they would be drenched in time, and then he would be very uncomfortable; so that it was most advisable to seek a place of shelter.

He knew by the feeling that he was walking over vegetables, and soon his path was barred by a tall hedge; but as his cloak protected him from the thorns, he climbed over, leaving two or three rabbit skins and two curls from his wig in the bushes, and found himself at last on the other side, uncertain whether he would be any better off there. But various fruit-trees, pots of flowers, and a trellis, led him to think that he was in a garden. He walked on, holding his hands in front of him, and came to a wall; then he found that he was under a roof, where his progress was arrested by bundles of hay and straw: he was in a shed which was evidently used to store fodder.

"Parbleu!" he said to himself; "I have found all that I need for a comfortable night; I am sheltered from the rain, so I'll just lie down on this straw, wrap myself in my cloak, and sleep. To-morrow, we will consider our future plans."

Dubourg was soon ready for the night; he was exceedingly comfortable under the shed, and, after blessing the chance to which he owed that shelter, he fell sound asleep.

The shed in which he lay was at the end of a garden belonging to a very pretty little cottage, occupied by a farmer named Bertrand, who had married, seven years before, a pretty damsel of his village, a fresh, wide-awake young woman known as La Belle Claudine; she had already presented Monsieur Bertrand with two bouncing children, and hoped that the end was not yet.

In the country, everyone rises early. At daybreak, Fanfan and Marie, the farmer's two children, one five years old and the other four, having had their porridge, went out as usual to run about and play in the garden. Happening to pass near the shed, what did they see on the straw? Imagine Azor in *Beauty and the Beast*, and you will have an idea of the aspect of Dubourg, whose face was entirely hidden by a profusion of reddish-brown curls, which fell over his breast, while his whole body was covered by the cloak, which counterfeited some other animal if not the tiger; fancy, therefore, the fright of those children when they saw that shapeless mass.

Little Marie dropped the slice of bread and butter she held in her hand; while the little boy opened his mouth and could not close it again, being almost petrified by fear.

"Oh! oh! brother, do you see?" said little Marie at last, clinging to him and pointing to the object stretched out on the straw.

"Oh! oh! what a horrid beast!" said Fanfan, running behind his sister.

Then they ran at full speed to the house, uttering piercing shrieks which did not wake Dubourg, because the fatigue of the preceding night made his sleep very sound.

Bertrand had just kissed his Claudine, preparatory to going into the fields to work, when the two frightened, screaming children appeared.

"What's the matter?" said their papa; "why don't you speak, you rascals?"

The children were so panic-stricken that they could not speak coherently. At last, they cried in unison:

"Over there—under the shed—a great big beast all covered with hair—on the straw—with a black head and a red mane; he's bigger'n our donkey! He's a horrid-looking thing!"

"Can you make anything of all that?" Bertrand asked his wife.

"They said something about a big beast, goodman."

"*Morgué!* there's only us in the house; how could it get in? Perhaps it's neighbor Gervais's bull, or Dame Catherine's donkey."

"No, papa, no; it's all gray and red. Oh! it's awful-looking!"

"The devil! what does it mean?"

"Has it got any tail?" inquired Claudine.

"I don't know 'bout that, mamma; he looked as if he was asleep, and we ran right away."

"You must go and see what it is, goodman."

"Yes, yes; I must go and see."

But Bertrand, who was not naturally brave, had already begun to quake, and, as a matter of prudence, went to get his gun, which was loaded with salt. Claudine took a broom, the children seized sticks, and they marched toward the shed. The little ones went first, because at that age, although frightened, a child delights in anything out of the ordinary, and the slightest event is a pleasure. Bertrand walked beside his wife, who kept pushing him to make him go ahead. The nearer they came to the shed, the more slowly they walked; they had ordered the children to make no noise, because it was better to view the beast asleep than awake.

At last they stood in front of the little building, and the children said, their voices trembling with fear and excitement:

"There—look, in there!"

Bertrand and Claudine thrust their heads forward, saw the horrifying object, and dared not advance; the husband turned pale and drew closer to his wife, who motioned to the children not to go any nearer.

"Let's go and call help," said Bertrand at last, in a choking voice.

"S'pose you fire at it, goodman."

"I guess not! my gun's only loaded with salt; that wouldn't kill him, but would just wake him up, and he'd be mad and go for us."

"Ah! you're right, you mustn't fire; let's run to the village. Come, children. Great God! I hope he won't wake up!"

Bertrand had already started; he ran, as if the beast were after him, to the village, which was only a gunshot from his house, and he was soon joined by Claudine. They both told everybody they met what they had found in their garden. As fear always magnifies objects, the beast they had seen became as large as a bull; and as events are always exaggerated by passing from mouth to mouth, because everyone adds a little to what he hears, the beast was transformed from a bull to a camel, then into a lion, then into an elephant; nor would it have stopped there if they had been able to think of any larger animal.

The one undoubted fact was that there was an extraordinary creature in Bertrand's garden, and in a moment that news had put the whole village in a ferment. The people assembled, and took counsel together; the women went to fetch their husbands from the fields, and the mothers brought their little ones into the house and forbade them to go out. They called on the mayor, who, like his constituents, was an honest peasant, and who declared that he knew no more about beasts than did the other inhabitants of his bailiwick. But there was a certain Latouche in the village, who had once been a customs clerk at the barrier in Paris, and who set up for a wit, a joker, and a scholar. They hunted up Latouche, who was at work on a process of making preserves without sugar, and told him of the event which had upset the equilibrium of the whole village.

Latouche listened gravely, passed his hand under his chin, required every detail to be repeated several times, made a pretence of reflecting long and profoundly, and said at last:

"We must go and see what it is."

"That is true, he's quite right," said all those who heard him; "let's go and see the beast."

"When I have seen it," said Latouche, "I will tell you at once what it is, and to what genus it belongs; I ought to know about such things; I studied botany once, and my cousin was under-porter at the Museum of Natural History."

The whole village made ready to visit Bertrand's garden. Everyone took such weapon as he could find; even the women took hoes or rakes, because the beast might be dangerous. The mayor joined the villagers, and Latouche, who was the only man in the place who had a gun in working order,—for Bertrand's would carry nothing heavier than salt,—Latouche undertook to lead the march and to direct all the operations that were to take place.

They left the village; men, women, boys, and girls plodded along, discussing the adventure. But the nearer they came to Bertrand's house, the less inclined they were to talk; and soon, as a result of the general terror, the silence became general. They marched in closer order, and everyone tried to gather courage from the glance of his neighbor.

Latouche walked ahead, with his gun over his shoulder, arranging his forces as if it were a matter of surprising a hostile camp. As they drew near the garden hedge, Bertrand uttered an exclamation and dodged behind a large rock.

"There it is!" he cried.

Instantly the whole body of peasants executed a retrograde movement, and Latouche darted into the centre of his battalion; but soon, hearing no sound, they moved forward again, looking for the object which had frightened Bertrand. It was a red cat, which had glided under the hedge.

"Morbleu! Bertrand," said Latouche, hastily resuming his place as leader, "do you know that you're terribly chicken-hearted? it's shameful for a man of your years to have so little courage!"

"Yes, that's true enough," said Claudine; "he ain't brave a bit, and I often tell him so."

"The idea of calling out and spreading an alarm just for a cat!"

"*Dame!* Monsieur Latouche, I saw something crawling, and I thought——"

"Perhaps it was some foolish thing like that that made him turn the whole village upside down, and interrupt the

chemical experiment I was making."

"Oh, no! that wasn't anything foolish! you'll soon see that it was worth the trouble; here we are, close to the shed; just go through this little gate and you'll be right there."

"No; let's go in by the house, and examine the creature first at a distance."

Latouche's advice was followed: they went through Bertrand's house into the garden. As they approached the shed, the bravest turned pale, several women dared not go any farther, and Latouche, who resembled those persons who sing to dissemble their fear, issued precautionary orders on this side and that, but found an excuse for abandoning his position at the head of the procession.

"There it is! there it is!" exclaimed several of the villagers, pointing to Dubourg, who was still in the same position, because he was in a heavy sleep. Terror was depicted on every face, but it was blended with curiosity; everyone stretched out his neck, or stooped forward, or leaned against his neighbor. Latouche instantly ordered a halt, and one could hear on all sides:

"Oh! what a horrid beast! oh! how ugly! What a head! what a body! I can't see any eyes. No, nor any paws."

"Hush! hush!" said Latouche; "don't talk so loud, you may wake him up. Wait till I examine him. Neighbors, did you ever hear of the famous beast that ravaged Gévaudan?"

"No, no!" said the villagers.

"Well, this one looks to me very much like him. You don't see this monster's feet, because he has them folded under him, like the Turks; as for his eyes, they are turned toward the straw, luckily for us; for the eyes of such creatures often emit a deadly poison. The more I look at that skin and that mane—yes, it's a sea-lion, that must have found its way here from Normandie."

"A sea-lion!" repeated the peasants; "are they ugly?"

"Parbleu! they eat a man as if he was an oyster."

"Oh! mon Dieu! What shall we do? how shall we catch him?"

"Perhaps he's dead," said Claudine; "he ain't changed his position since this morning."

"Dead? where's the man who'll go and find out?"

"What if you should give him a shot?" suggested the mayor.

"To fire at him is taking a great risk; the bullet often glances off of their skin."

"Aim at his ear."

"I should have to see it, first."

"No matter," said the mayor; "we must capture the animal, dead or alive; take good aim, and fire; and we, that is I myself and the bravest men here, will guard you with our hoes; and, *morgué!* if he comes at us, we'll give him a warm reception."

The mayor's speech revived the courage of the villagers; they formed in line and stood with upraised hoes, ready to strike. Latouche finally decided to fire, although he was not at all eager to do so. He stood behind the line, passed the barrel of his gun between two peasants, spent five minutes taking aim, and at last pulled the trigger—and the gun missed fire, luckily for Dubourg, who had no suspicion of the danger he had escaped.

The mayor was in despair, Latouche refused to try again, and the peasants made no motion. Suddenly our sleeper turned over, with a yawn which everybody took for a roar. Instantly the most courageous dropped their weapons and fled, pushing and crowding one another, and listening to nothing but their fright; the boys tumbled over the girls, the women dragged their husbands away, Latouche climbed a tree, the mayor was thrown down by Bertrand, the most agile leaped the hedge, the heaviest slipped and fell when they tried to run. Claudine fell flat, as did several of her neighbors, and, in the confusion, all the women, young and old, were more on exhibition than they were in the habit of being in public; but no one paid any heed to them; the most seductive objects do not stop fugitives, for in great crises we do not give a thought to such trifles.

But Dubourg was now fully awake; he rubbed his eyes, and, first of all, snatched off his wig, which prevented his seeing, then removed his cloak, in which he was stifling. He stood up, for he heard shouts, cries of terror, words that he did not understand—in short, an uproar, the cause of which he was very far from suspecting. He left the shed and went out into the garden, where he was thunderstruck by the scene before his eyes. There was ample ground for amazement; but as he saw some very pleasing details amid the chaos, he walked on, saying to himself:

"I don't know what insect has stung all these people, but they have a strange way of receiving travellers in this country; one ought to have little difficulty in making acquaintances."

The boldest of the villagers, hearing no repetition of the roaring, gradually turned his head; he saw Dubourg's features, which were in no wise alarming when they were no longer surrounded by that infernal wig.

"Well, well! who's that man, and where did he come from?" said the peasant.

At that, all his companions turned their heads and stared at Dubourg, who, having politely assisted Claudine to rise, thus answered the mayor, who repeated the question:

"I am an unfortunate devil, albeit an honest man, who, when surprised by the storm last night, did not know where to go, so took the liberty of lying on yonder bundles of straw, where I slept without waking until this moment. I trust that I have done no harm."

"You say you slept under that shed?" said the mayor.

"To be sure."

"And the big beast didn't eat you?" asked Bertrand.

"What big beast?"

"*Pardi!* the beast with long hair and red mane that was lying there."

Dubourg turned, and his eye fell on his cloak and wig; he divined the source of the peasants' terror, and gave way to a longing to laugh, which he could not control for several minutes. The villagers, hearing his laughter, began to take courage; the fugitives stopped, the women rose and arranged their dresses; everybody looked at Dubourg and awaited an explanation from him. He went back to the shed, took his cloak in one hand and his wig in the other, and returned to the villagers.

"Here, my friends, is the beast that seems to have frightened you. I abandon it to your wrath."

As he spoke, he threw the cloak and wig on the ground; and the peasants drew near, ventured to touch them, and laughed with Dubourg, saying:

"What! is that what it was? Mon Dieu! what a pack of idiots!"

At this juncture, Latouche descended from his pear-tree, crying:

"I told you that that idiot of a Bertrand, who's as cowardly as a hare, had told us some fool story, and taken a nut-cracker for an ox. Tell me, now, if I wasn't right."

"*Morguienne!*" retorted Bertrand; "I don't see but what my nut-cracker gave you a good fright, too; for you climbed that pear-tree like a cat, and knocked Claudine down when you ran by her."

"Hush!" said Latouche, turning as red as a beet at Bertrand's retort; "hush, you clown! I only climbed the tree so that I could aim better at what you called an animal."

"And you threw your gun away!"

"Unintentionally, of course."

"Come, come," said Dubourg; "I am the cause of all this confusion; and, in truth, I don't wonder you were frightened when you saw me at a distance in this cloak and wig; the bravest men aren't always eager to fight with a savage beast, and Monsieur Latouche must be very brave to have dared to fire at me."

This adroit speech conciliated everybody, and Latouche recovered his good humor.

"This stranger expresses himself well," he said; "he is certainly a learned man."

Dubourg might easily have passed himself off as a baron again, he had created such a favorable impression; but since the happenings at Chambertin's, he was little inclined to play the nobleman; and when the mayor asked him whence he had come in such an extraordinary costume, he instantly invented a fable of robbers who had attacked and stripped him, stifled his cries with the wig, and wrapped him in the cloak, probably intending to carry him to their cavern, when they had taken alarm at the sound of horses' steps, and had run away, leaving him in the midst of the fields.

This tale aroused the deepest interest among the villagers, in Dubourg's favor; they found him very agreeable, having ceased to be afraid of him. The mayor drew up a report, and Latouche observed:

"I have been saying for a long while that there are robbers in the neighborhood; they stole two hens from me a week ago, and that isn't all they've done. We must have a general *battue*, neighbors; I'll take charge of it, and you know what a good hand I am at making plans. We will begin immediately after the constables have made theirs in pursuance of monsieur le maire's report."

Awaiting the general *battue*, they turned their attention to Dubourg, who obviously stood in need of refreshment. Everyone wanted to treat him, to give him food and lodging. Every male villager cordially offered him a jacket to replace his cloak, and urged him to make his house his home for a few days. Dubourg gave the preference to Bertrand, because he had not forgotten certain impressions he had received when he assisted Claudine to rise. Bertrand's better half seemed flattered by that honor; she courtesied to the stranger, and accompanied the courtesy with a smile, which smile meant many things. After all that Dubourg had witnessed, it was a great triumph for her over her neighbors.

The mayor, as the official head of the commune, had the privilege of offering him a stout woollen jacket to replace the coat the robbers had stolen from him. As compensation, he awarded to himself the famous cloak, with which he proposed to make a winter coverlet; and Monsieur Latouche secured the wig, which he had well earned by his behavior throughout the affair.

The villagers returned to their customary occupations: some to the fields, others to their cottages. Bertrand, who had a large field to plow, went off to his work, enjoining upon his wife to take good care of the gentleman until his return. Claudine promised, and kept her word. She was active and obliging; she was most anxious to prove to the stranger that he had done well to give her the preference, and she spared no trouble to make him content with his choice. For his part, Dubourg desired to efface the ghastly impression produced by his appearance in the village, and we know that he had a great talent for making himself agreeable to the ladies; and so, when Bertrand returned from the field at night, his wife ran to meet him, saying:

"*Jarni!* goodman, what fools we was to be afraid of that gentleman; he's just like anybody else, you see, and he knows a lot more'n you do."

Dubourg was extremely well treated by the villagers, and he found it very convenient to pass some little time among those honest folk, who strove, by their attentions, to make him forget his misadventure. He paid for his entertainment by telling ghost stories in the evening. To the peasant, a man who can talk for hours of interesting, terrifying, and, consequently, amusing things, is a veritable treasure. Dubourg was such a man, and when Monsieur Latouche was present he always sprinkled his tales with a few Latin words; whereupon the village oracle, although he did not understand, would turn to the peasants and say:

"This is all true, my friends; he just made oath to it in German."

But, after a fortnight, Dubourg began to tire of telling the peasants fairy tales in the evening and making love to their wives during the day; and he determined to leave the village, and go in search of news of his former companions. He still had in his pocket, untouched, the hundred francs he had earned by acting Hippolyte; with that amount he could safely set out without being obliged to disguise himself as a strange beast. Despite all that Claudine could do to detain him, he determined to go. He thanked the mayor, Latouche, and all the villagers for their kind treatment. He thanked Bertrand, and especially his wife, with peculiar warmth. Then, with a stout knotted stick in his hand, which harmonized with his jacket, and a broad-brimmed hat in place of his wig, he left the village, saying to himself:

"Those people who saw me playing the swell will never recognize me; and that is precisely what I desire."

However, he deemed it prudent to avoid Voreppe, where he might fall in with Floridor or some member of his troupe. Nor did he care to pass through Grenoble, where Durosey might still be lying in wait for him, and a creditor's eyes are not easily deceived. So he headed for Vizille, where he hoped to find Frédéric, or, at least, to learn something about him.

He strode gayly along, singing all the time, and sitting down on the grass to eat the provisions with which

Claudine had filled his pockets; for women think of everything. Dubourg blessed Madame Bertrand's foresight.

"How can I be melancholy," he thought, "when I have had ample proof, a hundred times over, that tender-hearted women will always take an interest in my fate! Here's to Claudine's health, and Madame Chambertin's, and Goton's, and little Delphine's, and all the others to whom I owe so many pleasant hours and delicious memories."

He drank their healths in water from a brook, for he could adapt himself to anything. Moreover, he had money and might have wine, which consideration made the water seem less disagreeable. Toward nightfall, he drew near Vizille.

"If monsieur le comte learned of Frédéric's amourette from Ménard," he said to himself, "he probably came here after him, and I shall not find him; but I shall find the pretty blonde, and she will tell me what has happened."

He did not then know that the poor girl could not tell him anything. He walked through the valley, entered the woods, looked about, and called, but saw no one. At last he discovered the cabin; he entered the garden, which was deserted; then he went into the little house, where he found no one but old Marguerite, dozing in her big armchair.

Surprised not to find the girl, Dubourg left the cabin; he was afraid that the story he had invented for Ménard would prove to be true, and that Frédéric had really taken his sweetheart away with him. He was on his way to the village to try to learn something about Sister Anne, when, in one of the paths in the forest, he met her walking slowly toward her home.

Her whole bearing was so dejected, her features wore an expression of such profound sorrow, that Dubourg was touched. He gazed at her for several minutes, saying to himself:

"Poor creature! he has gone, and he didn't take you! How much better it would have been for you if he had never come!"

At that moment, Sister Anne, hearing footsteps, looked up and saw that someone was approaching. She ran forward like a flash; when she reached Dubourg's side, she stopped, and her features, which hope had brightened for a moment, resumed their grief-stricken expression; sadly she shook her head—it was not he!

But Dubourg spoke; recognizing his voice, she looked at him more carefully, and again her heart beat fast with joy. It was one of Frédéric's friends, who had come once before to seek him; doubtless he came now to announce his return. She walked closer to him, questioning him with her eyes, and waiting impatiently for him to explain his presence; whereupon Dubourg, much surprised, asked her what had become of Frédéric.

The name of Frédéric made her quiver; she pointed to the road he had taken, counted on her fingers the number of days he had been gone, and seemed to be trying to ask him why he did not bring him back.

This pantomime revealed to Dubourg Sister Anne's unhappy condition, and he devoted all his efforts to consoling her. But for Sister Anne there was no consolation, no happiness, without Frédéric.

"Poor girl!" thought Dubourg; "he was quite right to assure me that she did not resemble any woman he had ever known! But to leave her in these woods—that was an outrage! for such grace and charm to live in a wretched hovel is downright murder! Upon my word, I have a mind to take her to Paris!"

"Why didn't you go with him?" he asked her; "what detains you here in the woods? Come with me, my child, and we will find Frédéric; or, if we don't find him, there are thousands of others who will be only too happy to fill his place."

Sister Anne stared at him in amazement; she seemed not to understand him; but when he waved his hand in the direction of the town, she hastily drew back, and, pointing to the cabin, made him understand by signs that there was someone there whom she could not leave. Ah! had it not been for Marguerite, how willingly she would have gone with Dubourg! for she believed that he would lead her at once to her lover's arms. But as for abandoning the one who had taken charge of her in her childhood, who had been a second mother to her,—now, when she was advanced in years and was most in need of her assistance!—such a thought did not enter the dumb girl's mind; ingratitude was a vice to which her heart was a stranger.

"Very good," said Dubourg; "then remain here in these woods, my child; and may you recover your happiness and peace of mind!"

Sister Anne's eyes questioned him anew.

"Yes, yes," he said; "he will come back; you will see him again, I have no doubt. Dry your tears. He will surely come soon and comfort you."

These words brought a gleam of hope to the dumb girl's pale, sorrowful face. She smiled at him who had given her that assurance, and, bidding him adieu with a motion of her head, left him, to return to Marguerite.

Dubourg left the woods, and, despite his heedless nature, he did not sing as he walked back through the valley to the highroad. Like a heavy weight upon his heart lay the image of that unhappy child, to whom he had held out a hope which he thought would never be realized. He had never been so moved. For several leagues, he thought constantly of Sister Anne, saying to himself:

"Poor girl! she was well worth the trouble!"

But, at last, the thought of his own plight brought him back to his natural frame of mind. He sold his jacket and hat to a second-hand dealer, and for a few crowns obtained a more fitting costume; then he started for Lyon, whence he proposed to return to Paris, in the hope of finding his former travelling companions.

XIX

ILLUSIONS OF THE HEART.—INCONSTANCY AND LOYALTY

The post chaise which bore Frédéric Parisward went like the wind. The Comte de Montreville was in haste to deaden the intensity of his son's memories, and seemed impatient to arrive at the capital.

They exchanged very few words: Frédéric thought exclusively of Sister Anne, his father of the best means of bringing his son to his senses, and Ménard of all the lies the false Polish baron had told him.

The count did not address a word of reproach to Frédéric; he seemed to have forgotten all his grounds of

dissatisfaction; and Ménard, who was mortally afraid of Monsieur de Montreville's stern glance, because he realized that his conduct had been far from exemplary, began to breathe more freely, and ventured to hold up his head.

They arrived at Paris. Before Ménard took leave of the count, Frédéric found an opportunity to speak with him in private, and asked him about Dubourg. Ménard did not answer for a moment; he bit his lips, as if he were not quite sure whether he ought to take offence, and said at last, with what he intended for a sly look:

"Is it Monsieur le Baron Potoski that you wish to know about?"

"Potoski, Dubourg—call him what you please."

"Faith! monsieur, I might well call him rather impertinent, considering all the fables he told me. The idea of claiming to be a palatine——"

"Come, come, my dear Ménard, forget all that."

"And his snuff-box that belonged to the King of Prussia!"

"That was a joke!"

"But I thought more of that tokay from Tekely's cellar than of anything else."

"Remember that I am as much to blame as he, for giving him permission to deceive you."

"That closes my mouth, monsieur le comte; besides, if it weren't for his recklessness and his passion for gambling, he would be a man of great merit. He is well informed, he knows his classics."

"But what has become of him? where did you leave him?"

"I left him acting Hippolyte, and coming to get me to make my *entrée* on the stage."

As Frédéric was entirely in the dark, Ménard described their adventures in the little town, at which anybody but the young count would have laughed heartily. But he heard only this, that Dubourg had been left in a very embarrassing position. He could form no idea when he would see him again, which was a grievous disappointment; for he had proposed to send Dubourg to Sister Anne, to allay the poor girl's apprehensions and explain his failure to return.

The Comte de Montreville dismissed Ménard with a reasonable compensation, not for the way he had looked after his son during their journey, but for the time he had lost. Ménard bade adieu to his dear pupil, expressing the hope that he would remember him in case he should ever propose to start around the world again.

Several days had passed since Frédéric's return to Paris, and the dumb girl's image was constantly in his thoughts. He imagined her in the woods, awaiting his return, watching the road by which he was to come, and in despair at his desertion of her. Every moment added to his remorse and his longing to see Sister Anne again. But what could he do? He dared not leave his father; he had no money, and, for the first time in his life, the steward, at the count's bidding, had refused to supply him. Monsieur de Montreville feared that his son would use it to resume his travels, and he did not propose to let him go away again.

Every day, Frédéric formed the most extravagant projects. He determined to leave Paris on foot, to join his young sweetheart and conceal himself with her in the heart of some forest. But Sister Anne could not leave Marguerite; so that they must remain near the cabin, where his father could easily find him; for Ménard had told him everything.

Then what was he to do?—write? Alas! the poor child did not know how to read—she knew how to do nothing, except love; and that is very little in these days.

Frédéric rarely went into society, for he did not enjoy himself. In vain did pretty little Madame Dernange renew her provocations; he paid no heed to them; and she, piqued by his indifference, employed all the resources of coquetry to bring him to her feet. But Frédéric did not fall into the trap, for he had learned what true love is; he realized the worthlessness of all those promptings of self-esteem, those caprices of the senses, which one mistakes for love until he has learned to know the real thing.

The count treated his son coldly, but never alluded to his adventures in Dauphiné. On the contrary, he avoided the subject; and when Frédéric, desirous to obtain some idea of his father's feelings, ventured to mention his stay at Grenoble, to speak of the country in that neighborhood, and of the pretty village of Vizille, a stern glance from the count closed his mouth and forbade him to continue.

Frédéric called again and again at the various lodgings which Dubourg had occupied in Paris; but he could not find him at any of them. He went to Ménard, and urged him to do his utmost to unearth Dubourg, who, he said, had perhaps returned to the capital, but was afraid to call upon him, Frédéric, for fear of meeting Monsieur de Montreville.

"Suppose I find him?" said Ménard.

"Send him to me at once."

"Send him to you! God forbid! Monsieur le comte your father spoke very harshly to him when he saw him in the costume of Hippolyte. To be sure, the costume was unbecoming."

"Tell him to write to me; what is there to prevent his meeting me somewhere else, if he's afraid to come to the house? Am I watched? Ah! Monsieur Ménard, I can't stand it any longer. Every day adds to my torture! I must see her again, or at least hear something from her."

"Hear from whom?"

"From the woman I adore, the woman whom—I was compelled to desert, in order to return to Paris with you."

"Ah! I understand—the little maid of the forest. Monsieur Dubourg told me that you had furnished a lodging for her and had taken her away with you."

"Would to God that I had! I should be with her now. Ah! my dear Monsieur Ménard, if you were a different man —— But you are kind-hearted and sympathetic; you are fond of me, and you would restore me to life if you would consent to go to her and tell her that I love her more dearly than ever!"

"I am very sorry, monsieur; but I shall not go to tell her that or anything else. I will do nothing to forward a passion which your worthy father does not approve; he has too much reason now to complain of my negligence. I love you dearly, and that is why I will not help you to continue a guilty connection which would lead to no good end. Monsieur your father knows very well what he is doing; it was high time that he should come, for we were all making fools of ourselves, I most of all. His presence restored our equilibrium. He snatched you away from temptation; that

distresses you, and yet it was the best thing he could possibly do. *Qui bene amat, bene castigat; experto crede Roberto.*"

Frédéric went home, to think of Sister Anne, and to try to devise some means of seeing her. If he had known that she bore within her a pledge of his love, that she was about to become a mother, nothing could have kept him in Paris. He would have flown to her, defying his father's wrath. But he knew nothing of that circumstance, so he confined himself to saying every day:

"I will go to her."

The count sent to ask his son to come to him, and Frédéric obeyed, his brow still clouded with ennui.

"You have ceased to appear in society," said the count; "have your travels made a misanthrope of you?"

Frédéric said nothing,—always the best course to pursue when one has nothing to say.

"I wish you to go with me this evening," continued the count, "to call on one of my old comrades in arms, Général de Valmont. After a long residence on his estates in the country, he has come to Paris to stay some little time. He desires to see you, and I desire to present you to him."

Frédéric bowed, and prepared to accompany his father. He had heard him speak of this Monsieur de Valmont, with whom he had served in the army, and who was of about his age; so that there was nothing to cause surprise in his desire to present his son to his old friend.

On their way to the general's house, Monsieur de Montreville was unusually amiable, and Frédéric strove to appear less melancholy than usual. When they reached their destination, they were announced in due course, and Monsieur de Valmont came forward to meet them. At first sight, his appearance was most prepossessing. His manners were frank and cordial, his features instinct with sincerity and good humor. He embraced his old friend, shook hands heartily with Frédéric, and seemed delighted to see him.

After the exchange of greetings, the general invited his visitors to step into an adjoining room.

"You have shown me your family," he said to the count; "now, I must show you mine. It surprises you, perhaps, that I, an old bachelor, have a family; it is not quite so near to me, to be sure, but it is none the less dear."

As he spoke, they entered the room, where a young lady was seated at a piano. At sight of the strangers, she hastily rose.

"Constance," said the general, "this is my friend, the Comte de Montreville, and his son; messieurs, let me present my niece—my daughter—for I love her as dearly as if I were her father."

Constance courtesied gracefully to the two visitors. Frédéric looked at her—he could not do otherwise than think her charming. As for the count, a smile of satisfaction played over his features. I believe that the sly old fellow had heard of Mademoiselle Constance, and that he had his little scheme in his head when he took his son to see the general.

Constance was slender and graceful; there was something sweet and modest in her aspect, which impressed one favorably. She was fair, with a touch of color in her cheeks. Her great blue eyes, set off by long, dark lashes, had an indefinable charm; her expression was amiable and frank; every movement was instinct with grace, and she seemed absolutely unconscious of it. Far from seeking to attract attention, she seemed desirous to shun the admiration she aroused.

The two old friends fell to talking over their campaigns and their youthful adventures, and, at sixty, such subjects are inexhaustible. So that it was necessary for Frédéric to talk with the general's niece; and, although one's heart is heavy, one does not like to bore a pretty woman, but makes an effort to forget one's sorrow momentarily, in order not to appear too dull. That is what our hero tried to do while chatting with Mademoiselle Constance, who talked very agreeably, and, without the least trace of ostentation, revealed a judicious, cultivated mind, great love for art, and a candor and modesty which imparted an additional charm to everything she said. She was not one of those young women who know everything and discuss every subject, of whom we have so many, and whom we are good-natured enough to call little prodigies because they chatter on for hours with extraordinary assurance, and because it is customary to praise every word that falls from a pretty mouth, even when it lacks common sense.

May God protect you from prodigies, reader, especially of the female variety! There is nothing comparable to that which is simple, modest, and natural; we are always glad to return to that. Those qualities do not exclude intelligence and knowledge, but they add to them a varnish of unassuming gentleness which makes them even more attractive, and which is never found in the others.

The young people talked of painting, music, and the pleasures of the country. Suddenly the general said to his niece:

"Sing us something, Constance; sit you down at your piano and sing. I like singing myself, and perhaps it will entertain our young friend here."

Constance did not wait to be urged; she took her place at the piano and sang, accompanying herself excellently; her voice was sweet and full of expression; it had not a great range, but she sang with so much taste that one never tired of listening to her. Frédéric listened with keen delight; he had never heard a voice that pleased him so much. Constance sang several pieces, until at last her uncle said to her:

"That is well, very well; you are good-natured and don't make so much fuss about singing as some people do. Morbleu! I can't endure such affectation!"

The count and his son joined in their praise of the singing, and thanked Constance, who blushed at their compliments. But their visit had lasted two hours, and they rose to go.

"I will pay you a visit," said the general; "I have just bought a little country house in the suburbs for mademoiselle, who drives me crazy with her chatter about fields and birds. I hope that we shall see you and your son there before the season is much further advanced."

The count promised, and returned to his carriage with Frédéric, to whom he was careful not to say a word of the general's niece. The sight of Constance was certain to do more than anything a father could say. Frédéric said nothing; his thoughts had returned to the poor dumb girl in the woods. For two hours he had almost forgotten her! Two hours is no great matter; but Sister Anne did not forget him for an instant.

Three days after this visit, the general and his niece dined with the Comte de Montreville, who entertained quite a large party. When he learned that he was to see Mademoiselle de Valmont again, Frédéric was conscious of a thrill

of excitement, which he attributed to the annoyance of being obliged to conceal his melancholy. Was that the real cause?

The general was jovial, outspoken, and unaffected, as usual; his niece was as pretty and affable and modest as ever. In a large party, it is easier to arrange a tête-à-tête than when the guests are few in number, and Frédéric returned again and again to Constance's side. He fancied that he did so from courtesy simply, because it was his duty to pay especial attention to the general's niece; but he could not blind himself to the fact that, of all the assembled company, Constance was the one who attracted him the most, if it were possible for anyone to attract him. He could talk with her without having to think what he was going to say. The words that fell from her mouth were not mere trite phrases and tasteless epigrams; Constance did not devote her attention exclusively to other women's costumes; she did not pass them in review and criticise them one after another, as a young woman is very likely to do. With her, he felt more free, more at his ease; it seemed to him that he had known her a long while. She smiled at him so pleasantly when he seated himself beside her, her voice was so tender, her eyes so sweet, that it was natural that he should prefer her conversation to that of all the rest; even when he was not talking with her, he was conscious of a secret charm in her presence. Although he strove to overcome his sadness, his face still wore a melancholy expression, which was not unbecoming to him; and women often yield to the seduction of such expressions. When he was pensive, Constance looked at him with deep interest, her eyes seemed to ask him if he was unhappy. And when she spoke to him, her voice was even softer, her manner more sympathetic; one would have said that she unconsciously shared his sorrow, or that she was trying to make him forget it.

Several young ladies exhibited their talents and their voices in selections self-accompanied on the harp or piano, but Frédéric heard no one but Mademoiselle de Valmont. She sang only one ballad, but she sang it so beautifully! As he listened, Frédéric examined her more closely than he had hitherto dared to do. Whether it was mere chance, or an illusion of the heart, he discovered in Constance's features a striking resemblance to those of Sister Anne: the same expression, the same melting sweetness; and if the poor mute could speak, surely her voice would be as tender and expressive. Frédéric, while listening to Constance, persuaded himself that it was Sister Anne's voice that he heard, and his eyes were wet with tears. Full of that illusion, and discovering every moment some new point of resemblance in feature, he did not take his eyes from Mademoiselle de Valmont. When she had finished singing, Frédéric remained by her side, and his eyes, persistently fastened on her face, shone with a new fire and meaning. Constance noticed it, and avoided his gaze; a crimson flush overspread her cheeks. If Frédéric, when he gazed so tenderly at her, fancied that the dumb girl was before him, should he not have told Mademoiselle de Valmont of the real object of his preoccupation? And was not Constance justified in the belief that the Comte de Montreville's son did not look upon her with indifference?

The evening passed very swiftly to Frédéric. When the general and his niece went away, the former announced that they were going to their country house on the following day, and that he should await impatiently a visit from the count and his son.

When Constance had gone, Frédéric felt entirely alone in the midst of the company; and as soon as he could with courtesy retire, he hastened to his room to think—of Constance? oh, no! of Sister Anne; it was still the poor dumb girl who filled his thoughts; but was it his fault if now and then the memory of Mademoiselle de Valmont intruded itself? It was solely because of the resemblance between them. A loving heart sees its loved one everywhere, even where she is not. It loves her in another who recalls her features. That is why it is no safer to trust sentimental lovers than fickle ones.

Several days passed; Frédéric heard nothing from Dubourg, and concluded that he had not yet returned to Paris. The young count was still sad and thoughtful, but there was something not unpleasant in his sadness. The thought of Sister Anne often caused him to sigh. He was intensely anxious to see her again; but he had ceased to form those extravagant projects which, in the first days after his return, seemed so easy of execution. He longed to ensure Sister Anne's happiness and repose forever; but he thought of the future, and he was more certain than ever that his father would never consent to give her to him for his wife. He said to himself:

"What should we do? what would be the result of our liaison? One cannot always live in the woods. Man is made for society, and Sister Anne is utterly unfitted for it: she is ignorant of everything that it is indispensable to know."

Poor girl! why did he not think of all these things the first time he saw you by the brook? Ah! then you seemed fascinating to him, just as you were; your very ignorance made you a thousand times more alluring in his eyes; and now—— I say again, that men whose sentiments are so easily stirred are no better than other men.

One morning, the count suggested to his son a visit to the general at his country house. Frédéric was always at his father's orders, but he now chose to take unusual pains with his toilet. Even though one have no desire to please, one does not wish to repel. The count closely observed his son's actions, and exulted in secret; but he said no more to him on the subject of Mademoiselle de Valmont than on any other subject.

The general's country house was in the outskirts of Montmorency, and the visitors arrived about noon. As he alighted from the carriage, Frédéric was conscious of a quickening of the pulses, which he attributed to the pleasure of seeing a woman whose features recalled those of his beloved. He was, in truth, deeply moved, and, when he entered the house, his eyes sought Mademoiselle de Valmont. But he saw no one but the general, who welcomed them with great cordiality.

"You must stay with us several days," he said; "I have you in my power, and I shall not let you go at present. We will talk and laugh and hunt and play cards; my niece will play and sing to us; in short, we will pass the time as pleasantly as we can."

Frédéric continued to look about for the niece, whom he did not see; and as the general had already begun to discuss with his father one of their campaigns, which was likely to lead them far afield, he ventured to inquire for her.

"She is probably in the garden," said the general; "either in her aviary, or looking after her flowers, or in her summer-house. Go and find her, young man; corbleu! that's your business; at your age, I would have run here from Paris for a pretty face."

Frédéric profited by the permission; he went down into a garden, which seemed to be extensive and well kept, and walked about at random, looking for Mademoiselle Constance. He passed the aviary, but she was not there; he turned into an avenue of lindens, at the end of which the ground rose slightly and a winding path led to a sort of

platform, where there was a beautiful view. That was presumably what the general called the summer-house, for Constance was sitting there, with a drawing-board on her lap, sketching the lovely valley which could be seen from that point. She did not see Frédéric, because her back was turned to the path leading to the platform, and the young man drew near and leaned over her shoulder without attracting her attention.

"So you have all the talents?" he said. Constance looked up, and at sight of him her eyes expressed the pleasure she felt, while her bosom rose and fell more rapidly. She made a motion as if to lay aside her drawing.

"Go on, I pray you," said Frédéric; "I did not come here to interrupt your studies; on the contrary, I should be glad to join you in them. And, furthermore, your uncle insists that we must remain here several days; so that our presence must not be allowed to disarrange your habits."

"And are you really going to give us the pleasure of keeping you for some days?" said Constance, unsteadily.

"Most assuredly. I cannot believe that my father will refuse his old friend's invitation; he is much too happy with him for that."

"I am afraid, monsieur, that you, not having the same reason to enjoy yourself here, will soon regret the diversions of Paris. We see very few people here; you will surely be bored."

"You judge me very ill, if you think it possible for me to be bored with you."

"Oh! I beg your pardon. I said that—because I was afraid; but if you really love the country and music and drawing and reading, you ought to enjoy yourself here."

Frédéric did not reply at once; he looked closely at Constance, and his heart was oppressed by innumerable conflicting feelings. He saw in her features a face that was still dear to him; he transported himself in his imagination to the little wood by the brook, and a cloud of melancholy darkened his brow. A profound sigh escaped him, and not until several minutes had passed did he answer Constance, as if waking from a dream:

"Yes, I am very fond of the country."

The young woman looked at him in amazement, and smiled; then, finding that he said nothing more, she returned to her drawing-board, and tried to continue her sketch. But Frédéric's presence embarrassed her; the hand that held the pencil trembled, and she did not know what she was doing.

Frédéric continued to gaze at her in silence; he was charmed by her manner, her grace, her amiable yet reserved air. If Sister Anne had had a good education, she would have been like her; she would have had her manners, her talents; she would have had the same command of language. And he began to consider that education, instead of lessening a woman's attractions, imparts an additional fascination to them.

The conversation languished, for Frédéric often relapsed into reverie; but, for all that, the time passed very quickly; it seemed that they were happy to be together, and that that sufficed them. So far as Frédéric was concerned, he would gladly have passed the whole day looking at Constance and drawing comparisons. She noticed that he kept his eyes constantly upon her; but his eyes were so soft, there was in their expression something so tender and touching, that no woman could have been offended at being the object of their scrutiny.

The arrival of the two old friends put an end to this situation, which was very agreeable to the young people, although they dared not confess as much, even to themselves. The general pointed out to the count all the beauties of his garden, and the summer-house was one of them. The count seemed extremely well pleased, for, as he approached the platform, he detected a certain embarrassment, a certain emotion, which added greatly to its attractions in his eyes. The general saw nothing of it; he was not so keen an observer as his friend.

"We have two guests, as you see, niece," he said; "try to do the honors of the establishment so satisfactorily that they won't think of leaving us for a long time."

"I will do my best," said Constance, blushing.

"Mademoiselle," said the count, "your presence alone is enough to detain us."

Frédéric said nothing, but looked at Constance, who, as she thanked the count, cast a furtive glance at his son, as if to make sure that he thought the same.

After dinner, two of the general's neighbors called. One was an enthusiastic player of billiards, who could not sleep if he had not had his game; the other, who was somewhat younger, had seen service in the army, and had an endless stock of campaign stories, which he interspersed with compliments and gallant speeches to Mademoiselle de Valmont.

Frédéric declined to join them at billiards, in order to remain with Constance and to hear her sing or play.

"Don't feel bound to stay with me," she said; "remember that we are not in Paris."

"Unless it is disagreeable to you," Frédéric replied, "I prefer to stay with you."

Constance smiled, and it was easy to see that it was not disagreeable to her. In the country, especially under the general's roof, the most delightful liberty of action was the rule. During the day, everyone did whatever he chose; the count and his friend made frequent excursions in the neighborhood, while Frédéric remained with Constance; they passed a part of every day together in the garden.

"We must make the most of the last fine days," said Constance; "the winter is at hand, and I must say good-bye to my trees and my flowers and my birds. But I shall see them again; it is not an eternal farewell."

"Don't you expect to return to your uncle's estate in the provinces?"

"Oh, no! I like this house much better; he bought it for me, and he is willing that I should spend seven months of the year here. We shall return to Paris for the winter. Uncle is so kind to me! He does whatever I want, for he is very fond of me."

"Who could fail to——"

Frédéric did not finish his question; he checked himself, as if he regretted what he had said, and Constance, taken by surprise, lowered her eyes and said nothing. But she was beginning to become accustomed to the young man's eccentricities. Sometimes, when he sat by her for a long while without speaking, and seemed to be sad and distressed, she was tempted to ask him what was troubling him; but she dared not; so she held her peace, and sighed with him, although she did not quite know why. Melancholy is a disease readily transmitted between two young people of different sexes. Often the hours of silence are more dangerous than a conversation devoted to love making.

Meanwhile, the intimacy between Frédéric and Constance was growing closer day by day: hardly a week had

passed, and they had abandoned that reserve, that tone of gallantry and of formality, which is never the tone of friendship or of love. The count talked of returning to Paris, and Frédéric was surprised to find that he himself had not thought of it; the week had passed so quickly!—Upon reflection, he was almost angry with himself; he was remorseful because he had enjoyed himself. But remorse never comes until after the fact.

"No," he said to himself, "I have not forgotten Sister Anne. I always see her when I look at Constance. I always think of her when I have Constance's lovely features before my eyes; I fancy that I am with her, when, sitting beside Constance, I quiver with delicious emotion."

And he was probably still thinking of Sister Anne, when, on the day before he returned to Paris with his father, as he sat beside Constance in the garden, he took her hand and held it a long while in his. Constance did not withdraw her hand. She lowered her eyes, and seemed deeply moved. Frédéric said nothing, but he pressed her hand very tenderly; and the sweet-tempered girl, perhaps unconsciously, returned the pressure.

Thereupon the young man's embarrassment revived; he dropped the hand he held, and hastily moved away from Constance, who raised her head, and, observing his agitation, smiled at him with that indefinable charm which captures and enslaves.

"Are you really going to-morrow?" she said.

"I must," faltered Frédéric, returning to her side; "I should have gone sooner, I fear—— Ah! yes, it is she, always she, whom I see! I would like to stay with you forever; I am so happy here! Oh! forgive me, mademoiselle; I don't know where I am."

Constance was at a loss to understand this speech; but lovers never know what they say, or say it very badly; and she readily forgave him, because she interpreted it all according to her own heart, which told her that Frédéric loved her; and such sentiments always seem to be well expressed, for, in love, the eyes speak as loudly as the voice.

The count took his son back to Paris; but never a word concerning Constance! Ah! monsieur le comte, you have your project, and you are well aware what you are doing. A few days later, Frédéric said that they ought to take advantage of the last of the fine weather to call on the general; for he was burning to see Constance again—so that he could think of Sister Anne!

XX

LUNEL, DUBOURG, AND MADELON

We left Dubourg about to start for Paris. He no longer travelled as a Polish nobleman, but fared modestly on foot, with a stick in his hand, which he swung jauntily as if he were simply out for a walk. He had no bundle to carry, because he had his whole wardrobe on his back, which he found much more convenient for a pedestrian. He saw at a distance the localities where he had recently appeared in such magnificent and noble guise. He passed quite near to Monsieur Chambertin's house, waved his hand by way of salutation to that hospitable abode, and sighed—not for its mistress, but for the old pomard in the cellar.

However, he walked quickly, for he still dreaded a meeting with that infernal Durosey, whose presence he looked upon as the cause of all his misfortunes. As he emerged from a narrow pathway into the highroad, he found himself face to face with old Lunel, who was returning home in charge of an ass laden with divers objects he had bought at Grenoble. Dubourg hurriedly pulled his hat over his eyes and lowered his head, having no desire to be recognized by Monsieur Chambertin's jockey. But as he walked blindly on, he collided with the ass and nearly threw her down.

"Can't you see where you're going, idiot?" exclaimed Lunel; "the road isn't so narrow that you need to run into my donkey."

At the word *idiot*, Dubourg, who had never liked the old jockey, for he had waited upon him with an ill grace during the whole of his sojourn at Monsieur Chambertin's, and had constantly sought opportunities to show his spite to him and to Ménard—Dubourg, who had not forgotten, either, the horsewhipping Lunel had given the two little Poles, turned suddenly upon him and struck him thrice with his knotted stick.

"Help! murder!" cried Lunel.

And as Dubourg's sudden movement had disarranged his hat, the old servant recognized his features, and shouted louder than ever:

"It's that miserable palatine, who owes four hundred francs at his restaurant! It's that sham baron, who showed madame such attention and surprised monsieur! Peste! he ain't such a swell now!"

"Will you hold your tongue, you rascal!" said Dubourg, raising his stick again.

"What are you hitting me for?"

"I am simply returning what you gave my servants; I've owed you this a long while."

"Your servants—your servants! pretty servants they were! I suppose this is my *pourboire*, because my master boarded you for a month, you and your great scholar, who ate enough for six!"

"If I did your master the honor to visit him, what business have you to make comments on it, you clown?"

"Oh, yes! a great honor you did him!"

"Take care, or I'll begin again."

As Dubourg still had his cane in the air, the old jockey decided to lower his tone. He held his peace and looked about for the ass, in order to go his way; but the animal had disappeared while they were quarrelling; she had wandered into the underbrush that lined the road, and was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh! mon Dieu! my ass! where is my ass?" cried Lunel, searching anxiously in every direction.

"Faith! I have no idea. Find your ass, and I'll continue my journey. Give my compliments to your mistress, and tell your master that, if he ever comes to Paris, I'll give him a little reception, with fireworks."

Lunel paid no heed; he ran to right and left, calling: "Madelon! ohé! Madelon!"—He rushed into a wooded path, and Dubourg, having lost sight of him, went his way, laughing heartily at the adventure. About half an hour after he

had parted from Lunel, as he reached a place where the road left the woods for the open country, he saw Madelon within twenty paces, trotting slowly along with her pack on her back, following such roads as she pleased, and halting now and then to eat a thistle or a mouthful of wild briers.

"Parbleu! this is a strange chance," said Dubourg; "can it be that this beast is sent to me by Providence? But I must be wary; the law may not approve of my receiving gifts from Providence. However, I had nothing to do with diverting this jenny from her road. Am I to blame because she left her master? Never mind; I will begin by trying to restore her to him."

Thereupon he walked back some distance into the forest he had just left, and began to shout at the top of his lungs:

"Lunel! holà, Lunel! here's your jenny!"

There was no reply; Dubourg called again and again, to no purpose. Weary at last of calling, he returned to the ass, saying to himself:

"It seems to me that I have done all I can, and my conscience is beginning to be less troublesome. I can't go back half a league, and I have no desire to present myself again at the house of my friend Chambertin, who is no longer my friend. But let us see what this creature has on her back; it is not probable that there's anything of much value."

Dubourg began an examination of the two baskets, which were covered with stout canvas. In one he found two syringes, one mechanical, marked: *For madame*; the other plain: *For monsieur*; also, a large box containing a number of phials and small pasteboard boxes.

"Oho! I seem to have struck a whole apothecary's shop! But here's a big sheet of paper. Ah! it's the receipted bill; this will tell me what we have here. 'Sold by Dardanus, Apothecary, Grenoble, to Madame Chambertin.' Let us see: 'Tooth powder, salve for the gums, three jars of superfine rouge, liquid almond paste, macassar oil to dye the hair, bear's grease to keep it from falling out, Essence of Venus to soften the skin, rouge *au vinaigre* for the evening, vegetable blue to make veins.'—Great God!" exclaimed Dubourg, interrupting his reading; "it's very lucky that I didn't find this bill a month sooner, for it would have taken away my courage, and I shouldn't have dared to make pretty speeches to Madame Chambertin. Let us read on: 'Laxative pastilles, emollient pills, soothing tablets.'—The deuce! it would seem that madame is very excitable.—'Two pounds of hygienic chocolate.'—Ah! that's better. Now, let's see what monsieur requires: 'Three hundred issue peas.'—Ah! the rascal! that's what keeps his complexion so fresh.—'Three bottles of Eau de Baréges, salve for corns, ointment for bunions, cachou pastilles, mint, astringent pills, tonic tablets.'—Hum! monsieur evidently isn't constipated. That's all of that. Now, let's have a look at the other basket."

First of all, he found a box containing an exquisitely curled wig, which madame probably wore when she had not time to arrange her hair. Also, a wooden head, designed to hold the wig when it was not in use. Also, a pair of riding-boots, and doeskin gloves.

"Deuce take me if I'll walk back to Allevard for a couple of syringes and a parcel of pills!" said Dubourg, when he had concluded his examination; "monsieur and madame may go without their supplies for a few days. I will take possession—although I don't quite know what I am to do with all these drugs. But I have an idea. Parbleu! an excellent means of making use of this donkey and of travelling without touching my purse, which is none too full. Who knows if I may not make my fortune? Well, the die is cast! I have been a baron, a palatine, and an actor; I have even played the part of a beast, unwittingly; surely I can play the charlatan: it's the simplest trade, the easiest of all parts to play, provided one has ever so little wit, cheek, and loquacity, and I have all three. A charlatan I am, then. Indeed, who is not, in this world? everyone plays the part in his own way: men in office with petitioners, speculators with capitalists, knaves with fools, gallants with women, coquettes with their lovers, debtors with their creditors, authors with actors, booksellers with readers, and tradesmen with everybody. I am one of those who cure all diseases, who divine them and forestall them; in short, I am a second Cagliostro; I am familiar with the universal pharmacopœia, I have no confederate, I deal honorably; I have discovered a thousand secrets, a single one of which would suffice to make a man's fortune; and I sell pills for two sous, because I am a philanthropist."

Having fully decided to embark upon this new escapade, Dubourg led his donkey into a dense thicket. There he began operations by removing his palatine boots, which were badly worn, and throwing them into the bushes; he replaced them with the long riding-boots, which came halfway to his hips, so that no one might recognize Baron Potoski in the dealer in pills; he pulled over his head the blonde wig intended for Madame Chambertin, having first tied the hair behind and made a Prussian queue; he daubed his cheeks, forehead, and chin with superfine rouge; then, mounting Madelon *en croupe*, with the two baskets containing his itinerant pharmacy in front of him, he resumed his journey, inciting his steed with his stick, by way of riding-whip.

Dubourg's singular aspect, his face surrounded by beautiful flaxen curls, the long queue falling down his back, his high boots, which he held as far back as possible because the baskets were much in his way, and, lastly, his majestic bearing, attracted the attention of all the peasants he met. They called to one another to look at him. They stood at doors and windows to watch him pass, and at times a number of boys followed at his heels. Dubourg bowed to right and left, with a benevolent expression, calling out in a loud tone:

"Have you any aches or pains, my children, in the foot or the ear? do you have bad dreams? do you suffer when you are asleep? have you been beaten? are you blind, dumb, or paralyzed? Draw near; grasp the golden opportunity! I am the great restorer, the great cure-all, the great operator! Make haste to profit by my presence in this province; I shall not come again for thirty years, and probably I shall not find you all then. Come, my friends; I cure everything, I do everything—I even make children, when they are ordered in advance. The only thing I don't do is extract teeth, but I can supply a lotion that makes them drop out, and the result is the same."

Peasants are naturally credulous. On hearing this harangue, some of them approached Dubourg, and, after respectfully removing their hats or making a reverence, proceeded to tell him their ills. When the number about him was considerable, Dubourg took from his basket the mechanical syringe, which he had filled with Eau de Baréges; then he pressed the spring, and the villagers had to hold their noses; but they remained, because the syringe played the air *Avec les Jeux dans le Village*, and Dubourg said:

"This magic syringe, my children, came to me from the favorite sultana of the Sultan of Egypt. It plays three hundred tunes; but, as it is subject to whims, it insists on playing the same one over and over to-day. This marvellous

water that comes from it—it does not smell like rosewater, by the way—is a prompt and certain remedy for women with the colic. I sometimes administer these remedies myself, but I have to be very particular as to persons, for this syringe doesn't fit all figures."

After this speech, Dubourg listened to the complaints of each one in turn, then looked through his pharmacy, and distributed drugs at random, but received the price with the utmost assurance, promising that the effects would soon appear. He gave a nurse liquid almond paste; a man with a fever, cachou pastilles; for a cold, he prescribed pellets that he had made of the salve for corns; for asthma, macassar oil; for a pain in the chest, bear's grease; and for the stomach-ache, rouge *au vinaigre*.

After this promising début, he belabored Madelon and rode away as fast as possible from his patients. He was not half a league away, when the poor creatures began to feel the effects of his remedies. Some held their hands to their bellies, some were nauseated, some had a violent headache, some could not endure the taste of the drug they had swallowed, and some ran after the charlatan, calling him *swindler* and *thief*. But he did not wait for them. Luckily, he was prudent enough to administer his remedies in very small quantities, so that the results were not serious.

Dubourg was careful not to attempt any cures in the neighborhood of the places where he stopped to eat or to sleep. After travelling about forty leagues in a fortnight,—for, as the great healer halted frequently to sell his drugs, and as his steed's best gait was a slow trot, he did not get ahead very fast,—Dubourg found himself one day in front of an extensive farm. It was a long while since he had sold anything, for as he drew nearer to the capital he found the country people less and less gullible. His fortune had not increased. He spent regularly at night what he had earned during the day; and when his receipts were large, he fared sumptuously, content to leave his original hoard untouched.

The appearance of the farm made Dubourg disposed to stop there. As he had neither bugle nor hunting-horn, he announced his presence with his mechanical syringe, beating time with his cane on the wig-block. The farm people came out. Among them Dubourg noticed a fresh, rosy-cheeked girl, with a mischievous eye and a small foot, and he at once conceived a fervent desire to become her physician.

Several buxom dairymaids procured ointments for fever and chilblains, and a number of peasants bought pastilles of mint and cachou for toothache; but one and all stared in amazement at the marvellous syringe that made music, and the wig-block that spoke when it was stormy, as its owner assured them.

The pretty girl was a daughter of the farmer, who happened to be absent. With her was her aunt, a good old soul who believed in dreams, fortune telling, magic, ghosts, talismans, and sorcerers. She was anxious to consult Dubourg, because for three nights past she had fallen asleep on her back and waked up on her stomach, which she considered very extraordinary.

"I'll give you something that will keep you from changing your position," said our charlatan to the old woman, while ogling the young one; "here are some pastilles that came to me from a native of the Guinea Coast, who sometimes slept a whole week on his left ear. But if you take them in moderate doses, you pass a delightful night, and have charming dreams, divine dreams, such dreams as you had at fifteen! It is so pleasant, that you don't want to wake up. And then, my dear lady, when you have taken them, you are certain to dream of any person you choose; all you need to do is walk round your somno before you go to bed."

"Oh! my dear monsieur," said the old woman, "pray give me some of the pastilles at once; I'll eat some every night. I mean to dream of my first husband this very night; he was a dear, good man, not a sot like my second. I'll walk round the somno, monsieur; I won't fail."

Dubourg gave her a box of laxative pills, which she received with deep gratitude; then he turned to the young woman and asked her what he could do for her.

"*Dame!* monsieur," she replied, "a week ago, while I was dancing with Thomas, I fell and sprained my wrist, and since then I haven't been able to use it as well as usual; have you got anything that will cure that right away?"

"Have I, my sweet child! As if I hadn't everything! In a quarter of an hour, I'll drive away your pain, and it will never come back. All I've got to do is rub you with a certain ointment of mine; but I must say some magic words over it, and I can't say them before witnesses; that would break the spell. So take me to your chamber, or some other place where we shall be alone, and I'll operate."

"Shall I, aunt?" asked the farmer's daughter.

"Shall you!" repeated the good woman; "why, of course. Make the most of this great man's kindness, and let him rub you."

The girl made no further objection, but requested Dubourg to follow her. He fastened his donkey, with his whole outfit, at the farmhouse door, and walked quickly after his pretty patient, who led him to her chamber and closed the door, abandoning herself with perfect confidence to the skill of the sorcerer, whose appearance was rather laughable than terrifying.

Meanwhile, the aunt, being in haste to enjoy the effect of the pastilles, and too impatient to wait for the night in order to dream of her first husband, had also withdrawn to her apartment, and, having swallowed a pill and performed the prescribed ceremonial, had gone to bed and was anxiously awaiting the operation of the charm, which was not precisely ushered in by prodigies.

While the ladies were experimenting with Dubourg's specifics, the farmer came home. He began by inquiring who owned the ass that he found at his door, and was told that it was the property of the great healer who had recently arrived. The farmer asked who this great healer was, and his servants replied that they did not know, but that he was probably a sorcerer, because he wore his hair in curls, like a woman, and had a long queue, enormous boots, a syringe that played dance music, and a wig-block that spoke when it was stormy.

Now, the farmer was one of those men who are so unfortunate as not to believe in sorcerers, spells, and magic, who insist on seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears, and cannot be convinced that a black hen evokes the devil, or that the future can be read by means of a sheep's liver, coffee grounds, or molten lead thrown in water. Such men are the bane of the occult sciences.

Vexed by what he learned from his servants, the farmer inquired where this great healer had gone. They told him that they had seen him go into the house with the young woman and her aunt. The farmer hurried to the old lady's chamber and found her in bed, still awaiting the delicious dream that did not come.

"Oh! brother! what are you doing?" she cried. "You have disturbed me—upset me completely. The dream was coming! I was going to see my first husband, and we were going to pick nuts together. Do go away; you'll prevent the pill that wonderful man gave me from working."

"Morbleu!" retorted the farmer; "ain't you nearly through with your fairy tales and nonsense? Where is your sorcerer? stealing my rabbits, most likely."

"What an idea! he's with your daughter, in her room, saying magic words to cure her wrist."

"Locked in with my daughter!" cried the farmer; "*morgué!* we'll see about this!"

And he ran to his daughter's chamber without listening to what the old woman said. He opened the door with a vigorous kick, and it is to be presumed that he was not pleased with the great healer's method of healing his daughter; for he seized a broom, and opened the conversation by striking him with it again and again.

Dubourg had no time to parley; with a muttered oath, he fled; the girl wept, the father swore, and the whole household was up in arms.

Our charlatan, seeing that the farm hands were arming themselves with clubs in imitation of their master, thought of nothing but his personal safety; he fled from the farm, abandoning his ass, his syringes, and all his remedies; all of which was very fortunate for the invalids along the route he still had to traverse.

XXI

LOVE IS ALWAYS THE STRONGEST

Dubourg reached Paris at last. He had taken only a few days more than a month to travel nearly a hundred and eighty leagues; which is not an inordinately long time, when one makes marvellous cures all along the road. As he fled from the farm, where his last miracle had been so ill rewarded, he was careful to throw away his blonde wig with the long pigtail, which tempted all the little ragamuffins to run after him. He arrived in the capital rather travel-stained and muddy and unkempt; but nevertheless he arrived, and went at once to his last lodgings, which no longer belonged to him, but where he had left a pair of trousers in the custody of his concierge, an excellent woman, who was rather partial to ne'er-do-wells, because they are, as a general rule, more open-handed than virtuous and orderly young men.

Together with his trousers, the concierge handed him a bulky sealed package, which Dubourg took with a trembling hand, supposing it to be a bundle of summonses or judgments; of executions and levies he had no fear.

He broke the seal and read a letter which he found inside; an expression of delirious joy stole over his features, but soon he began to make wry faces as if he were trying to weep; however, as he could not manage it, he abandoned the attempt.

"My dear Madame Benoît," he said to the concierge, "you must often have heard me speak of my venerable aunt in Bretagne, who used to send me money sometimes?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, she is dead, Madame Benoît—that venerable woman is no more."

"Ah! mon Dieu! what a misfortune!"

"Indeed, yes. But I am her only heir; her fortune was not large, but there is enough for a man to live on, especially if he is prudent and philosophical."

"What did she die of, monsieur?"

"As to that, I'll tell you some other time. I am expected in Bretagne, and I must start at once."

"During your absence, monsieur, your friend Monsieur Frédéric has sent here several times to inquire about you."

"I will see him when I return; the interests of my inheritance demand my presence, and they are more important; a man should attend to his own business before other people's. Adieu, Madame Benoît, adieu! Here, I'll make you a present of these trousers, for the news you have given me; you can make a blouse out of them for your daughter. As for myself, I go away just as I arrived, except that I shall not go on foot this time."

He ran to the diligence office, having money enough still to pay his fare; to be sure, that left him only five francs to live on during the journey, but he put himself on a strict diet, promising to make up for his abstinence before long.

The old aunt had left all her property to her nephew, believing him to be married and a father. He found himself possessed of sixteen hundred francs a year. A man cannot play the baron with that, but he can live on it in a modest way, when he is orderly in his habits and economical. Those were not among Dubourg's qualities, but, like all men, he made a vow to reform and not to pledge his income.

"Monsieur," said the attorney who was settling the estate, "your worthy aunt instructed me to recommend you to be faithful to your wife, and to give your little triplets a good education."

"Never fear, monsieur; I shall carry out my dear aunt's wishes to the letter. My wife and I are like turtle-doves, and my triplets already love each other like Castor and Pollux."

Dubourg sold the furniture and personal effects of the deceased, in order to obtain a supply of ready money. He was detained two months in Bretagne, at the end of which time he returned to Paris, dressed in black from head to foot. To signalize his return to virtue, he began by paying his creditors, and strove to retain the serene expression and dignified bearing which he had assumed as soon as he learned of his inheritance.

He thought of Frédéric, but was still hesitating whether he should write to him or call on him, when, as he entered a café one evening, he spied Ménard watching a game of dominoes and absorbed in the play. Dubourg touched him lightly on the arm; he turned, recognized his former travelling companion, and could not decide how he ought to receive him.

"Surely I have the pleasure of seeing my dear friend Monsieur Ménard," said Dubourg, with a smile.

"Himself, monsieur le—monsieur du—really, I am not at all sure what I should call you now." And the ex-tutor smiled, delighted by the epigram he had achieved.

"How now, Monsieur Ménard! are we at odds?"

"Really, monsieur, I ought to bear you a grudge, after all the fables you told me. Hereafter, if I ever believe you ——"

"Come, come, Monsieur Ménard, let us leave gall and bitterness to atrabilious souls, and let it not be said of us: *Nec ipsa mors odium illorum internocinum exstinxit.*"

"Oh, yes! I know that you are very well read," said the tutor, softening a little; "but that castle of Krapach! And then, to make me act!"

"Allow me to offer you a cup of coffee, and a glass of Liqueur des Iles."

"Very well, if you insist."—And the tutor said to himself, as he followed Dubourg to a table: "This devil of a fellow has a persuasive way that seduces you and carries you away; it's impossible to remain angry with him."

"Where are you from?" he asked; "my pupil has been looking for you a long while; he's very anxious to see you."

"I have just arrived from my province—Bretagne."

"Ah! so you are from Bretagne? I am not surprised, then, that you were constantly bringing it into your descriptions of Poland; and then, the milk and butter that you were always boasting about."

"Excellent they are, Monsieur Ménard."

"And what have you been doing in Bretagne?"

"I have just inherited a very pretty little fortune from my aunt."

"I'll wager that that isn't true!"

"O Monsieur Ménard! don't you see that I am in mourning?"

"That proves nothing; you were dressed as a Polish nobleman when we walked arm in arm through the streets of Lyon. Oh! when I think of that——"

"Do you think also of the delicious dinners I ordered for you?"

"Of course, of course! Oh! you order a dinner perfectly. But that poor Monsieur Chambertin! To make him believe that he was entertaining an illustrious character!"

"Look you, Monsieur Ménard, I don't see why I'm not as good as another man——"

"And to make him give parties and fireworks and magnificent dinners!"

"Where you did your part wonderfully well."

"I acted in perfect good faith, myself; I was your accomplice, without suspecting it. Do you know that you compromised me, and that that was very ill done of you?"

"Have a glass of punch; what do you say?"

"Oh! I am afraid——"

"It shall be very mild."

"All right, if it's mild——"

"Waiter, two glasses of punch."

"For, you see, my friend, I am not as young as you are, and the follies which are overlooked in the young admit of no excuse in those of mature years."

"You talk like Cicero; but I reply that Cato learned to dance at sixty."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"I didn't see it; but our follies were very reasonable ones.—Let us take a drink."

"I admit that we didn't injure anybody, after all. This punch is good, very good. But when you made me run across fields on account of that imaginary Turk——"

"Faith! I'll admit that he was a creditor; but aren't they Turks to their unfortunate debtors?—Another drink."

"It is true that creditors—— Look you, my dear Dubourg, you have all the qualities of a charming companion: you know all the good authors, you know history; take my advice, reform, settle down——"

"I have done it; it's all over now: no more gambling, no more escapades, no more drunkenness.—But we aren't drinking."

"Your health, my dear friend!"

"No more fairy tales, no more lies."

"Ah, yes! no more lies, above all; for lying destroys confidence; and then, you made me look like an idiot."

"Oh! not altogether."

"That's a very handsome seal ring of yours."

"It's an emerald that was worn by Ali Pacha."

"It's magnificent."

"Another glass."

"Dear Dubourg! My friend, I am extremely glad to have renewed my acquaintance with you."

The liqueur and the punch had completely melted Ménard, who, when he parted from Dubourg, called him his loving friend, and assured him that he might safely go to the Hôtel de Montreville, that monsieur le comte bore him no ill-will and would receive him cordially.

On the day following this meeting, Dubourg did, in fact, call upon Frédéric, who had just returned from the general's country house. He passed all his time with Mademoiselle de Valmont. As it was no longer necessary that he should be accompanied by his father, for the general treated him like his own son, he made the most of the liberty accorded him. Every day, he invented some pretext for going to see Constance; for he persisted in deluding himself, in excusing himself in his own eyes, and strove to persuade himself that there was no trace of love in the feeling that drew him to the general's niece. He still thought of Sister Anne, but no longer with the same ardor and affection, and that was what he refused to acknowledge to himself; perhaps, if he should see her again, it would still be inexpressibly sweet to him to hold her in his arms. But it was not she whom he saw, it was Constance; Constance, who was more amiable, more tender, more sentimental with him, day by day; who felt such unbounded pleasure in

seeing him and made no attempt to conceal it. Already there was the closest intimacy between them. When she passed two or three days without seeing him, she would reproach him good-naturedly, and avow that she was vexed at his absence; and she said it with such perfect candor and sincerity that Frédéric was deeply touched. However, he had never breathed a word of love to her; but is it necessary to speak to make one's self understood? and what woman, in Constance's place, would not have believed that she was loved?

At sight of Dubourg, Frédéric made a gesture of surprise; a keen observer might even have detected a trace of embarrassment.

"Here I am," said Dubourg; "I have been in Paris only a week."

"Yes, I supposed that you were away. But why this mourning?"

"Ah! my friend, my poor aunt—she is no more!"

At this point, Dubourg drew his handkerchief and blew his nose three or four times.

"Come, come, Dubourg, stop blowing your nose; you know perfectly well that you're not crying."

"Never mind; she was a most respectable old lady: she has left me sixteen hundred francs a year."

"That is something; try not to gamble it away."

"What do you say? Why, écarté is like an emetic to me. But tell me about your love affairs. Do you know, you don't seem to me to look any too wretched for an unhappy lover."

"But I—— Since my father suddenly appeared at Grenoble, where I had gone to find out something about you, I have not been able to see that poor girl, we started for Paris so hurriedly! Since then, he hardly leaves my side. I could write—but who would read my letters? we can't use that method; and I don't know how to communicate with her."

"Well, I can tell you something."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes; but it was a long while ago—about a fortnight after you left."

"Well! where was she? what was she doing?"

"Where was she? in the woods, returning from the road, where she had been watching for you, no doubt. What was she doing?—weeping; that is her only resource now, I fancy."

"She was weeping!"

"Yes; and I confess that she made my heart ache."

"Poor child! but you spoke to her, I suppose—she saw you? Tell me about it."

"She saw me; indeed, she recognized me, although she had seen me only once. You didn't tell me that she was dumb, but I very soon understood her pantomime. She counted off the days you had been away, and asked me if you would return soon. I told her *yes*."

"Ah! you did well."

"But that was three months ago."

"True: but I haven't been able——"

"I left her at last, after giving her a little hope; I could do nothing more for her; but in three months that hope must have vanished."

Dubourg said no more, and Frédéric sat for some moments buried in melancholy reflections.

"If you knew, Dubourg," he said at last, "what a most surprising thing has happened to me!"

"I should know, if you told me."

"It is really inconceivable; it is a stroke of fate. On returning to Paris, I found Sister Anne."

"You found her here?"

"Yes; I saw her again—in another woman, the niece of Général de Valmont, a former comrade in arms of my father. Why, my friend, it is an astonishing thing—I never saw such a perfect resemblance."

"Ah! I begin to understand."

"If you should see Constance,—that is the name of the general's niece,—you would be as surprised as I was—not at once, but on a close examination."

"Ah! you were surprised after some time, eh?"

"It's her eyes—their sweet expression. Constance's are a little darker, to be sure. The hair is the same color; the forehead as high and noble; the same complexion—but Constance isn't as pale as Sister Anne. The same expression in the features."

"I am surprised that a general's niece should have all the features of a goatherd."

"Of course, there's the difference due to rank and education and social customs. In the first place, Constance is much taller; she has a beautiful, well-proportioned figure; but so has Sister Anne. Constance has the grace, the dignified carriage which no one can attain who lives in the woods."

"Ah! you have discovered that now."

"And she has a charming voice, an enchanting voice, that goes to the very bottom of your heart. Well, my friend, when I listen to her, I persuade myself that the poor orphan is no longer dumb; I imagine that I am listening to her; her voice, I am sure, would have the same sweet quality, the same fascination. So that I am deeply moved when I listen to that other voice."

"I doubt whether that emotion would make Sister Anne very happy."

"But it is impossible for me not to feel it. Tell me, isn't it strange that there should be such a resemblance?"

"Exceedingly strange, no doubt; but I fancy that it would be less striking to my eyes. I am no longer surprised at your leaving the little one in her woods. You have found her here, you see her, and listen to her—a pleasure that you did not enjoy when you were with her. You are privileged to gaze upon her every day, at your leisure; here, she has graces and talents which she did not have down yonder. It is extremely convenient. I congratulate you. I can understand that you don't need to bother your head about the one who is far away, in her cabin or on the hilltop, watching for you to come, since you can still be with her, without putting yourself out, and since she is more lovely

and fascinating here than there."

There was an undercurrent of satire, of reproach, in Dubourg's tone that made Frédéric lower his eyes.

"No," he said, with evident embarrassment, "no, I will not desert Sister Anne. I shall certainly go to see her—I haven't forgotten her, for I think of her every day. Is it my fault that I find all her features in another woman's? On the contrary, isn't it a proof that I am always thinking of her? But really it is surprising; Mademoiselle de Valmont resembles her so closely—in spite of some slight differences—she is so sweet and kind! her voice moves me so deeply! Ah! I would like you to see Constance!"

Dubourg did not reply at once, and for some minutes there was silence between them. Dubourg broke it at last.

"Look you, Frédéric, I confess that I am sorry that I saw that girl—that I saw her waiting for you and weeping."

"Why so?"

"Why? Because I imagine that I still see her, and, despite my heedlessness, I feel—it makes me unhappy. I am nothing more than a reckless chap, a libertine, a ne'er-do-well, if you please; but, after all, I prefer my way of loving to yours. With your great passions, which are destined never to end, but which do end just like others, you wheedle inexperienced young hearts, sentimental women, who allow themselves to be touched by your sighs, your noble sentiments; they give themselves to you, and then—why, they weep and tear their hair over your inconstancy. Faith! I know none but women of easy virtue, grisettes or coquettes, who, if they're no better, are at least more lively. They deceive me, I deceive them, we deceive each other; it's all understood and accepted beforehand. But we don't rave about it; we weep only for sport; and when we fall out altogether, it doesn't make us melancholy. I agree that the ladies I speak of are not absolutely virtuous; but for an amourette, a caprice, should we seek that flower of pure sentiment, an inexperienced heart that knows love only from romantic novels in which it is always painted in colors that, while they may be very seductive, are altogether false? No; on the contrary, I think that it's barbarous to try to win a girl's whole heart, to inspire a great passion, and then to leave your victim to waste her best days in tears and despair."

"Why do you say this to me? I still love Sister Anne; I am not unfaithful to her. Is it my fault that my father dragged me back to Paris all of a sudden? and that it has been impossible for me to absent myself since then? Most certainly I shall see her again, I shall not abandon her; she is still dear to me."

"Pshaw! Frédéric, don't talk that humbug to me! Do you want to make me believe that my nose is crooked? I tell you, I'm an old hand, and I am not to be hoodwinked; indeed, I may have read your heart better than you have yourself. You no longer love Sister Anne, or at least you are no longer enamored of her; for you are burning now for this fascinating Constance, who is a perfect image of the poor dumb girl, except that she is taller and stouter, has darker eyes and a different complexion, and——"

"No, no, Dubourg! I swear that I am not in love with Constance; I love her—like a brother—but no word of love has ever passed my lips."

"Well, I give you my word that that will soon come. Oh! it's of no use for you to look up at the sky; I tell you that you are in love with Mademoiselle Constance. I don't charge you with it as a crime; it's perfectly natural: she is pretty, she attracts you—and why not? But what I do blame is your prowling about in the woods after that poor little creature who has no knowledge of the world or men, and who yielded to your seductions and believed all your oaths, because they were the first oaths she had ever heard. What was wrong was your inspiring in her heart an exalted passion, which will ruin her life, because she has nothing there in the woods to divert her thoughts. If, yielding to a sudden temptation, you had seduced her and then left her at once, the pain would have been sharp, but it wouldn't have lasted so long; she wouldn't have had time to love you so dearly; but you always have to run things into the ground. You abandon everything to live in the woods—in order not to be separated from her; for six weeks, you don't leave her for a single moment; you eat nuts together and lie on the grass; you would live on roots, if need be, in order to speak of love to her. How in the devil do you think that that can fail to turn her head? The girl has reached a point where she cannot do without you; she lives and breathes for you alone; she imagines that that sort of life will last forever; and then—presto! my gentleman vanishes; good-evening, it's all over! Weep, and tear your hair! you won't see him again.—But I have seen her, and I'm almighty sorry; for I fancy that I see her still, pale, dishevelled, walking without seeing, listening without hearing, and, absorbed by a single thought, keeping her tear-dimmed eyes fixed on the road by which he went away; then returning to her poor cabin, to weep on; and so again the next day, and forever! And remember that she has not even the one poor consolation of the unhappy, the power to complain and pour her sorrows into a friend's bosom. That is what you have caused, and it isn't the noblest chapter in your history. That is what you would have avoided if you had not followed the guidance of your romantic ideas, or if you had paid your addresses to women of the world only."

Frédéric made no response; he seemed to be lost in thought.

"My friend," continued Dubourg, taking his hand, "I have told you just what I think; you ought not to be angry. Moreover, all that one can say to a lover never makes any difference; he always follows his own impulses solely. I know, too, that you cannot marry Sister Anne. Parbleu! if a man had to marry all the charmers he has loved, I should have as many wives as King Solomon. I tell you simply that it gave me great pain to—— But, enough of that! I am none the less your friend, do with me as you will. Adieu! I am going to dine at a thirty-two-sou ordinary, because when a man has an income of sixteen hundred francs a year and wants to keep it, he doesn't go to Beauvilliers."

Long after Dubourg had gone, Frédéric remained where he had left him, absorbed in his reflections. Argue as he would, Dubourg had opened his eyes to the state of his heart, and, although he still tried to delude himself, he knew that he was no longer the dumb girl's devoted, ardent, faithful lover, who was ready to sacrifice everything in order to pass his days with her.

It is hard for a man to admit his faults to himself, and even when he does he always finds some excuse to palliate his conduct, and says to himself that he could not have done otherwise. Especially in love do we reason thus, and the last passion, being always the strongest, speedily vanquishes its predecessor.

Frédéric, cudgelling his brains for some means of repairing the wrong he had done, said to himself:

"I will see Sister Anne again, I will not leave her to pass her life in a wretched hovel, cut off from all intercourse with society; I will buy her a pretty cottage, with a lovely garden, and some cows and sheep; I will surround her with everything that will make her life pleasant and happy; I will find some village girl, of her own age, to wait upon her, whose presence will enliven her; she will live there with old Marguerite, and she shall have everything that she

needs; the sight of her neighbors, of the passers-by, and of the people at work in the fields, with her own household cares, will drive away her melancholy; I will go to see her sometimes, and she will be happy."

Happy, without Frédéric! No; to Sister Anne, that was impossible. Comfort, even wealth, would not compensate her for the loss of her love; for Sister Anne was not brought up in Paris; she could not conceive that anyone could prefer diamonds and fine clothes to joys of the heart, or that a wrong could be atoned for with gold. Nor, five months earlier, could Frédéric have conceived it; but as he could readily do so now, it was natural that he should believe that Sister Anne could do the same: we judge others' hearts by our own.

For several days, Frédéric, tormented by what Dubourg had said to him, had the dumb girl's image constantly before his eyes; even when he was with Constance, his melancholy, which had at one time almost disappeared, seemed to weigh upon him more heavily than ever. The general and his niece had returned to Paris. Frédéric was able to see Constance every day. But he trembled when he entered her presence, and she, though surprised by his dejection, dared not ask him the cause of it; but her eyes, when they met Frédéric's, spoke for her, and revealed all the concern she felt for his secret sorrow, and often, too, her longing to know its cause.

In his desire to be relieved from his anxiety, and to have news of Sister Anne, Frédéric several times urged Dubourg to go to Vizille, to see the poor girl and try to comfort her. But on that point Dubourg was immovable.

"I will not go," he said; "I saw her once, and that was quite enough. I have no desire to see her again, and then have unpleasant thoughts for six weeks—I, who never knew what such thoughts were. Besides, my presence would not comfort her; she wouldn't believe anything that I could say to her, because I lied to her once; so my journey would do no good and would not change her plight at all."

As he could not induce Dubourg to take the journey, Frédéric decided to ask his father's permission to leave Paris for a fortnight. Not until after long hesitation did he determine upon that step; but his remorse was troublesome, he was constantly tormented by the memory of the poor mute, and he was persuaded that he would be calmer and less conscience-stricken after he had seen her.

For some time past, the count had treated his son most affectionately; convinced that he had entirely forgotten the person who had fascinated him during his stay in Dauphiné, and having no doubt of his love for Mademoiselle de Valmont, the count had entirely laid aside his former sternness of manner with Frédéric; he hoped soon to see the plan he had formed successfully carried out, being confident in advance of the general's consent; so that he was greatly surprised when his son asked his permission to leave Paris for a few days.

The Comte de Montreville's brow became clouded and severe, and Frédéric, who was accustomed to tremble before his father, anxiously awaited his reply.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the count, after a brief silence.

Frédéric attempted to stammer some pretext, but the count did not give him time.

"Don't try to beat about the bush; I don't like it. You are still thinking of a woman who interested you during your journey, and for whom, I know, you committed a thousand follies. I thought, I confess, that you had become reasonable; I thought that the memory of that fancy had long since vanished from your mind—I do not say from your heart, for the heart has no concern in such affairs."

"Ah! father, if you knew her!"

"Enough, monsieur! You do not propose to marry your conquest, I presume? Still, it is possible that you have some wrongs to undo. I do not know this girl. Perhaps you are more culpable than I think; perhaps she whom you seduced, or led astray, is now cast off and abandoned through your fault, and is living in want. If her misfortunes can be mended with money, you may be sure that I will not spare it, monsieur; but I will attend to the business, not you."

"You, father?"

"Yes, monsieur, I; I shall be better able to arrange it than anyone else. So you need not leave Paris now. Besides," the count continued, after a moment's thought, "your presence here is indispensable. The general expects to marry his niece to a young colonel, who will probably arrive in Paris very soon."

"The general expects to marry his niece!" echoed Frédéric. Already his features had assumed a different expression: sadness and melancholy were succeeded by violent emotion, a jealous perturbation which was manifest in his excited glance, and which made it impossible for him to remain seated. His voice trembled, and, as he questioned his father, it seemed as if his life or death hung upon the answer he was to receive.

"Yes," said the count, in an indifferent tone, pretending not to notice Frédéric's state of mind, "yes; and, for my part, I see nothing surprising about it."

"And—this colonel is coming to Paris? Do you know him, father? Is he young? Is he supposed to be handsome? Mademoiselle de Valmont loves him, of course?"

"You don't think that I am in Mademoiselle de Valmont's confidence, do you? She met the colonel in society, I presume. I believe he's a young man of twenty-eight or thirty."

"Good-looking?"

"Oh! whether he's good-looking or ugly, isn't an honorable man always attractive?"

"And this marriage is all arranged?"

"So it seems."

"And Mademoiselle Constance has never mentioned it to me!"

"Why on earth should she have told you beforehand of something that a well-bred young woman never mentions?"

"Oh! of course—I had no claim—there was no reason why I should know—and still, I should have thought——"

"Besides, it is possible that the general hasn't mentioned his plans to his niece as yet."

"And this is the reason why I must stay in Paris?"

"To be sure; at such times, there are innumerable details to be attended to—clothes and presents and wedding festivities; the general, being accustomed to camp life, knows nothing about such things; a bachelor always needs advice, and he relies on you to help him."

"Indeed! that's very kind of him; I am highly flattered that he considers me good enough for that."

"So, Frédéric, I say again that you must not think of leaving Paris now."

This argument was no longer necessary. The count left the house to call upon his old friend, to whom he had something to say privately; and Frédéric, long after his father's departure, was completely crushed by what he had learned. Poor Sister Anne! your image had vanished.

Pale and excited, hardly able to breathe, Frédéric paced the floor of his apartment, now throwing himself into a chair for a moment, then springing abruptly to his feet, sighing, and clenching his fists convulsively. It was in that frame of mind that Dubourg found him when he came to bid him good-bye, for Frédéric had told him of his projected journey.

"What in God's name is the matter, Frédéric?" he said, pausing in the doorway, alarmed to see him in that condition. "Come, won't you speak, instead of rushing about like this and banging the furniture?"

"Who would have believed it? who would have thought it?" said Frédéric, dropping into a chair. "Ah! these women!"

"Oho! so it's a question of women, is it? I begin to feel less alarmed."

"With such an honest face, such lovely eyes, to conceal such perfidy! for it is perfidy! she ought to have told me that she loved another. To welcome me so cordially! to seem so pleased to see me! Oh! it's horrible!"

"There's no doubt of that. Whom are you talking about?"

"Mademoiselle de Valmont—Constance. She is so lovely! so sweet!"

"Oh, yes! and she looks so much like Sister Anne!"

"Would you believe, my friend, that she is going to be married—to a young colonel whom I don't know, but whom she loves—that goes without saying; whom I have never seen, and who is coming to Paris very soon to marry her?"

"Mademoiselle de Valmont is going to be married?"

"Yes, Dubourg."

"Well, what difference does that make to you? you don't love her; you're not in love with her; no word of love has ever passed your lips; you are her brother, her friend, nothing more. You told me this yourself, within a month."

"No, I certainly do not love her; but one owes some regard, some mark of confidence, to a friend; and when you see a person every day——"

"Oho! you see her every day, do you?"

"She might have told me, have let fall a hint. Ah! I never would have believed it, Constance!"

"By the way, have you given up going to Dauphiné? I say—Frédéric! Frédéric!"

But he was already far away, running like a madman to Mademoiselle de Valmont; and Dubourg left the house, saying to himself:

"He's a good one to accuse women of perfidy! Ah! these men!—I must go and dine. I don't know how it has happened, but I am already in debt at my restaurant, and the month has only half gone!"

When Frédéric reached the general's house, he had formed no plan of action, and had no idea what he was going to say or do. He entered the house, where his was a familiar presence, and walked rapidly through several rooms to the salon where Constance usually sat. She was there, seated at her piano. Seeing that she was intent upon her music and as placid as ever, Frédéric stood for a moment, gazing at her.

Constance turned her head when she heard footsteps. She smiled when she recognized her visitor, whose excitement she did not notice at once.

"Is it you, monsieur," she said; "I am glad you have come; you are a good musician and can help me decipher this piece."

The young man did not reply, but continued to gaze at Constance, who, being accustomed to his peculiar and often taciturn humor, did not at first observe that anything was wrong; but, finding that he did not approach, she turned again, and then his evident excitement did not escape her notice.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" she asked, with manifest concern; "you seem excited."

"Oh! nothing's the matter, mademoiselle; what could be the matter?"

"I am sure I don't know; you are not in the habit of telling me your troubles."

There was a faint tinge of reproach in the tone in which Constance made this remark. Frédéric sat down beside her, and seemed to try to read in her eyes; never before had he looked at her with such an expression, and Constance, in her surprise, felt that she was blushing, and averted her lovely eyes.

"You are afraid that I shall guess what is taking place in your heart," said Frédéric, affecting an ironical tone to dissemble his suffering.

"I, monsieur! on my word, I don't know what you mean; I don't understand you. Why should I fear to allow my thoughts to be read? I am conscious of no guilt; and if it were otherwise, you are not the one to reprove me."

"Oh! certainly not! you are entirely free as to your feelings, mademoiselle; I know that I have no claim to your heart."

"Mon Dieu! what is the matter, Monsieur Frédéric? really, you alarm me; your agitation is not natural."

"What is the matter! Ah! Constance, you love another, and you ask me that question!"

Mademoiselle de Valmont was speechless with surprise; Frédéric had never called her by that name before, and are not the words: "You love another" equivalent to: "You should love no one but me"? A wave of blissful emotion surged in Constance's heart, which beat faster and with greater force; joy and happiness shone in her eyes, and her voice was softer than ever, as she said:

"I, love another! Mon Dieu! what does he mean? Explain yourself, Frédéric: I don't understand."

The dear girl had understood but one thing, and that was that Frédéric did not want her to love another; and that was enough to make her understand that he loved her. For a long time, she had hoped that she had inspired the sweetest of sentiments in Frédéric's heart; but he had never said a word to her on the subject, nothing that signified: "I love you;" and even when everything tends to that conclusion, a woman longs none the less to hear the words.

Again Frédéric was silent; he sighed long and loud, but said nothing.

"Will you speak, monsieur? what has happened to disturb you so to-day?—what have I done to deserve your

reproaches? Explain yourself clearly; I insist upon it—do you hear, monsieur? I insist upon it."

The expression of her voice was so tender that Frédéric could not resist the temptation to look at her again, and doubtless her eyes were in accord with her voice, for he gazed at them several minutes in a sort of ecstasy; but suddenly he cried again:

"What an unhappy wretch I am!"

"You unhappy, Frédéric? Why so?"

"You are going to be married."

"Married! This is the first I've heard of it."

"Oh! it's useless for you to try to conceal it from me; I know all, mademoiselle: I know that your future husband will be here in a few days, that he's a colonel, and that you love him."

"What do you say? a colonel? and I love him? Upon my word, this is rather strong! What is the name of this colonel I am going to marry, if you please?"

"His name! Faith! I forgot to ask that. But you must know perfectly well whom I mean. Will you say that you don't know a colonel?"

"Several colonels have called on my uncle, but——"

"Ah! several of them—you admit it now."

"Who told you, monsieur, that I am going to be married?"

"Someone who is absolutely certain of it: my father, who learned it from your uncle."

"From my uncle? Why, I can't understand this at all."

"You pretend not to understand; but, I doubt not, you are impatiently waiting for your future husband's arrival."

Constance reflected for some little time, then replied in a tone which she struggled to make indifferent:

"Really, monsieur, I am very much surprised by what you have told me; but, after all, suppose it to be true that I am to be married—how does it concern you? I imagine that it is a matter of the utmost indifference to you."

"Ah! you think that, do you? You are quite right, mademoiselle; of course, it cannot make any difference to me."

"Very well! then why do you ask me all these questions, monsieur?"

"Why? O Constance! are you going to be married? and this colonel—do you really love him?"

"And if I did love anyone—would that cause you any grief?"

She was determined to force him to the wall and make him avow his sentiments. Frédéric could contain himself no longer; his heart could not keep its secret.

"Yes," he cried, "I love you, I adore you! I shall die if you marry another man!"

"He loves me!—Ah! it's very lucky that I have extorted that from you! I thought you would never say it."

And the blushing girl gave her hand to Frédéric, who had fallen at her feet; and he covered that hand with kisses, while she said to him with deep earnestness:

"Ah! Frédéric, I love you, too. I shall never love anyone else. Why, my dear, did you not long ago say those words, which make me so happy, and which I have been expecting so long? My uncle is very fond of me; he will never do anything to make me unhappy. If it be true that he has planned a marriage for me—he has never mentioned the subject—why, he must abandon it, for I will tell him that I will marry no one but you, that you alone can obtain my heart and hand; and he will consent, I am certain of it. He is fond of you too, Frédéric; indeed, who would not be? You see, you do wrong to be sad and depressed, and to conceal your sorrows from me. My dear, I read your heart long ago; should you not have been able to read mine?"

Frédéric replied only by protestations of love; he was beside himself with joy; Mademoiselle de Valmont's avowal had disturbed his reason; not without difficulty did she succeed in calming him, and he did not leave her until she had repeated her solemn promise that she would never give her hand to another.

Frédéric left the house in a very different frame of mind from that in which he had entered it. The certainty that Constance loved him had revolutionized all his ideas in an instant: in his delirious joy, Sister Anne was entirely forgotten; he did not even feel a pang of remorse. Like those sick persons who, when the fever is at its height, are unconscious of pain, he said to himself again and again:

"Dubourg was quite right: I do love Constance, I adore her! I can never again love anybody else."

Two days after this declaration, the Comte de Montreville, well assured that his son no longer thought of leaving Constance, set out for Dauphiné, in his own carriage, attended by a single servant and a postilion.

XXII

DEATH OF MARGUERITE.—SISTER ANNE LEAVES HER CABIN

Let us now return to the dumb girl in the woods, whom we left awaiting Frédéric's coming, and whom we shall find still awaiting him.

But the trees have lost their foliage; the fields no longer offer to the eye the pleasing prospect of luxuriant vegetation; there is no green turf in the valley, no verdure on the banks of the stream. The leaves have fallen, and the villager's steps are deadened by that which shaded him and embellished his garden a few days since. He tramples under foot the beautiful foliage to which the approach of a harsher season has brought death. Thus do all things pass away. Other foliage will be born, only to die in its turn; and the man who tramples upon it must likewise return to the dust whereon future generations will tread. He fancies himself of some account because his allotted time is longer; but when the ages have dispersed his ashes, what more will he have left behind him than those leaves have done which whirl about in the wind at his feet?

The autumn disposes us to melancholy; it brings reverie and reflection, not to him who lives in the city, detained in the vortex of the world by the necessities of business or pleasure, but to the man of the fields who can contemplate each day the successive changes in the face of nature. Not without emotion does he look upon the

forest, whose black, skeleton-like trees seem to be in mourning for the spring; if he walks along a path but lately shaded by dense foliage, if he seeks the thicket where he was wont to rest during the heat of the day, he sees naught but dry branches, often broken by the poor man's hand. The forest is less dark than in summer, for the sunlight finds its way in on all sides. But that brightness, far from embellishing it, robs it of all its charm; one regrets the dark, mysterious paths, through which it is so pleasant to wander in the season of love.

As he watches the approach of the frost and snow, as he contemplates the effects of the winter's cold, man, always buoyed up by hope, says to himself:

"The spring will come again; I shall see once more my leafy lanes, my lawns, and my shrubs."

The spring comes again—but many men do not see it!

Sister Anne observed the change in the season only because it emphasized the length of time that had elapsed since Frédéric left her. The unhappy child could no longer count the days; their number was too great. However, hope had not vanished from her heart; she could not believe that her lover intended to abandon her forever; sometimes, she imagined that he had ceased to live, and then the blackest despair took possession of her thoughts. When that idea forced itself upon her, life seemed to be only one long agony. Could she live on, unsustained by the hope of seeing her lover? Often she longed to die. But she was soon to be a mother; that thought made her cling to life once more; something told her that she must live for her child.

It was a very long time since she had been to the village. An old shepherd, who went back and forth through the woods, was in the habit of leaving every day, at the foot of a tree, the loaf of rye bread required by the occupants of the cabin, and always found there, in exchange, a large pitcher filled with milk. This bread, with milk and fresh eggs, was all that the two poor women ate in winter. When Sister Anne had finished preparing the meal, and had given the old woman all that she required, she drove her goats to the hilltop, and seated herself at the foot of her mother's tree. Despite the cold, which was beginning to be severe, the girl did not fail to go thither a single day. Wrapped in a wretched woollen cloak, half worn out, she defied the rigor of the season, although the garment was but little protection to her; her goats, finding nothing on the hill to browse upon, huddled at her feet; and Sister Anne, her features pinched and worn by her condition and her sufferings, presented only too faithfully the image of poverty and sorrow.

More than once, the snow, falling in great flakes, formed an icy cloak about her body, so that the poor girl's form could hardly be distinguished from the ground she lay upon; and often she removed her cloak to cover her shivering companions. The traveller who happened to pass over the hill could make out nothing in that snow-covered group save the dumb girl's head, always turned toward the road to the town. But, unheeding the cold, she did not realize that her whole body shivered, that her teeth chattered, that her limbs stiffened; she was unconscious of physical suffering; a single sentiment absorbed her whole being, and the pain it caused left her no feeling for any other.

When the darkness made it impossible for her to see the road, she rose and looked at herself, amazed to find that she was almost buried in snow. Then she would shake her cloak, caress her goats, and slowly descend the hill to the cabin and old Marguerite. When the old woman was asleep, and she threw herself on her solitary couch, she no longer found love there, nor even rest, to which she had long been a stranger. The memory of her lover was there, as it was everywhere. If only she could express her grief in words, call to him and implore him to return! It seemed to her that her voice would reach his ears.—Poor girl! heaven had deprived you of that priceless organ. Tears! always tears! those were all that remained to you!

But, meanwhile, Sister Anne saw that old Marguerite was failing from day to day. For a long while she had not left the house; she was hardly able to totter to her great armchair. Marguerite was seventy-six years of age; she had led an active, laborious life, and her old age was placid; she had no disease and did not suffer; age alone was wearing out her strength, which was daily diminishing. She was going out like a lamp whose light has been soft and mellow; she had not shone with great brilliancy, but she had been useful, which is far preferable.

The hour fixed by nature drew near; Marguerite was destined not to see another spring. Sister Anne redoubled her loving attentions to her adopted mother; observing the gradual weakening of her faculties, she gave up going to the hilltop, in order to be always with her. She could have made no greater sacrifice. Good Marguerite, touched by her devotion, smiled at her affectionately, and called her her dear child.

But one morning, when Sister Anne went as usual to her mother's bed to ask how she had passed the night, Marguerite did not answer, or, as her custom was, hold out her trembling hand. Her eyes were closed, never to open again. Sister Anne was terrified; she seized the old woman's hand—it was cold and inert, and she tried in vain to warm it in her own. She stooped and kissed Marguerite's forehead, but no smile rewarded her.

The girl stood by her aged companion's bedside, overwhelmed with grief; she gazed at the venerable features of her who had taken care of her from childhood, of her only friend, who had been taken from her!—Marguerite seemed like one asleep; the serenity of her face indicated the serenity of her mind in its last moments. Sister Anne, standing beside the bed, with one hand resting upon it, could not tire of gazing at her adopted mother. Her grief was calm, but none the less profound; her eyes were dry, but their expression was none the less heartrending.

She passed a large part of the day beside the good woman's lifeless remains; not without difficulty did she succeed in tearing herself away; but she knew that she must perform the last duties for Marguerite, that she must consign her to her last resting-place; and she realized that she was incapable of doing it alone, without assistance. She must go to the village, therefore, where she had not been seen for a long while.

She left her cabin and went out of the woods on her way to Vizille. As she passed, she bowed, as usual, to those of the village women whom she knew; but she could not understand why they turned their heads away, or stared at her with contempt. Instead of stopping, as their custom was, to bid her good-day, they walked quickly away, and seemed desirous to avoid meeting her. The young men looked at her with mocking smiles; some pointed at her, whispering to one another; and not upon a single face did she observe the marks of interest which they were accustomed to manifest.

"What can be the matter?" thought the poor child; "everybody seems to avoid me; is it because I am more unhappy than ever, because I have lost my kind mother, and Frédéric has abandoned me?"

She forgot that she bore the testimony of her weakness; that pledge of love, of which she was so proud, was, in the eyes of the peasants, a proof of her shame. In villages, people are more severe than in cities; they set great store

by innocence, because it is often the only treasure they possess. The good people of Vizille held very austere views on the subject of such falls from virtue: a girl who had been seduced became an object of general contempt, so long as her seducer did not repair her fault before the altar. Perhaps they should have been more indulgent to the dumb girl, who, living in the woods, did not know that she was culpable in yielding to the promptings of her heart. But peasants do not reason; they act in obedience to habit, and often mechanically. They had shown deep interest, so long as she was innocent as well as unfortunate; now that she bore manifest proofs of her weakness, they spurned her, without waiting to inquire whether she was not more unfortunate than before.

At last she reached the village, unable to understand the conduct of the people, having no idea why the young girls fled at her approach without deigning to answer her signs, or why their parents stared at her with a stern, disdainful air.

She knocked at the door of a cottage, the owners of which were friends of Marguerite. The woman who opened the door made a gesture of surprise when she saw her, then drove her away from the house. Sister Anne tried to insist and to make her understand the loss she had met with; but, refusing to notice her signs, the woman pushed her into the street, where a number of peasants had assembled and stood staring at her.

"How do you dare to come to the village in that state?" asked an old man; "to show your face here and try to get into our houses? You're carrying the token of your shame; you'd do better to hide it in your woods. And you come here and show yourself to our daughters! Do you do it to let them admire your pretty behavior, and set them an example? Off with you, Clotilde's child! you ought to die of shame! Go back to your cabin, clear out with your seducer, but don't come here again among our wives and children!"

Sister Anne could not understand how a person could be guilty for having known love. She gazed at the peasants in surprise; she held out her hands, clasped in entreaty: she tried to make them understand that she had not come to seek their aid for herself. But they did not choose to understand; they turned their backs on her and went into their houses; some escorted her to the outskirts of the village, and did not leave her until they had ordered her never to return.

The poor child was suffocated by the sobs that convulsed her whole body. To be treated so for having loved Frédéric! That thought sustained her courage; it was for him that she was subjected to such humiliation; she would endure everything rather than cease to love him. She returned to her cabin, weeping bitterly. It was dark. Absolute solitude reigned in her poor home, thenceforth the abode of silence. She was utterly alone on earth. Proof against idle terrors, against the childish fear which even the greatest geniuses sometimes feel at sight of death, Sister Anne went to the bed on which Marguerite lay, and, falling on her knees beside it, held out her arms to her protectress, as if to say:

"You would not have spurned me, mother, if I had come before you even guiltier than I am! You would have had pity on me. Your great age, your enfeebled sight, did not permit you to notice my condition; but you would have forgiven me; and they turned me away! Is it by heaping obloquy on the unfortunate that the path of repentance should be pointed out to them?"

She passed the whole night by Marguerite's bed. She prayed with all her heart for her who had been a mother to her; she implored her to protect her still, and during that mournful night Frédéric's image did not disturb her pious occupation.

The next morning, at daybreak, Sister Anne went to the woods to wait for the old shepherd who supplied her with bread in exchange for milk. He soon appeared. He was a man of some sixty years, still strong and well, who had passed most of his life in the forest, and, like Sister Anne, knew almost nothing of what happened in the village, which is the whole world to a woodsman. The girl took him by the hand and seemed to urge him to go with her to the cabin. The old shepherd complied with her entreaty, and she led him to Marguerite's bedside. He shook his head, but did not seem moved: the habit of living the life of a savage sometimes makes men indifferent to the suffering of others. But Sister Anne appealed to him by signs which he could not fail to understand, and the old fellow consented to perform the service she asked at his hands.

She led him into the garden, to the fig-tree under which Marguerite loved to sit, and pointed to the ground: that was where she wished that her adopted mother should rest. The old shepherd soon dug the grave, then carried the old woman's remains thither and covered them with earth. Sister Anne planted a cross by the spot. It was the only monument she could erect to her benefactress's memory; but she would come often to water it with her tears. How many magnificent mausoleums there are whereon no tear was ever shed!

The shepherd went his way, and Sister Anne was once more alone—and forever! At that moment, she felt more keenly than ever the loss she had sustained. Marguerite talked little; for some time past, she had dozed constantly; but she was always there, and the poor child felt that she was not altogether alone in the world. There was one person who could comfort her; but he did not come, and each succeeding day helped to destroy the little hope that still sustained her. She would not have had the courage to endure her torments, but for the feeling that heaven would soon give her someone to lighten them. She was now fully aware of the existence of the being in whom she was to live again. She had already suffered much for its sake: people shunned and despised her; she could no longer seek help or shelter in the village; but the mere sight of that little creature would bring forgetfulness of all her agony; is it not just that we should find in the cause of our sorrows their compensation?

As the days passed, Sister Anne's profound grief for the loss of Marguerite changed into a tender, grateful memory; but time, which soothes the regrets of friendship, does not allay the sufferings of a lover. The memory of Frédéric was more constantly in her mind than ever, for there was nothing to divert her thoughts from it. She saw no one; and if the movements within her reminded her that she was soon to be a mother, that fact made her desire more ardently the presence of her child's father.

While Frédéric was with Sister Anne, he had talked to her sometimes of the outside world, of his father, and very often of Paris, his birthplace. During the day, while they sat together by the brook, it amused him to draw a picture of the great city for the wondering girl, to describe the pleasures, the plays, the splendid avenues, which make it a place of enchantment. She did not always comprehend what he said, but she listened with wide-open eyes, manifesting her amazement by artless gestures, by curious tokens of surprise; and it amused Frédéric, who was often obliged to tell her stories to satisfy her, for one cannot be always making love. Some people maintain that it is a great pity; they forget that those things which one can do all the time end by losing their value.

What Frédéric had told Sister Anne was engraved in her memory. Each day she thought about it more and more, and said to herself:

"He is probably in that great city, Paris, that he used to tell me so much about, where he was born. Perhaps his father won't let him come back to me. But if I could go there and find him, if I could once throw myself into his arms, I'm very sure he would be glad to see me. Then he would keep me with him, I would never leave him again, and I should be, oh! so happy! But how can I find my way to Paris?"

Every day, the longing to set out in search of her lover became stronger in that loving heart, which could not persuade itself that Frédéric had forgotten her, but believed that the reason he did not return was that someone was keeping him away from her. Marguerite being dead, there was nothing to detain Sister Anne in the woods. In her condition, and bereft as she was of so essential an organ, she ought doubtless to have felt that her cabin was preferable to the dangers, the suffering, and the fatigue that would be her portion in the journey she contemplated; but a woman who loves truly sees neither danger nor suffering; she dares everything, sustained by the hope of seeing once more the object of her affection. Sister Anne, unacquainted with the world, unable to speak, and bearing within her the fruit of her love, determined to leave her home to go in search of her lover; to face every danger, to endure poverty and privations of every sort; and even though she should have to employ years in her search, it seemed to her that every step would bring her nearer to her lover.

Having formed her decision, she devoted all her thought to its execution; but she did not wish to leave her cabin and Marguerite's grave to be utterly neglected. Again it was the old shepherd to whom she addressed herself: she led him into the house one morning, and pointed to a small bundle containing her clothing, which she slung over her shoulders, to indicate that she was going away; then she motioned to him to sit down, as if to say:

"This cabin is yours, stay here; I ask you only to take care of the fig-tree that shades my mother's tomb, and these poor creatures who have been my only companions so long."

The old man readily understood her; but, although the hovel was a palace in his eyes, and Sister Anne's cession of it to him made him richer than he had ever been, he tried to induce the girl to abandon a plan which seemed to him insane.

"Where do you propose to go, my child?" he asked; "can you think of leaving home in the condition you are in? Within two months you will be a mother, and you propose to go on a journey; and you a poor, dumb girl! Who will take you in, who will help you, how will you ask the way? Come, my girl, you are going to do a very foolish thing. Wait a little while, at least."

But Sister Anne had made up her mind, and nothing could move her; she shook her head as she looked at the old shepherd; then raised her eyes to heaven, as if to say:

"God will take pity on me and guide my steps."

He tried once more to keep her.

"What about money?" he said; "you need money in the world, my girl; I know that, although I haven't lived much in the world. I haven't got any myself, and I can't give you anything for your house and what there is in it, although it's well worth something."

Sister Anne smiled, then took from her bosom a small canvas bag, and showed the old man four gold pieces: it was Marguerite's little hoard. Some time before she died, the good woman had told her to look in the corner of the cabin, under her bed; there she had found the little bag securely tied, and Marguerite had said to her:

"Take it, my child; it's for you; it's the fruit of my savings in sixty years of toil. I have always meant it for you; perhaps it will help you to buy some more goats."

At sight of the four gold pieces, the old shepherd ceased his efforts to detain her, for he believed that with that amount of money she could go round the world.

"Go, my child," he said; "I will keep your cabin; remember that it still belongs to you, if ever you want to come back to it."

Sister Anne smiled sadly; then, with a last glance at her home, she went forth, with her light bundle in one hand, and in the other a stick on which she leaned as she walked. She saluted Marguerite's grave in the garden; her goats ran after her, as if they expected her to drive them to the hill as usual. She caressed them, weeping, for they had come to be her only friends, and something told her that she would never see them again.

What memories stirred her heart as she walked through the woods! There was the place where they had sat so often! yonder the brook, by which she first saw him, and where he told her that he loved her! Those familiar spots seemed alive with his presence, and she found it hard to make up her mind to leave them. But she said to herself, to sustain her courage:

"I am going to join him; and perhaps we shall return together."

She climbed the hill, and knelt at the foot of the tree where Clotilde died. She prayed to her mother to watch over her from on high, and to guide her in her journey. Then she descended the hill, in the direction of the town; she followed the road that he had taken, and wished that she could discover his footprints.

XXIII

SISTER ANNE'S JOURNEY.—THE FOREST

The dumb girl had begun her journey at daybreak; it was a cold but fine morning; a heavy frost had dried up the roads, frozen the streams, and checked the torrents. The fields were deserted; the peasants who were abroad wasted no time, but hastened to return to their cabins and sit down in front of the fireplace, where the stumps they had brought from the forest snapped and crackled. A bright fire enlivens the long winter evening, and the poor beggar, as he passes through a village, stops and gazes enviously at the flame that shines through a cottage window, overjoyed when he finds an opportunity to warm himself on the public square, before a bundle or two of straw which other poor wretches have set on fire.

It was only four hours since Sister Anne had set out, and her eyes were already struck by the novelty of what

she saw. Having never seen anything besides her own cabin, her woods, and the village of Vizille, she paused in amazement before a forge, or a mill, or a country house, which seemed to her a very castle. Everything was new to her; but how was she to find her way in this world, which seemed to her so immense, how could she find that city which she could not name, and of which she did not even know the direction? Sometimes these thoughts made her heart sink; she would stop and look sadly about; then she would think of Frédéric, and resume her journey.

Toward midday, she arrived at a small hamlet, and knocked at the door of a peasant's cottage; it was opened by a young woman, who was nursing one child, while four others played about her, and an old woman kindled the fire with an armful of dry branches she had just brought from the woods.

"What do you want, my good woman?" asked the young mother. Sister Anne gazed at the picture before her, and could not take her eyes from the child at its mother's breast. A gleam of joy lighted up her face; one could see that she was thinking at that moment:

"I will nurse my child, too; I will carry him at my bosom and receive his caresses."

"Why don't you say what you want?" said the old woman, without taking her eyes from the fire.

"Oh! see how pale she is, mother!" said the younger woman; "and how she seems to be suffering! To think of such a young thing, and so near her time, travelling about when it's as cold as this!—You are going to join your husband, I suppose?"

Sister Anne sighed; then, seeing that they were waiting for her answer, she explained by signs that she could not speak.

"Mon Dieu! mother, she's dumb! Poor woman!"

"Dumb!" cried the old mother. "What, my dear, can't you talk? How I pity you, poor child! Are you deaf too?"

Sister Anne's pantomime indicated that she could hear them perfectly.

"Well, that's lucky, on my word!" exclaimed the old woman, walking toward the traveller; while all the children stared curiously at her, thinking that a mute was not like other people.

"Was it some accident that made you dumb, my girl? have you been so long? Was it an illness? Can't it be cured?"

"Let us first give the poor creature what she needs, mother," said the young woman; "let her rest and eat something; then you can question her."

They bustled about, and seated Sister Anne in front of the fire; one child took her bundle, another her stick, and the old mother brought her food, for the daughter could not leave the child she was nursing. Sister Anne, touched by their kindness to her, manifested her gratitude by such pathetic gestures, that the occupants of the little cottage were deeply moved.

"So it isn't the same everywhere as it is at my village," thought the young wayfarer; "here, instead of turning me away and looking down on me, they are kind to me, and treat me like their own child. The world isn't so cruel, after all."

This welcome revived her courage; but she could not answer all the old woman's questions. The peasants believed, according to her signs, that she was going to join her husband.

"He's in the city, I suppose?" queried the old woman.

Sister Anne nodded her head; and as Grenoble was the nearest city, they concluded that that was her destination.

After remaining several hours beneath that hospitable roof, she determined to resume her journey; but first she took one of the gold pieces from her little bag and offered it to the young woman.

"Keep it, my dear," said she; "we don't want anything for what we've done. You're so much to be pitied for not being able to talk, that you deserve to be taken in and put up everywhere for nothing; but, unluckily, everybody don't think so; there's some folks with hard, unfeeling hearts. You're going to the city, and you'll need all your money; they won't refuse it there."

Sister Anne expressed her gratitude as best she could. She kissed the young mother and her little nursling affectionately, then left the cottage, after they had pointed out the road to Grenoble, where they supposed that she was going.

The young woman did not travel rapidly; her pregnancy, her lack of practice in walking, and the bundle of clothing she carried, compelled her to stop frequently. She would sit down on a felled tree, a stone, or the bank of a ditch, and wait until her strength had returned and she could go on.

Sometimes other travellers passed her while she was resting. Those in carriages did not look at her; several men on horseback cast a glance at her; but the pedestrians stopped and said a few words to her. Receiving no reply, they went their way, some thinking that she was half-witted, others calling her impertinent because she did not deign to speak to them. Sister Anne gazed at them with an air of surprise, smiled at a peasant who proposed to take her on his horse, and lowered her eyes when another lost his temper because she did not answer him; the most curious ended by doing as the others did, and left her.

Toward nightfall, Sister Anne, having followed the directions given her, reached Grenoble. The sight of a large city was a source of fresh surprise, which increased with every step she took in the streets, where the people were dressed so much more handsomely than in her village. Everything surprised and bewildered her, and she trembled as she walked. The tall houses, the shops, the throng of people moving in every direction, the continual uproar, the strange way in which the passers-by gazed at her—everything tended to increase her confusion. Poor girl! how would it be if you were in Paris?

But it grew dark, and she must seek shelter for the night. She dared not enter any of the houses; they all seemed too fine; she was afraid that she would not be admitted. For a long while, she wandered at random through those unfamiliar streets; but she was tired out at last, and determined to knock somewhere. The poor child did not know what an inn was; she thought that she could obtain a place to sleep anywhere by paying for it.

She knocked at the door of a house of modest appearance. The door opened, and she entered trembling.

"What do you want?" demanded an old tailor, who acted as concierge.

The girl looked sadly at him, and made signs to indicate that she could not speak; but he paid no attention to

them, and repeated his question. Receiving no reply, he sprang to his feet in a rage, ran to Sister Anne, took her by the arm, and put her out of the door, saying:

"Oho! so you won't tell where you're going, won't you? Folks don't get in here that way, my girl."

This reception was not encouraging; the poor girl was once more in the street; her eyes filled with tears, but she summoned all her courage and knocked at another door. There, they called her a beggar, and refused to admit her. She could stand it no longer; her sobs choked her; she sat down on a stone bench beside a door and wept bitterly. In a moment the door opened, and an old couple came out, wrapped in furs and comforters, followed by a servant carrying a lantern. As they passed, they ordered Sister Anne to leave the bench, which belonged to their house, calling her an idler and a beggar, and threatening to have her put in prison if she did not move on. Sister Anne rose, trembling in every limb, and dragged her sorrow and weariness elsewhere; and the old couple went their way, chuckling over what they had done, and promising to hold forth concerning the audacity of the lower classes at the party where they were to pass the evening.

The dumb girl, utterly worn out, could hardly stand erect, and did not know which way to turn. The treatment she had met with gave her a very depressing idea of life in cities. But she must find a shelter for the night. She spied a house more brightly lighted than the others; the front door was open, and many persons were going in and out. She took one of her gold pieces in her hand, afraid to enter unless she exhibited it. This time she had made a more fortunate selection: the house in question was an inn, and the sight of the gold piece procured her a cordial reception.

When the landlady found that the young traveller could not answer her questions, she felt called upon to talk for two, and, while she led the way to a small bedroom, extolled the advantages of her house and the way in which it was kept, asked her where she came from and where she was going, then interrupted herself by exclaiming:

"Mon Dieu! what a fool I am! I ask that just as if you could answer."

A moment later, she resumed her chatter, saying:

"It's very hard! I don't understand your signs, I don't understand 'em at all. Never mind, my child; you shall be served on the dot. If my nephew was only here! he knows mathematics, and he'd soon explain your signs. But he's gone away, poor boy! he's a clerk in the telegraph office at Lyon, now."

At last she left Sister Anne, who, having eaten sparingly, was able to enjoy the rest she needed so sorely. Sleep, poor girl, and may happy dreams bring momentary oblivion of your sufferings!

As she had heard the hostess say more than once: "You are in the best hotel in Grenoble," she knew the name of the city, and remembered that Frédéric had mentioned that name. That recollection led her to resolve not to leave that place until she had sought him there; and the next morning, after she had succeeded in making her hostess understand that she proposed to pass that day also at Grenoble, she left the inn and set out to search the city, which seemed to her enormously large.

As she walked along, she looked at every window in every house. If Frédéric were there, she thought that he would see her pass, and would either call to her or run after her. Sometimes she stopped, thinking that she recognized his figure; but she soon discovered her error. She passed the whole day thus, and did not return to the inn until it was so dark that she could see nothing.

"Have you been looking about our city?" inquired the landlady; "it's a very pretty place, I tell you, a very pretty place, our city of Grenoble. But it isn't as big as Lyon, and even Lyon don't come near Paris."

At the word *Paris*, the young traveller made a joyful movement, and, grasping the hostess's arm, signified that that was where she wanted to go. But she did not make her meaning clear.

"You are going to Lyon, I'll wager," said the hostess; "that isn't so far; fifteen leagues, that's all. To be sure, in your condition you can't walk very fast; but in three or four days at most, you ought to do it."

Sister Anne went sadly to her room. How could she find the road to Paris, if she could not make people understand that that was where she wanted to go? That thought disheartened her; but she had implored her mother to guide her on her journey; she prayed to her again, and hope was born anew in her heart; without hope, what would be left for the unhappy?

The next day, the girl prepared to leave the inn; the landlady presented a bill to her, of which she could make nothing; but she tendered a gold piece and received very little change. In cities, one has to pay for every reverence, every attention. Sister Anne had been treated with great courtesy, so that her stay at the inn cost her rather dear.

They pointed out the road to Lyon, and she set forth once more, with her little bundle and her stick. But how easy it is to lose one's way in the hilly, wooded paths between Grenoble and Lyon! She abandoned herself to Providence for guidance. She walked most of the day, and at night, thoroughly exhausted, went to a farmhouse, where they consented to let her sleep in a barn. But, provided that she could pass the night where she was sheltered from the cold, she slept as well on straw as on feathers; fatigue enabled her at last to sleep several hours.

Her accommodation at the farm helped to exhaust her little store, and the young traveller began to realize that she must be sparing of it, for it was almost the only talisman by means of which she could obtain shelter. Hospitable folk are rare. The most humane think that they are doing much for the poor wayfarer when they give him a trifling sum of money and a crust of bread; but they will not receive him under their roof. Far distant are the days when men deemed it an honor to give shelter to a stranger, without inquiring as to his rank and his means; when they shared their fire and their repast and their bed with him. Other times, other manners! We have become very proud, we are no longer inclined to share anything. By way of compensation, we have excellent friends, who come to our house and eat our bread, drink our wine, and sometimes make love to our wives, and who, when they leave, go elsewhere and say countless cruel things about us; but they do it from excess of affection, and because they are afraid that we may have other friends than themselves.

Toward noon of the second day after she left Grenoble, Sister Anne, absorbed by her recollections, did not notice that she had strayed from the road that had been pointed out to her. Not until she began to feel the need of rest did she look about for the village, which, according to the directions she had received in the morning, could not be far away.

The place where she was at that moment was wild and deserted; there was no house in sight. She climbed a hill, and could see nothing in front of her but an extensive forest of firs. On her left, a mountain stream, with ice floating

on the surface, plunged into a deep and winding ravine; on her right was a bare mountain side, with steep cliffs, but no human habitation.

She began to fear that she had lost her way, and hesitated for some time as to the best course for her to pursue. The roads to the right and left had a most unpromising look; she was reluctant to retrace her steps; so she decided to take the road leading to the forest. After walking about half an hour, she found herself among the stately firs, which time had not bent, and whose branches, although partly despoiled of their foliage, seemed to rise no less proudly toward the clouds and to defy wind and frost.

An excellent road led directly into the forest, and Sister Anne did not hesitate to take it. She could see the marks of wheels and of horses' feet, and she hoped that it would lead her to the village or to some nearby city. She surmounted her fatigue, in order that she might reach a place of shelter before dark. As she walked on, she did not meet a human being, and there was a sombreness and gloom about that road, hemmed in by the forest on both sides, that depressed her beyond words. Her eyes, straining to discover the end of the interminable road, saw naught save the dark firs, and there was no indication that she was approaching the village. Her heart sank; night was beginning to envelop the earth in its dark folds; she could no longer distinguish anything in the paths that led to right and left; and soon Sister Anne, her strength giving way before her courage, felt that it was impossible for her to go farther. So she was forced to make up her mind to pass the night in the forest. It was not fear that made the poor child's heart beat fast; she did not know what robbers were, for there had never been any in her woods. But the thought of passing a whole night in the forest, without shelter, in such cold weather, and in her condition! However, it must be done. She seated herself at the foot of a large tree. She was always careful, when she passed through a town or a village, to supply herself with provisions; so she ate some bread and dried nuts; then, wrapping herself as well as she could in her clothes, and placing her bundle under her head, she waited for sleep to come. Thanks to the fatigue of that long day's journey, she had not long to wait.

It was midnight when the dumb girl opened her eyes, and the moon, shining directly over the road on the edge of which she had fallen asleep, lighted the strange picture which awaited her at her awakening.

Four men stood about her, all dressed like poor woodcutters, in jackets and loose trousers held in place by broad belts; they wore broad-brimmed hats, some with the brims turned down, while the others, being turned up in front, revealed faces that bore no trace of gentleness or humanity. Their long, uncombed hair and beards intensified the sinister expression of their features; each of them carried a gun, on which he leaned; and each had a hunting-knife and a pair of pistols in his belt.

Two of these men were stooping over Sister Anne; another held a dark lantern near her face; while the fourth, who also had his eyes upon her, seemed to be listening, to make sure that everything was quiet on the road.

The sight of those four faces fixed upon hers caused Sister Anne an involuntary shock; and, although she did not appreciate the danger that threatened her, she was conscious of a feeling of terror which she could not understand, and closed her eyes to avoid those searching glances.

"What in the devil have we got here?" said one of the two who were leaning over her; "I'm very much afraid that it don't amount to much, and I doubt if it's worth while to stop."

"Eh? why not?" said the man with the lantern; "it's better'n nothing, anyway. Look, Pierre, she's got a bundle under her head."

"A lot of worthless rags; don't you see that she's a woman as works in the fields?"

"I say! is she dead or asleep?" said a third. "Come, Leroux, just push her a bit! Are we going to spend the night staring at this drudge?"

"Death of my life! I don't know as we've got anything better to do. All's quiet on the road—eh, Jacques?"

Jacques was the man who stood a few steps away, apparently listening. When his comrades addressed him, he approached the group about the girl, saying:

"Damnation! another bad night!"

"Not so bad as it might be!" rejoined Leroux, still gazing at Sister Anne; "morbleu! that's a pretty woman!"

It was at that moment that Sister Anne opened her eyes, resolved to appeal to the compassion of the men who surrounded her, and whose language she did not comprehend, having no suspicion of their profession.

"I say, look!" cried Leroux; "she's waking up. She's got a fine pair of eyes, on my word! I'm curious to hear what she'll say."

Sister Anne cast a glance of entreaty upon them, one after another, clasping her hands as if to implore their pity.

"Oh! don't you be afraid," said Pierre; "we ain't going to hurt you. Where did you come from? where you going? what put it into your head to sleep in our forest?"

The dumb girl, taking the robbers for woodcutters, tried to make them understand that she had lost her way.

"What's this! a woman, and she won't speak!" cried Jacques; "what does this mean? Is it fear that makes her dumb? Come, speak—damnation!"

Sister Anne rose, and indicated by signs that she could not speak.

"What devilish kind of a woman is this?" cried Pierre; while Leroux, holding his lantern still nearer to her, exclaimed, with a roar of laughter:

"My eyes, comrades! Dumb or not, the hen has found her rooster, and the egg won't be long coming!"

This jest was welcomed with a savage laugh by the other three robbers; and all four kept their eyes fixed on the poor girl, who, not divining the cause of their merriment, but unable to endure their glances, timidly lowered her eyes and stood trembling in the midst of them.

"Come on, let's leave the woman," said Pierre; "she's a poor deaf mute; we mustn't take her on our shoulders."

"Deaf?" rejoined Leroux, whose eyes gleamed with a terrifying expression; "why, such a woman as that's a downright treasure. She's so pretty! she takes my eye, and I'll make her my moll as soon as she gets rid of her load."

"Nonsense, Leroux! you're joking."

"No! ten thousand thunders! a deaf mute—think how useful she'll be to us in our business."

Sister Anne, trembling like a leaf, did not fully understand the conversation of the miscreants; but, observing

their indecision, and fearing that they would refuse to give her the shelter of which she felt more in need than ever, for the cold had benumbed all her limbs, she took her little store from her bosom. She knew that the sight of money smooths all obstacles; so she took a coin from her little bag, and offered it with an air of entreaty to one of the ruffians.

"Oho! she's got money, and she offers it to us; that's good! Parbleu! give it here, give it here, girl!"

As he spoke, Pierre snatched the bag from Sister Anne, who was stupefied at being thus forcibly despoiled of her treasure; while the robbers greedily counted its contents.

"Three gold pieces, as I'm alive!" cried Jacques; and the brigands' faces gleamed with savage joy. "That's more'n we've made in five days!"

"Didn't I tell you this wasn't a bad find?" rejoined Leroux. "Come, comrades, let's take this girl to our hole, and have a good time."

With that, the fellow seized Sister Anne's arm and dragged her into the forest; Jacques took charge of the bundle, Pierre followed him, and Franck, the fourth man, taking the lantern from Leroux's hand, went ahead to light his companions.

The dumb girl walked unresistingly in the midst of the robbers, still not realizing the horror of her position; she thought they were taking her to their home, to their wives and children. But their brutal features, their abrupt and insolent manners, the weapons they carried, and the strangeness of their language, inspired her with a terror she could not control. She glanced timidly at them again and again, hoping to find, for her comfort, a look of sympathy or pity on their faces; but whenever she raised her eyes, they met Leroux's fastened upon her and blazing with brutal passion. That ruffian's features intensified the fear caused by his manners: his curly hair corresponded in color with his name, which his companions had given him on that account; his pale, gray eyes rolled this way and that with amazing rapidity; his mouth, about which a ferocious smile always lurked, was surmounted by heavy moustaches of the color of his hair; and a broad scar, extending from the top of the nose to the bottom of the left ear, put the finishing touch to his sinister countenance. He had one arm about the girl's body, supporting her as they walked rapidly along the forest paths, while the other bandits, by their actions and their speech, momentarily added to Sister Anne's alarm.

The robbers lived in a wretched hovel in the heart of the forest; by day, they passed for poor woodcutters, being careful to keep their weapons out of sight in a cellar under their den. But at night they armed themselves to the teeth and betook themselves to the highroad, where, when they considered that they were sufficiently numerous, they attacked belated travellers.

Sister Anne was surprised that they had to go so far to reach their home, and even more surprised by the almost impassable paths they chose. At last, after walking more than an hour, they led her down into a ravine, amid dense underbrush. Soon she made out a flickering light in the window of a hut, and a woman opened the door after the robbers had whistled several times.

The appearance of one of her own sex cheered Sister Anne for a moment; but when she looked closely at the woman who appeared in the doorway, her short-lived hope vanished. In truth, the aspect of the robbers' companion was not calculated to restore tranquillity to the unhappy girl's mind: she was a tall woman, shockingly thin, and her strongly marked features wore an expression of calm, cold cruelty which pointed to absolute lack of sensibility; her face was of a livid pallor; a red silk handkerchief covered her head, and a handful of rags barely concealed her emaciated body.

"Here we are, Christine," cried the brigands, as they approached. "We've got a prize; we've brought you a companion you can't quarrel with."

At that, Christine stepped out of the house, and, snatching the lantern from Franck's hand, held it close to Sister Anne's face. After examining her closely for several minutes, she said, in a harsh voice:

"What's all this?"

"A woman, can't you see? And a rare woman, too! a deaf mute!"

"A deaf mute! A fine capture, I swear! What do you expect to do with her?"

"That's none of your business," said Leroux, in a voice that echoed through the forest; "I took this woman for myself; I like her, she suits me just as she is. Don't you dare to look crooked at her, or I'll hang you up to the tallest fir in the forest!"

Christine did not seem alarmed by the threat; she continued to stare at the girl, and, when she noticed her condition, a sarcastic smile lighted up her face, and she muttered between her teeth:

"You'll be sure of having a brat, anyway."

A blow which sent her reeling against the wall of the cabin was Leroux's only reply to this remark of the repellent Christine; she rushed at him with a threatening air, but Pierre stepped between them.

"Come, come, comrades," he said, "that's enough of such fooling; we mustn't let the new-comer raise a row here. Go in, Christine, and see about giving us some supper, quick; we're as hungry as wolves!"

During this altercation between the robbers and their housekeeper, the unfortunate dumb girl felt a sensation of fear, of absolute terror, such as she had never known before. The aspect of the woman, the language of the men, whose brutal character she began to divine, the appearance of that horrible lair—everything combined to give her some conception of the perils that encompassed her. But what could she do? what would become of her? She would have been only too glad, at that moment, to be far away from that spot, even though she had to endure the severe cold, unsheltered, in the forest. But there was no means of escape, and they did not return her money; they had taken her treasure and her clothes; was it for a moment only? she dared not hope so, and she discovered some new cause of alarm every minute. She shuddered from head to foot, her teeth chattered, her knees gave way under her.

"See!" said Leroux, holding her up; "that fury has frightened my pretty bird.—Come, don't be afraid, little one, and let's go in and get warm."

The robbers entered the hovel, which was divided into two rooms: the outer one was that in which the occupants of that horrible den passed most of their time; there they ate, and slept on bundles of straw in one corner. There was a fireplace, where a huge fire was blazing, which warmed the room, the larger and better of the two. The other, which had no fireplace, and but a single window looking into the forest, was Christine's bedroom; they kept

their provisions and firewood there.

When she entered that dirty, smoke-begrimed room, and saw the heap of straw in a corner, the weapons standing against the wall, and the great fire, at which several huge joints of meat were cooking for the robbers' supper, Sister Anne's strength gave way, and Leroux carried her to the fire, saying:

"Sit down there and warm yourself; the supper'll bring back your strength."

"What a damned fool you are, to talk to her as if she could hear you!"

"That's so, but I keep forgetting it."

"How do you know she's deaf, anyway?" said Franck; "perhaps she's making believe. She might be just dumb."

"Then someone must have cut her tongue out," said Leroux; "but anyone can see that she's got one like anybody else; so, as she can't speak, it must be because she's deaf. You fellows don't understand about that; but I've travelled in my time, I know more'n you do, and I know that deaf mutes are mute because they can't hear. All you've got to do is look at the woman; anybody can see that she don't hear a word we're saying."

In truth, Sister Anne, since she had entered the cabin, being completely prostrated by fatigue, pain, and fear, had seemed to be insensible to everything that was taking place. However, she heard every word that the brigands said; but, on learning that they believed her to be deaf, a secret presentiment warned her not to correct their error. If they felt sure that she could not hear them, they would not hesitate to discuss their plans before her; thus she would learn what she must fear or hope; and perhaps they might unwittingly suggest a means of escape. That ray of hope sustained the poor girl's courage, and she strove to conceal the emotion caused by the conversation of the cutthroats.

They had laid aside their arms, and while waiting for supper discoursed of their exploits. The dumb girl learned with dismay that she was among villains capable of any crime. But in the very excess of her despair she found a source of courage; and realizing at last the full extent of the perils which encompassed her, she felt that her only hope of escaping them was by craft and adroitness. If she alone were threatened with death, she would not fear it, but she wished to save the life of the being she carried within her. Mother-love has inspired many acts of heroism; it was that sentiment which sustained Sister Anne and gave her strength to endure her horrible situation.

Christine placed a table in the middle of the room, and covered it with food, bottles, and glasses; the robbers seated themselves about the table, and fell to with a sort of brutal satisfaction. Sister Anne remained in front of the fire. Leroux placed bread, wine, and roast meat before her; she thanked him with an inclination of the head, and forced herself to eat a little, in order to keep up her strength and to dissemble her terror.

"You see that woman?" said Leroux to his companions; "well, I'll bet she's as meek as a lamb; I'll do whatever I choose with her."

"Don't trust to looks," said Christine, as she joined the robbers at the table; "a woman can take a man in with those airs and graces; but faces are deceitful."

"Yours isn't, for you're the picture of Lucifer's sister!"

This jest made them all laugh, they filled and emptied their glasses with startling rapidity; the more they drank, the more they talked. The hideous Christine kept pace with them, and only Leroux, whose thoughts were fixed on Sister Anne, retained some show of reason.

"Where could this woman have come from?" queried one of the thieves; "she don't look as if she worked in the fields."

"Bah! it's some girl that's gone wrong; her lover's left her, and she's travelling about looking for him. That's the way with all the girls that listen to lovers!"

Sister Anne wiped away the tears that trembled on her eyelids, for her heart told her that the man was right.

"*Morgué!*" said Christine; "if I had a daughter, and she was unlucky enough to go wrong, I'd strangle her with my own hands."

"Hear that!" said Jacques; "it's a blasted shame that you haven't got some children; they'd be a handsome lot!"

"I don't care who the woman is," said Leroux; "she shan't leave this house.—And you, Christine, treat her well, or remember what I promised you!"

"I snap my fingers at your hussy. Look, you'd do much better to comfort her; I believe she's squalling now; go and give her a kiss."

"What about us?" said the other robbers, heated by the fumes of the wine; "we'll comfort her, too. Let's go and kiss the pretty mute; we must cheer her up a bit."

With that, Leroux's three comrades rose to go to Sister Anne; but he planted himself in front of them, and, taking a pistol in each hand, shouted to them in stentorian tones:

"Not another step, corbleu! or I'll kill you! That woman's mine; I found her on the road, when you were going by like fools without seeing her; I insisted on bringing her here; I swore I'd make her my wife; and, damn your eyes! the first man who touches her dies by my hand!"

This harangue checked the ardor of his fellows; they knew their companion, they knew that the act would follow close on the heels of the threat; so they contented themselves with laughing at Leroux's jealousy, while Sister Anne, frozen with terror by the scene, retreated into a corner of the room and fell on her knees before her captors.

Leroux went to her and tried to soothe her; but, fearing some new enterprise on the part of his companions, he led her into the other room, and, pointing to a wretched pallet, motioned to her to lie down upon it; then he went out, locking the door on her.

Sister Anne was alone in the little room, where there was no light except that which shone through the interstices of the partition, and which enabled her to make out her surroundings. Having made a pretence of lying down on the pallet, she soon rose and listened intently to what the robbers said. They continued to drink, and began to sing. If only she could escape while they were thus engaged! She felt along the wall until she came to a window; it must open into the forest, and the room was level with the ground, so that it would be easy to escape that way. But a moment later her hand came in contact with stout bars, which prevented her passing through. Poor girl! the pangs of disappointment were more cruel than all the sufferings she had endured hitherto. When she believed that she was on the point of recovering her liberty, to lose that last hope! to be unable to conceive any possible means of escaping

from that horrible den! It was like dying twice over. She fell, utterly disheartened, on the bed, and tried to stifle with her hands the groans that escaped from her breast.

XXIV

THE STRANGER

Thus the night passed. The robbers fell asleep in front of the fire; and, luckily for Sister Anne, their vile housekeeper did the same, and did not come to share the bed with the poor girl, who lay there all night, listening intently, quivering at the slightest sound in the next room, and praying to heaven to send her a rescuer.

At daybreak, the ruffians woke; they hastily concealed their weapons, then went forth into the forest to work as woodcutters. Before he left, Leroux went to Sister Anne, smiled at her, patted her under the chin, and muttered under his breath:

"To-night, my beauty, I'll say a couple of words to you."

The unhappy girl could not evade those disgusting caresses. Not without an effort did she restrain her indignation. But he went away at last, on the heels of his companions, bidding Christine to keep a sharp lookout on her prisoner.

When Sister Anne was alone with the robbers' female confederate, she was fain to endure the ill humor of that fury, who, being jealous of her presence there, tried to avenge herself by heaping all sorts of indignities upon her, being well assured that she could not complain of them. She laughed at her tears and gestures of entreaty, and the poor child felt that she would die if she did not escape soon from that horrible place.

At night, the four men returned; they ate a little, then took their weapons, Leroux alone excepted.

"Well! don't you propose to go out on the trail with us?" his companions asked him.

"No, no, not yet; I'll join you later; but I'm glad of the chance to say a word to my little mute."

As he said this, a bestial smile gleamed in his eyes, which were constantly fixed upon Sister Anne.

"Oh, yes! I understand," said Pierre; "we'll let it pass to-day, but you mustn't let love make you forget your duty."

"But if a well-lined post chaise should happen along," said Jacques, "we shan't be strong enough to attack."

"Bah! it ain't likely that there'll be one to-night; anyway, I tell you I'll join you soon."

"All right! all right! we'll get along without him; and if some rich prize does turn up, why, it will belong to us, and he won't get any of it."

"That's fair enough, mates."

The three men left the cabin, with a mocking glance at the dumb girl, who did not divine her impending peril, or the meaning of their smile. But when she saw that Leroux did not accompany them, she shuddered involuntarily and turned her eyes on Christine, as if she hoped for aid from her. But she, after glancing at her and at Leroux with the same mocking smile, went into the other room and slammed the door behind her.

Sister Anne started to follow her, but when she saw that it was impossible she fell back on the straw on which she had been sitting; she trembled convulsively; she was alone with the brigand.

Leroux seated himself in front of the fire and poked it; then lighted a pipe and smoked for several minutes, interrupting his smoking only to drink and to glance at Sister Anne. She trembled in every limb, in the corner where she had seated herself in order to be as far as possible from the robber, whose eyes, as he glanced at her, were inflamed with lust.

"Damned fine, ten thousand devils!" he cried, from time to time. "Fine eyes, fine teeth. She'll be even better looking in a few months, but damn the odds! And those clowns didn't see her! Oh! I won't give her up to you, my mates! We don't capture such prizes often."

These words added to the poor girl's alarm; it was increased tenfold when Leroux, who had not remained behind solely to drink and smoke, motioned to her to come to him. She pretended not to understand, and lowered her eyes. Thereupon he rose and walked toward her. The girl could hardly breathe. The brigand threw himself on the straw, beside her; she tried to rise and go away from him, but he detained her by force, passing his arm about her waist, and putting his repulsive face close to hers. The poor girl put her hand before her eyes, so that she could not see Leroux's.

"Ha! ha! I really believe she's trembling!" he exclaimed, with a roar of savage laughter. "I promise you, my dear, it don't become you to play the prude; anyone can see you haven't always been one."

With that, he put his face still nearer to hers, and tried to kiss her on the lips; but she, summoning all her courage, pushed him away, and, taking advantage of his surprise, sprang quickly to her feet and ran to the other end of the room, behind the table on which the robbers ate.

Leroux stared at her in amazement, but in a moment smiled again, saying:

"Oho! so you're balky, are you? Pretty good! Do you really think of resisting me?"

He rose and went toward her; with a well-directed kick, he sent the table to the other end of the room; then, seizing the girl, who struggled to no purpose, he took her in his arms and carried her back to the heap of straw. Once more she summoned all her courage, all her strength, to resist the brigand, who was determined to triumph over her, and who, after laughing scornfully at her defence, finally became furious at her obstinate resistance. This pitiful struggle lasted a long time, but the unfortunate girl felt that her strength was failing her; tears and sobs suffocated her, and she was on the point of becoming the victim of the villain who strove to force her, when of a sudden there was a succession of violent blows on the door of the cabin.

"The devil take anybody who comes just now!" cried Leroux. "Those fellows have done it on purpose; but I won't let 'em in."

At that moment, he heard a strange voice, which said:

"Open, for God's sake! save me! you shall be handsomely rewarded!"

It was not the voice of any of Leroux's companions. The robber was surprised beyond words. He listened in terror, while Sister Anne fell on her knees and thanked heaven for rescuing her.

Christine came hastily from the other room, and ran up to Leroux in evident perturbation.

"Somebody's knocking, do you hear? It's a strange voice."

"Morbleu! yes, I hear it well enough. Go and look out of the window, and try to see whether it's just one man."

Christine obeyed, and returned in a moment.

"Yes, he's alone," she said.

"Then let's let him in," said Leroux; "but we must be prudent till our friends return."

Having replaced the table in the middle of the room, Leroux resumed his pipe and his seat before the fire, while Christine opened the door of the hovel to the person who had knocked.

The stranger who appeared in the doorway was an elderly man, whose dress denoted wealth, and his manners high rank; but he was hatless, his clothes were in disorder, and the pallor of his cheeks betrayed agitation and fear. He rushed into the cabin, and did not seem to breathe freely until he saw the door closed and locked behind him.

"Pardon, pardon, good people!" he said, addressing Leroux and Christine; "I fear I have disturbed you and interrupted your rest; but by giving me shelter you save my life."

"How so, monsieur?" said Leroux, with an air of deep interest.

"I have just been attacked, my friends, yonder, on the road that crosses the forest I was in my carriage, with my servant, and the postilion was urging the horses. Suddenly a party of robbers came out of the forest; they rushed to the horses' heads and fired point-blank at the postilion; the poor fellow fell dead! Having stopped the carriage, they ordered me and my servant to alight, and one of them got in to search it; while he was inside, I took advantage of a moment when the villains had not their eyes on me, and plunged into the forest, selecting the darkest paths; I succeeded in getting thus far, when I saw this light and knocked at your door."

"You did well, monsieur," said Leroux, with a significant glance at Christine. "Sit you down before the fire, and warm yourself and get back your breath."

"Oh! you are too kind!" said the traveller, seating himself by the hearth; "but my unfortunate servant—what have they done to him? will he, too, be their victim?"

"Oh! that ain't likely. They probably let him go, after robbing him. They only killed the postilion to make him stop. I know their ways; there's so much robbery in this infernal forest!"

"I ought not to have taken that road; it was out of my way; but I wanted to see this region."

"Did the rascals rob you, monsieur?"

"No, thank heaven! they were going to do it, no doubt, when I got away. I have saved my wallet and my purse, at all events."

"You're very lucky, on my word," said Leroux, with another glance at Christine. "Well, monsieur, you must make the best of it, and try to forget all about it. We'll do our best for you; for you mustn't think of leaving here before daylight; that would be very imprudent."

"I have no intention of doing so, if you will allow me to remain."

"Allow you! why, with great pleasure! Come, Christine, be spry! prepare our guest's supper."

Throughout this conversation, Sister Anne had kept her eyes fixed on the stranger, whose face, although rather stern, aroused her interest and respect. She shuddered at the thought that he had escaped one danger only to fall into another. Knowing now the unmitigated villainy of the occupants of the hovel, she trembled for the traveller's life, and her gaze, fastened insistently upon him, seemed to be striving to warn him of the perils by which he was surrounded.

But the stranger had not yet noticed the dumb girl, who was seated on the floor in a corner of the room; hardly recovered from his agitation, he drew nearer to the fire, and rarely removed his eyes from it.

"It's lucky, on my word, that the robbers didn't follow you," said Leroux, offering the traveller a glass of wine.

"What saved me, I fancy, was this: at the moment I escaped, I heard a great clatter of hoofs——"

"Oho! you heard the sound of horses?" queried Leroux, uneasily.

"Yes; at least, I thought so. But I was so excited! It may have been other brigands, or the constables in pursuit of them."

"Yes, that's so; it might have been."

"I served in the army once, but I confess that I don't care for an encounter with robbers; against such hounds, courage is often of no avail. Besides, I had no weapons about me."

"Ah! you have no weapons?"

"No; my pistols were in the carriage, but they didn't give me time to take them."

Leroux seemed to reflect. Since the stranger had said that he had heard horses on the road, he was less tranquil in his mind.

"You are a woodcutter, I presume?" said the traveller.

"Yes, monsieur; I'm a woodcutter; and this is my wife," said Leroux, pointing to Christine, who was laying the table for supper.

"Aren't you at all afraid, here in the heart of this forest?"

"Why, what should we be afraid of? We're not rich enough to tempt robbers. Come, Christine, look alive; monsieur will want to sleep when he's had his supper."

"Oh! don't hurry her so."

The stranger, having recovered somewhat from his excitement, began to look about him with more attention; and as he scrutinized the different parts of the room, he at last observed Sister Anne seated on the heap of straw, with her eyes fixed upon his with an expression which made it impossible for him not to notice her. Taken by surprise, he gazed for some time with interest at the dumb girl's pale, worn features, and seemed puzzled by the strange way in which she looked at him.

"Who is that girl?" he asked Christine; "I didn't notice her before."

"That! oh! she don't amount to much," replied the tall woman, shortly.

"Isn't she your child?"

"No, monsieur," said Leroux; "she's an unfortunate deaf mute that I found in the forest; and we took her in from charity. She'll soon be a mother, and I took pity on her."

"That does you honor, monsieur; the poor thing is so young, and her face so sweet! Haven't you been able to find out where she came from, or her name?"

"How in the devil do you suppose one can find out anything from a deaf and dumb woman? However, it don't make much difference; she's pretty near an idiot, too, I think; but I'll keep her here."

When she heard this, Sister Anne rose and walked slowly toward the stranger, still gazing at him with an expression of interest blended with compassion.

"Well, well! what's she doing?" said Leroux; "the poor girl has surely lost her reason! Make her go into the other room, Christine; it's time she went to bed."

Christine pushed the dumb girl roughly toward the door of the rear room. Sister Anne left the stranger's presence with profound regret; she would have liked to keep him in sight, because she took the liveliest interest in his welfare; but she was forced to obey. She walked slowly toward the door, still looking at the stranger, who seemed touched by the intensity of her gaze and followed her with his eyes until the door closed upon her.

Christine went into the rear room with Sister Anne; she looked through the window, and seemed disturbed by the non-return of the robbers. The dumb girl lay down on the pallet, not to sleep, but to reflect upon the means of saving the stranger by warning him of the risk he ran if he remained in the cabin. How could she gain access to him, and how make herself understood? At that moment, Leroux entered the room and closed the door carefully; then he went up to Christine, and, thanks to their conviction that Sister Anne could not hear them, she was soon made acquainted with their plans.

"Well! can't you hear them coming?" asked Leroux.

"No; I can't hear anything."

"It's very strange! what can they be doing in the forest since that man got here? I don't feel easy in my mind; he said something about horses and constables. Suppose our friends are arrested!"

"The devil! would they sell us?"

"Hark ye! when this stranger's had his supper and gone to sleep, I'll go out and try to find out something. If the others are in the forest, I know where to find 'em. If they're taken or gone, we'll take advantage of the stranger's sleep to make way with him, and with what he has on him we'll do well to get out of danger ourselves by leaving the forest."

"That's a good idea; give him his supper, and let him go to sleep; and then, when you come back, we'll go to work. Meanwhile, I'll lie down and rest a bit."

"Yes, do; don't be afraid but what I'll wake you when I need you."

Leroux went back to the traveller, and the repulsive Christine threw herself on the bed, beside Sister Anne, who had to endure the close proximity of a creature whom she knew to be planning a murder with the most revolting deliberation. But the poor girl did not stir; she had overheard all the conversation of those monsters, she had not lost a word of their schemes, and she still hoped to save the stranger. A single fear oppressed her: that the three robbers would return; for then all would be lost; she would be compelled to witness the unfortunate man's death, or to die with him.

Christine was hardly on the bed when a prolonged snore indicated that she was asleep. Thereupon Sister Anne rose softly and crept to the partition, where she put her eye to a crack through which she could look into the other room.

The stranger was tranquilly eating his supper; Leroux strove to entertain him, but he constantly listened with marked disquietude for sounds out of doors, and seemed desirous that the traveller should go to bed at once. Sister Anne was able to observe the old man's features at her leisure; and the more she looked at him, the stronger grew her feeling of interest and attachment, which seemed not to be born solely of his perilous situation. At the slightest noise caused by the wind or by the falling of a dead branch, the girl shivered in mortal terror, fancying that it was the three brigands returning; whereas, on the contrary, Leroux's face would assume a look of satisfaction, as he ran and listened at the door, hoping to hear his confederates' voices.

"Are you expecting company?" inquired the stranger.

"No, monsieur, no; it's the fear of robbers that makes me keep my ears open; but I'm beginning to think they haven't followed you; so you can go to sleep quietly."

"I'll lie down till daybreak; then you will be good enough to guide me to the nearest village."

"Yes, monsieur, with pleasure; but you can sleep comfortably; it's a long while to daybreak. This is the only bed I can offer you—fresh straw; I'm sorry not to be able to give you anything better, but we're pretty poor!"

"Oh! I shall be very comfortable; don't worry at all about me."

As he spoke, the stranger lay down on the straw and tried to sleep; while Leroux stood before the fire, turning his head now and again to see if his guest had fallen asleep. The dumb girl, her eye still glued to the crack in the partition, did not lose either of them from sight, and prayed fervently that Christine might not wake.

At last, the traveller seemed to doze, and Leroux went to fetch his weapons from the cellar, the opening to which was covered by a plank and concealed by a heap of straw. Sister Anne shuddered; suppose the villain proposed to murder the old man at once! But, no; having replaced the board, he stole softly from the cabin, muttering: "I'll go to the usual place; and if they ain't there, I'll come right back."

He opened the door without a sound, and disappeared. The time to act had come; the dumb girl summoned all her courage, and stole into the other room, walking on tiptoe for fear of waking Christine; then she locked the door securely, to prevent her from coming out in case she should wake. The room in which the stranger lay asleep was lighted only by the fire on the hearth. Sister Anne went to him, grasped his arm, and squeezed it with all her force. The old man woke, and was surprised to see her bending over him with an expression of the most intense and painful

anxiety on her face. He was about to speak, but she hastily placed a finger on his lips, and her eyes, as she glanced about in terror, bade him keep perfectly still. He rose and nervously awaited an explanation of this mysterious scene.

Sister Anne ran to the cellar, succeeded in raising the opening, took a blazing brand from the fire, and, motioning to the traveller to come near, showed him the interior, where there were weapons and garments of all sorts, the blood with which they were covered sufficiently attesting the method by which the robbers had come into possession of them. The stranger shuddered.

"Great God!" he said; "am I in a den of thieves?"

The girl nodded her head, then ran to the pile of straw, and indicated by signs that they intended to return and murder him while he slept.

The stranger at once took possession of a pair of pistols which he found near the entrance to the cellar.

"At all events, I will sell my life dearly," he said. "But you, poor woman, what are you to do?"

Sister Anne interrupted him by running to the door of the cabin, throwing it open, and making signs that he must fly at once and that she would go with him. The stranger took her hand, and they left the house. At that moment, Christine, hearing a noise, rose and tried to leave her room; when she found that she was locked in, she began to shriek and call Leroux, and, running to the window, saw the dumb girl and the stranger just disappearing in the forest.

"Damnation! they've got away!" cried Christine, trying to remove the bars at the window.

The old man pointed one of his pistols at her; but Sister Anne stopped him, making him understand that the report would attract the brigands. Her companion saw that she was right; so they fled, and, leaving the vile creature hurling curses at them, they were soon far away from the robbers' lair.

After wandering about the forest more than an hour, trembling at the slightest sound, lest they should fall in with Leroux and his confederates, the fugitives heard the steps of several horses. That could be nothing but the constabulary in search of the brigands. The dumb girl and the stranger started in the direction of the sound. Soon a man passed them, running at full speed; it was Leroux, with a horseman in pursuit. Another man on horseback followed, and, when he saw Sister Anne's companion, cried: "Here's my master! Thank heaven, the scoundrels didn't kill him!"

The traveller pointed out to the officers the abode of the brigands; then, mounting a horse that his servant was leading, he took the dumb girl *en croupe* who had saved his life, and they rode rapidly out of the forest.

The traveller did not cease to express his gratitude to his liberatress, while she thanked God that she was no longer in the power of the robbers.

The servant told his master that, a few moments after he had fled into the forest, the constables appeared, and the outlaws thought of nothing but escape; but two of them were overtaken, and were killed while resisting capture. Thereupon, taking the horses, which had already been unhitched from the chaise, the servant had mounted one and joined the constables who were searching the forest, hoping to find his master.

A danger passed is soon forgotten. They arrived at a large village, and the travellers knocked at the door of a farmhouse, where they were made welcome and received every attention. The dumb girl was especially in need of speedy assistance. The horrible situation in which she had been placed for two days, the danger she had barely escaped, the superhuman effort she had made during that ghastly night—all these things together had been too much for the unfortunate child, who was hardly able to stand erect. They put her in a warm bed; the people at the farm, when they learned of her condition and of what she had done to save the aged traveller, manifested the most sympathetic interest in her, and her companion would not go to bed until he was certain that everything possible had been done for his liberatress.

The next day, the carriage, which had been found on the road, was brought to the farm, and there was nothing to prevent the stranger from continuing his journey; but Sister Anne was in a high fever, and he was unwilling to leave her until he was assured that her life was in no danger. The best physician in the neighborhood was summoned; the stranger spent money lavishly to provide her with everything that her condition demanded. He passed a large part of the day in her room, adding his attentions to those of the farmer's family.

Sister Anne was conscious of all that he did for her, and her heart was deeply touched. Despite her weakness and suffering, she seized his hand and pressed it gratefully.

"Poor woman!" said the stranger, profoundly affected; "I will not leave you until my mind is at rest concerning your life. I would have liked to take you to your destination, in my carriage. What can I do for you? You can hear me, I see; so that you are deprived of the power of speech only. Do you know how to write?"

Sister Anne shook her head; then she seemed suddenly to remember something, and made a movement with her hand as if she were trying to form letters. The old man handed her a pen, but she could not use it; then he gave her a piece of chalk; whereupon she sat up in bed, leaned over a table that stood beside it, and succeeded, not without a mighty effort, in writing the name *Frédéric* with the chalk. That done, she pointed to it and sadly shook her head, as if to say:

"That is all I know."

The old man seemed greatly surprised when he read the name she had written on the table. He reflected a moment, then looked at Sister Anne with renewed interest; but it seemed to her that the expression of his eyes was less gentle, that there was in it a touch of sternness which she could not define.

"And your own name," he said; "can't you write that?"

Sister Anne shook her head, and again wrote the name *Frédéric*.

The traveller seemed extremely preoccupied all the rest of the day, and whenever his eyes rested on the dumb girl he fell into a profound reverie. For five days, Sister Anne's condition was such that her life was in danger, and the old man did not leave the farm. At the end of that time there was a perceptible improvement; the physician promised that she would recover, but said that she would be very weak for a long time, and that it would be imprudent in the extreme for her to leave the farm before her lying-in.

Sister Anne's eyes filled with tears when she was told of this; she was afraid of being a burden to the kind-hearted folk who had taken her in; but the stranger lost no time in pacifying and consoling her.

"I have provided for everything," he said; "wait here until your health is fully restored, and, if nothing calls you

elsewhere, remain permanently with these good people; they love you, and you will be happy here."

But Sister Anne sadly shook her head, and motioned with her hand that she must go a long, long way. The stranger, who had already given twenty-five louis to the villagers for their past and future care of the young woman, put a purse filled with gold in his rescuer's hands. She would fain have refused it, and was sadly at a loss to express her gratitude.

"You owe me nothing, my child," he said; "remember that you saved my life, and that I shall owe you gratitude as long as I live. Take this paper too; my name and address are written on it. If you are ever in difficulty, let me know, and always count on my protection."

Sister Anne took the paper and placed it in the purse he had given her. He, after gazing at her for some moments with evident emotion, kissed her on the forehead, then, tearing himself away from her demonstrations of gratitude, entered his carriage and drove away, leaving at the farm abundant tokens of his generosity.

After he had gone, Sister Anne was melancholy and depressed for a long while. Her heart went out to that stranger; in her mind, his image had taken its place beside Frédéric's; but the loving friendship she felt for the one in no wise impaired her ardent love for the other.

XXV

THE MARRIAGE TAKES PLACE

Frédéric did not pass a day without seeing Constance; since the lovers had mutually avowed their love, that sentiment seemed to grow stronger hourly in both their hearts. Mademoiselle de Valmont loved with the unrestrained ardor of a heart that no longer seeks to conceal its feelings. She was proud of Frédéric's love for her, and her happiness consisted in returning it.

Frédéric, even more passionate and impulsive, yielded to the sentiment that swept him off his feet; but, while he loved as dearly, he could not be so happy; he needed to forget himself, to banish recollections which disturbed his bliss. Like those persons who never look behind, for fear of seeing something to frighten them, Frédéric tried to drive away the thoughts that carried him back to a still recent period. He desired to think solely of Constance, he knew that thenceforth she ought to prevail over all other women; of what use, then, was an occasional sigh which would bring no comfort to her whom he had abandoned? A man may argue thus, but, none the less, even in the very bosom of happiness, there is something in the bottom of his heart that reproves him for the wrong he has done—unless, indeed, he has no heart, and there are many people in whom we should seek for it in vain.

The Comte de Montreville had been absent a fortnight. Frédéric was not certain as to the purpose of his father's journey, although he suspected it; but he had no desire to take advantage of his absence to go away himself. Could he leave Constance for a single day? Although she had set his mind at rest as to the marriage that had frightened him, Frédéric was not altogether satisfied. He begged his betrothed to question her uncle on that subject. Constance dared not mention it to the general; but at last, vanquished by Frédéric's entreaties, she made up her mind to question him, and one morning she went to him in his study.

"Uncle," she began, blushing, and lowering her eyes, "I have been told that you have been making plans for me."

The general smiled as he looked at her, then tried to assume a serious tone, with which, however, his expression did not harmonize.

"Who told you, mademoiselle, that I had made plans concerning you?"

"Monsieur Frédéric, uncle, who learned it from his father."

"The devil! so Monsieur Frédéric interests himself in it, does he? What might these plans be, mademoiselle?"

"You should know better than I, uncle."

"Gad! that's true, you're right. Well, yes, I have a plan of my own."

"For my future, uncle?" asked Constance, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, for your marriage, in fact."

"Marriage! can it be possible? Oh! uncle——"

And the sweet girl looked up at the general, with appealing eyes already filled with tears.

"Come, come, calm yourself, morbleu!" exclaimed the general, taking her hand. "Here you are up in arms, as if I proposed to make you unhappy. Don't you want to marry?"

"Oh! I don't say that, uncle."

"Well, then, why this terror when I tell you that I think of giving you a husband?"

"Why, because I want—I don't want——"

"Because you want and don't want! Deuce take it! why can't a woman ever say what she means! Why don't you tell me at once that you don't want to marry anyone but Frédéric?"

"Oh! uncle, did you know——"

"I should have to be as blind as a bat not to know that; and this fine gentleman, who presumes to love my niece—and who sighs and is melancholy and tears his hair, instead of just coming to me and asking for her hand——"

"Oh! my dear uncle—are you really willing?"

"Parbleu! am I in the habit of not being willing to do anything you want?"

"But this marriage with some colonel?"

"That was a fable invented by my old friend—I don't quite know why; but he came to me and begged me to let him say that; I couldn't refuse to let him do as he chose, although I don't understand all this mystery; for it seems to me that when two young people love each other and are suited to each other, there's no need of marching and countermarching to marry them. But, no matter; Montreville has his tactics, and he's bound to follow them. Don't think of telling Frédéric this, for his father would be angry with me; but when he comes back, which will be soon, I'll put an end to all this prevarication, and give you to your lover, or he'll end by making himself ill with his sighing."

Constance kissed her uncle and left him; the certainty of happiness made her more beautiful than ever. Frédéric soon returned, and inquired anxiously what her uncle had said to her. Constance tried to dissemble her joy; the most loving woman is not sorry to tease her lover a little now and then, for in his torments she sees fresh proofs of his love.

"Well!" said Frédéric, impatiently; "why don't you answer me? You have spoken to your uncle about this proposed marriage—has he formed such a plan?"

"Why, yes; he is thinking of marrying me."

"Then I was right!" cried the young man, with an agitation that made Constance tremble; "he is thinking of it; my father told me the truth. But you shall not be stolen from my love——"

"My dear, don't get excited."

"How can I help it, when you tell me that you are to be married? Constance, if your uncle is a tyrant, I will carry you off. We will fly together to the ends of the earth! You, you alone, will suffice for my happiness! This very night, if you agree, we will start. What, mademoiselle, you laugh at sight of my despair!"

"Oh! Frédéric, what a hot-headed boy you are!"

"Ah! mademoiselle is pleased to give me lessons in self-restraint! It seems to me that this projected marriage doesn't disturb you much. Is this how you love me?"

"Naughty boy! what a savage reproof! Ah! my dear, because my love is more placid than yours, don't think that it is less strong and deep."

"But this marriage that your uncle has in mind?"

"Suppose it were you, monsieur, to whom he thinks of marrying me?"

"Me!"

Frédéric's features lightened up with a new expression; and Constance put her finger on his lips, saying:

"Hush! not a word, my dear; uncle forbade me to speak—but how can I let you suffer long?"

"What, Constance, can it really be true? Oh! what bliss! your uncle is the best of men! Let me go and throw myself at his feet!"

"No, indeed! do you want him to scold me? shall I never be able to make you amenable to reason? Sit down here, monsieur, by my side."

"But when may I tell him that I love you?"

"When your father returns—he won't be away much longer, I am sure. Do you know whether he went very far?"

"Why—no—I don't think so; I am not certain."

"Well, my dear, now you are pensive."

"No, indeed I'm not!"

"So long as we were not certain of our happiness, I overlooked these dreamy airs, these fits of melancholy that seize you sometimes when you are with me; but understand, monsieur, that I won't have any more of such nonsense. You have no trouble, dear, no secret sorrow, that you can't confide to Constance, have you?"

"Of course not!"

"Promise me that you will tell me everything, absolutely everything; that I shall have your entire confidence. Ought a husband and wife to conceal anything from each other?"

"Yes, Constance, I promise; I will tell you all my thoughts."

Frédéric was not absolutely truthful at that moment, but his falsehood was excusable, for his entire confidence just then would not have afforded great pleasure to Constance, who was convinced that her lover thought of no one but her, and who, despite her tranquil air, her gentleness, and her confidence, loved Frédéric too ardently not to be susceptible to jealousy, a sentiment which, in women, is almost always inseparably connected with love.

The Comte de Montreville returned to Paris after an absence of nearly a month. Under any other circumstances, Frédéric would have been surprised at the length of a journey which might have been completed in a fortnight, but in Constance's company he had given little thought to it. When he saw his father again, however, all his memories of Dauphiné rushed back into his mind; he was embarrassed in his presence, longing to question him, but shrinking from it.

The count himself did not seem the same as before his departure; he was often pensive and abstracted, as if his thoughts were engrossed by some subject; and when he looked at his son, he, too, seemed to desire and dread an explanation. At last, Frédéric ventured to question him, and, contrary to his expectation, his father replied with no trace of the stern, cold manner which he was wont to assume on approaching that subject.

"Have you been in Dauphiné?" said Frédéric; "did you go to Vizille?"

"Yes," said the count; "I visited the neighborhood of that village, including the wood where you lived so long."

"And did you see that—girl?"

"No, I did not see her; she had left her cabin only a few days before, and there was nobody there but an old shepherd."

"What! Sister Anne not at her old home? Is it possible? And what of Marguerite?"

"The old woman died some months ago."

"And Sister Anne has gone away? Poor child! what can have become of her? In her plight, how could she find her way, make herself understood? Ah! unfortunate girl!"

"What do you mean?" cried the count, gazing at his son with an expression of the most intense interest; "what is this girl's plight, which makes her such an object of pity? Answer me, Frédéric!"

"When she was seven years old, father, Sister Anne lost the power of speech; a shocking calamity and a horrible fright deprived the poor child of the possibility of making herself understood."

"Great God!" said the count, thunderstruck by what his son had said; "it is she! I had divined it!"

But Frédéric did not hear his father's last words. He was engrossed by the thought of Sister Anne, fancying that he saw her wandering through the woods and fields, helpless and without shelter, turned away from most public-

houses, and everywhere exposed to want and misfortune. He reflected that that was all his work, that, if he had not tried to arouse in her heart a violent passion, she would have lived quietly in her solitude, with no thirst for pleasures of which she knew nothing, and with no dreams of happiness and of a different existence. At that moment, Frédéric was overwhelmed by remorse, and he reproached himself bitterly for his conduct to a woman of whom he was no longer enamored, but who was still dear to him.

For a long time, the count and his son were buried in thought. The count broke the silence at last, saying in a voice that shook with emotion:

"Have no concern as to that young woman's present lot. I have found her."

"You have found her, father? is it possible?"

"Yes; on a farm near Grenoble. I left her there, and I provided against her ever being in want."

"But how did you find her? You could not recognize her."

"Her misfortune, her youth—she interested me deeply; something told me that she was the person I sought, and I have no doubt of it now, since you have told me that she is dumb. I tell you again that you need not be alarmed concerning her future; I left her with excellent people, who are fond of her, and she will be very comfortable there; moreover, I shall not fail to have an eye to her welfare."

The count was careful not to mention his adventure in the forest and his indebtedness to Sister Anne; he was afraid that Frédéric's love would blaze up anew if he should learn that she had saved his father's life. He was especially solicitous that Frédéric should not know that the dumb girl was on the point of becoming a mother; that intelligence might disarrange the plans he had formed. For the count, although he was interested now in Sister Anne, and proposed to take care of her and her child, was none the less desirous for his son's marriage to his old friend's niece; and to that end he considered it most essential to conceal everything relating to the unhappy mute.

On arriving in Paris, he had expressly forbidden his servant to mention the adventure in the forest or the young woman they had left at the farm.

His father's assurance that Sister Anne was living among kindly people, and was amply provided against want, allayed Frédéric's remorse. That sentiment rarely lasts long in love, and the new passion is always at hand to dispel the memories of the old one. By Constance's side the young man entirely forgot the poor maid of the woods; and while renewing his oaths and protestations of love to Constance, he lost the memory of those he had laid at another woman's feet.

The Comte de Montreville's return was soon to be followed by the marriage of the young people. Frédéric longed for it, Constance hoped for it, and the general made no objection, because he did not believe in making lovers sigh too long.

Thus everybody was agreed; there was no obstacle to delay their happiness. The wedding day was fixed. The general vowed that he would dance at his niece's wedding, although he had never danced in his life; the count was anxious to greet Constance by the sweet name of daughter, and the lovers—oh! you know what their desires were; it may be guessed, but must not be said.

Engrossed by his approaching happiness, Frédéric was rarely disturbed by the memories which brought a sad expression to his face; if by chance a sigh escaped him, a glance from Constance speedily put to flight the thoughts of other times. Constance was so sweet-tempered, and the near approach of happiness made her so beautiful, that it was impossible not to adore her.

At last the day arrived which was to witness the union of Frédéric and Constance. The Comte de Montreville was so overjoyed that he allowed his son to invite everyone he chose. Frédéric knew no better friend than Dubourg, who, with all his follies, had often given him proofs of a genuine attachment. Moreover, since Dubourg had inherited his aunt's property, he had become much more sensible. To be sure, he was always hard up about the middle of the month, but he had not pledged his income, and he had taken up dominoes instead of écarté, that being a game at which one gets much less excited.

Ménard was not forgotten, either. The worthy man was much attached to Frédéric; he had been a little too indulgent on the journey, but the count had forgiven that; moreover, he had always acted with the best intentions. As for his fondness for the table, that is often considered in society an estimable quality.

Constance was dressed with taste and elegance; but one could pay no heed to her toilet, in presence of her beauty and her charms; for happiness, which embellishes everything, adds to the fascination of a pretty face. The men can only admire that; as for the women, they see at a glance every detail of the costume, and can, at need, tell us how every pin was put in, and how many pleats there were in the gown, in front and behind; our perspicacity will never go so far as that.

Frédéric was radiant with love; he did not lose sight of Constance, which is the surest means of having no unpleasant recollections. Frédéric was very comely, too; his face was noble and winning; and if the men admired Constance, the women were not inclined to pity her for marrying Frédéric.

The general and the count felt the keenest satisfaction in the union of their children. In his joy, Monsieur de Valmont was more hilarious and effusive than the Comte de Montreville; but the latter smiled benignly upon everybody, and, for the first time, embraced his son tenderly.

Monsieur Ménard was dressed with care and maintained a very sedate bearing until the dinner. As for Dubourg, he was overjoyed to be invited to his friend's wedding, and, as he desired to obtain the count's good graces, he assumed throughout the day such a dignified air, that he looked as if he had a fit of the *spleen*; and he tried so hard to be staid and respectable, that he might well have been taken for a man of sixty. Whenever the count approached him, he discoursed upon the illusive pleasures of the world, of the bliss of retirement, and of the joys that await the just man after death. He carried it so far, that the general said to Frédéric:

"What a devil of a fellow your friend Dubourg is! Does he pass his time in graveyards? I have been to him once or twice to talk, and he at once quotes a passage from Young's *Night Thoughts* or Massillon's *Petit Carême*. He's a very cheerful guest for a wedding party."

Frédéric went to Dubourg and urged him to act as he naturally would; but, convinced that his conversation, his tone, and his bearing delighted Monsieur de Montreville, it was impossible to induce Dubourg to change them.

A magnificent dinner was served at the Hôtel de Montreville, whence the young people were to return in the

evening to the general's house, where they were to live. As the general was often absent, he required only a small suite, and gave up three-fourths of the house to the newly married pair.

Marriages in the first society have not the hilarity of bourgeois marriages; which fact is some compensation to the bourgeoisie for not belonging to the first society. However, the repast was rather merry in a mild way. Monsieur Ménard devoted himself to the good cheer, as he did at Monsieur Chambertin's; but Dubourg ate little; he refused almost every dish, because he thought it much more *comme il faut*. Nor was it possible to induce him to accept a glass of champagne or liqueur.

"I never take it," he said, with imperturbable phlegm.

The Comte de Montreville stared at him in amazement, while Ménard, who sat next to him, said again and again:

"You used to take it, though; I've seen you take it often enough! Say you're sick, and I'll believe you."

"Your friend is wonderfully sober," said the general to Frédéric; "you have brought us an anchorite."

After the dinner, dancing engaged the attention of the guests for the rest of the evening. The new husband and wife indulged in that pastime, which enabled them to wait with more patience for the greater pleasures to come; dancing is always essential to bring a wedding party to a cheerful termination.

But Dubourg did not dance; he walked stiffly through the salons, holding his head as if he had a stiff neck, and never stopping near an écarté table.

"Don't you play, Monsieur Dubourg?" asked the count, with a smile.

"No, monsieur le comte; I have altogether renounced all games for money; I care for nothing but chess; that is the only sensible game, and the only one suited to me."

"Don't you dance, either?"

"Never; I care for nothing but the minuet, which is a sedate and dignified dance. It's a great pity that it isn't danced nowadays."

"The deuce! Monsieur Dubourg, you are tremendously changed. You used to be a little giddy, I think."

"Ah! monsieur le comte, other times, other cares; with advancing years, one grows wiser."

"Advancing years! why, it's not one year yet since you played Hippolyte, and would have made poor Ménard play Thésée."

"Oh! monsieur le comte, a very great revolution has taken place in me since then. I care for nothing now but study and science—science above all things; for, as Cato says: *Sine doctrina vita est quasi mortis imago*."

The count walked away with a smile on his face, and Dubourg was convinced that he was greatly pleased with him. The day was at an end. Ménard returned to his tiny lodging, reviewing in his mind all the delicious dishes he had eaten. Dubourg was no sooner outside the house than he began to jump and run like a schoolboy who is no longer under the master's eye. Frédéric and Constance were happy. Annoying witnesses were no longer present to curb the transports of their affection. Company is a burden to lovers, and they await impatiently solitude and mystery. At last, Frédéric was permitted to take his wife away; on the wedding night, a husband is a lover who abducts his mistress.

XXVI

SISTER ANNE BECOMES A MOTHER.—HER LONG STAY AT THE FARM

Sister Anne was still at the farmhouse where the Comte de Montreville left her; for it is no longer a secret to us that the stranger whom she had rescued from the robbers' hovel was Frédéric's father, then returning from Vizille, where he had been to inquire concerning the fate of the girl whom his son had abandoned. He had found no one in the cabin in the woods but the old shepherd, who did not know in what direction Sister Anne had gone. To all the count's questions, he could make no other answer than:

"She's gone away; she insisted on going; I don't know where she's gone."

On leaving the woods, the count had visited the outskirts of Grenoble, and was on his way back to Lyon when his carriage was stopped in the forest.

Sister Anne, despite her longing to continue her journey, realized that she was in no condition to travel; the moment of her delivery was drawing near, when she could press to her heart the fruit of her love. That thought diminished her suffering to some extent; the hope of seeing her child diverted her thoughts at times from her troubles, and everyone at the farm strove to restore her peace of mind and to bring back a smile to her lips. They were worthy people, who took the most affectionate interest in the poor girl. Even without recompense, they would have been no less kind to her; but money does no harm, and the sum the Comte de Montreville had given them, when he requested them to continue to take care of Sister Anne, was considerable, according to their ideas.

The dumb girl, realizing that her stay among them must be long, offered them the purse that the old gentleman had given her just before he went away; but they would take nothing from her.

"Keep the money," said the farmer's wife; "keep it, my child; that excellent man you saved from the robbers paid for everything; in fact, he paid us too much. We didn't need that to be kind to you; you're so pretty and sweet and unfortunate! Poor little woman! I can make a guess at your situation. Some man abused your innocence and inexperience; he deceived you, and then dropped you! That's the story of most young girls who haven't got any father and mother to protect 'em from the snares those fine fellows lay for 'em. Don't cry, my child; I'm a long way from blaming you; you're less to blame than other women! But the man who deserted you's the one as ought to be punished. The idea of leaving you, in the condition you're in! he must be a hard-hearted wretch!"

When she heard that, Sister Anne made a hasty gesture as if to prevent the farmer's wife from saying any more; she put her finger on her lips and shook her head vigorously, evidently to deny what the woman had said.

"Well, well!" said the farmer's wife; "she don't want me to speak ill of him! she still loves him! That's just like a woman: always ready to make excuses for the man that does 'em the most harm. But don't you be worried about the

future, my child; stay with us; we'll love you like our own daughter and take good care of you. You're out of reach of want forever here."

Sister Anne pressed her hand affectionately, but her eyes refused to make a promise which her heart had no intention of keeping. Frédéric was still supreme in that ardent heart, and the girl did not renounce the hope of finding him.

A short time after the stranger's departure, Sister Anne, remembering that he had given her a paper, took it from the purse and carried it to the farmer's wife, being anxious to know what was written on it. The woman read: *Comte de Montreville*, *Rue de Provence*, *Paris*. There was nothing else on the paper, and Sister Anne had no suspicion that it was Frédéric's father's name, for her lover had never mentioned his family name in her presence. But she was overjoyed when the farmer's wife read *Paris;* she tried to make her understand that that was where she wanted to go; then she carefully replaced the paper in the purse.

"That's the gentleman's address," said her hostess; "I tell you, he ain't like most men; he's grateful, and he won't ever forget what you did for him. I'm sure he'd give you a kind reception, if you should go to Paris; but what would you do in that big city? Take my advice, my child, and stay with us; you'll be happier here."

Sister Anne was overjoyed to possess that paper with the name of the city to which she meant to go some day. With it, she could make herself understood, and she thanked heaven for that gift, which would enable her to find that wonderful Paris where she hoped to find her lover as well.

After she had been two months at the farm, Sister Anne brought a son into the world. With what delirious joy did she contemplate her child! with what transports did she listen to his first cries! One must have been a mother to understand the perfect bliss of that moment. Already she fancied that she could recognize Frédéric's features in her child's; she gazed at him incessantly and covered him with kisses; her son was never out of her arms; weak as she was, she nursed him herself. The farmer's wife did not try to thwart her desire, for it is a source of ever-recurring delight to a mother, and Sister Anne seemed to enjoy it more keenly than another. She was so proud and happy when she held her child to her breast, that she forgot her sorrows for the moment. She did not forget Frédéric, but her heart was no longer oppressed by sombre melancholy; the sight of her child often brought a smile to her lips; she felt that for her son a mother can endure everything.

Some weeks after her confinement, Sister Anne manifested a wish to resume her journey; but the good people at the farm remonstrated with her.

"Can you think of such a thing," said the farmer's wife, "as starting on a journey, with a child at the breast? Remember that you don't expose your own life only, but his too. Do you suppose that if you set out in search of new dangers and fatigue, he'll be able to get nourishment from your breast? No, it isn't possible; the child will soon get sick and die, if you persist in your plan."

Endanger her son's life! that thought made the dumb girl shudder. There was no sacrifice she would not make for her child; it was a very great one to postpone her journey; but what the farmer's wife had said instantly decided her to remain at the farm until her son could no longer feel the effects of his mother's trials and sorrows.

"Good, good! you are going to stay," said the good woman, reading in Sister Anne's eyes that she would not insist. "That's right, my child; you are sensible. In a year, or a year and a half, if your son is strong enough, then we'll see; but till then you mustn't think of travelling."

Sister Anne had made up her mind, and, although she still thought of Frédéric, she devoted her whole attention to her child. As the result of her unremitting care, she had the joy of seeing him grow larger and stronger every day; his cheeks glowed with health, his lips wore a sweet smile, and his little arms seemed to embrace with gratitude her who had given him life.

By writing before her hosts the name of Frédéric, Sister Anne had succeeded in making them understand that this was the name she wished to give her son. They called him by no other name, and the young mother felt a fresh thrill of joy every time that that name fell upon her ear; how much greater her joy would be when her child should answer to it!

She had been at the farm six months, when a courier arrived with a package containing twenty-five louis and a note from the Comte de Montreville to the farmer and his wife. In the note, he once more commended the young woman to their care, and informed them that he would send them a like sum for her every six months.

The farmer's wife lost no time in telling Sister Anne what Monsieur de Montreville had done for her, and the poor girl's eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

"What an excellent man!" said the farmer's wife. "I was sure he wouldn't forget you. *Morgué!* I tell you once more, if the fancy to go to Paris should take you again by and by, you must go to this gentleman's house right away. *Dame!* my child, he's a count, you see, a nobleman, a powerful man. He seems to be very rich, too; and if your seducer's in Paris, he'll soon find him for you; and perhaps he'll give him such good advice that he'll induce him not to leave you again."

Sister Anne signified that she agreed with the farmer's wife, and that she would do all that she suggested. Then she compelled her to accept the money sent by the count, and was much happier in the thought that she was not a burden to the good people who treated her so kindly.

The weeks and months passed. Sister Anne fairly idolized her son. He filled the place of all that she had lost; in him, she saw once more the brother who was so dear to her, and whose death caused her such a fatal shock; she saw Frédéric too; his features were reproduced in his son's. She sought to anticipate the child's slightest desires; she watched his glance, his smile; and her touching devotion made the time since she had seen her lover, and that which was still to pass before she could hope to see him again, seem less long to her.

Little Frédéric promised to have the beauty and the sweet temper of her who gave him life; he had already learned to lisp that name which is so sweet to a mother's ear, and Sister Anne realized how essential it was that he should not be deprived of the care and thought that were so freely bestowed on him at the farm. If he knew no one but her, the poor child would never speak; for speech is an art in which a teacher is necessary.

The count sent a second remittance at the time he had fixed. His messenger inquired concerning the dumb girl's condition and the health of her child, and urged Sister Anne not to leave the farm, where she led a peaceful life and could devote all her care to her son.

But Sister Anne did not renounce her desire to go to Paris. Despite the remonstrances of the farmer's wife, she was determined to resort to every means of finding Frédéric. Her love for her son did not lessen her regret at her separation from her lover; on the contrary, it seemed that, as she contemplated the child's beauty, she felt a most intense longing to present him to his father.

"If he should see him," she thought, "could he help loving him? No; and then he would not dream of parting from me again."

Little Frédéric was twenty months old. He had long since ceased to receive nourishment at his mother's breast. He was beginning to take his first steps; every day he walked more steadily. Sister Anne guided him and held him up; she watched the growth of his strength and his faculties. Like the gardener, who observes the changes that the night has wrought in his young plants, a mother observes each day with delight the changes that denote her child's progress.

Being at ease in her mind concerning the boy's health, and ensured against want by the sum the count had given her when he went away; moreover, having no doubt that on her arrival in Paris she would find in him a protector and a friend—Sister Anne determined to undertake the journey, and one morning she showed the farmer's wife the paper the count had left with her. That was to announce her purpose.

Again her hosts tried to induce her to change her resolution, but this time Sister Anne was immovable; she was determined to leave them and go to Paris; her heart told her that she would find Frédéric there.

"Why do you take your child?" said the farmer's wife; "leave him with us; you know how dearly we love him."

But Sister Anne could not comprehend a mother's parting from her child for a single instant; she pressed him to her heart, and signified that she would never leave him.

"At least," said the good woman, "as you're bent on going to Paris, you won't go on foot, like a beggar. I'll take you in my wagon to Lyon, and there I'll put you into a diligence that will take you and your child to the end of your journey. When you get there, just show the address you've got, and they'll show you the way to the Comte de Montreville's. That gentleman won't turn you away; and when you want to come back to us, he'll find a way to send you back."

Sister Anne expressed as best she could her gratitude for all the kindness she had received. The journey being determined on, they turned their attention to the preparations. The villagers bought the young mother linen and clothes and everything that her son needed; they even tried to force money on her; but her purse contained fifty louis; that seemed an enormous sum to her, and much more than sufficient to live on for an indefinite time in Paris, even if the Comte de Montreville should not help her. She refused to accept any more, and the clothes in which she was dressed seemed magnificent to her in comparison with those she had worn in her woods. Her heart throbbed joyfully when she looked at her simple and tasteful costume, which was that of a young farmer's wife of Dauphiné.

"He'll think me prettier than before," she thought; "perhaps he'll love me more."

All the preparations were completed; the farmer's wife had her horse hitched to the wagon, in which she took her place beside Sister Anne, who held her son in her lap. They started early in the morning, and arrived at Lyon the same evening. The farmer's wife engaged a seat for the young mother in the diligence which was to start for Paris the next day, and recommended her to the conductor, so that he would keep an eye on her during the journey.

The hour for their departure arrived: not without abundant tears did the kind-hearted peasant part from the dumb girl and little Frédéric.

"You would leave us, my child," she said; "I'm very much afraid you're making a mistake. You're going to an enormous city. People there won't be so much interested in you as the folks in our village are. But don't forget us. Send us word how you're getting along, through Monsieur de Montreville, who seems to be very fond of you; and if the time should ever come when you're miserable and unhappy, why, come right back to us; you'll always be as welcome as a child of our own."

Sister Anne kissed the good woman affectionately; then, with her son in her arms, she entered the carriage that was to take her to Paris.

XXVII

THE DILIGENCE.—SISTER ANNE IN PARIS

A young woman who has never been away from her cabin in the woods until she is sixteen years of age, whose condition makes her peculiarly unfamiliar with the world and its customs, must experience countless novel sensations when she finds herself for the first time surrounded by strangers in one of those rolling houses that bear us through city and country.

Such was the case with Sister Anne, who was not eighteen and a half when she left Lyon for Paris with her little son of twenty-one months. Seated in the inmost corner of the conveyance, with her child on her knees, she dared not look at her fellow travellers, and blushed when she saw that they were scrutinizing her.

Her youth, her beauty, her manifest affection for her son, were certain to make her interesting in the eyes of every sympathetic person. But one finds little of that quality in a diligence, and the people about Sister Anne did not seem abundantly provided with it. At her left was a tradesman who talked incessantly of his business, with another tradesman who sat opposite him. The course of shares, the price of sugar, coffee, and cochineal, the transactions that were carried through at the last market, engrossed these gentlemen so completely that they did not even find time to apologize to their neighbors when, in their gesticulations, they stuck an elbow into their ribs or a snuff-box into their faces. At her right, our young mother had a man of some forty years, with a long, gaunt face and an oblique glance, who talked little, but seemed to be listening and trying to become acquainted with his neighbors. Opposite him was a woman of fifty, in an old, stained silk dress, with a dilapidated velvet hat embellished by feathers which resembled fish bones; her bloated face was daubed with rouge, *mouches*, and snuff. This lady had told her fellow passengers, within ten minutes after starting, that, having played *ingénue* parts at Strasbourg, princesses at Caen, *amoureuses* at Saint-Malo, shepherdesses at Quimper, queens at Nantes, noble mothers at Noisy-le-Sec, and *jeunes*

premières at Troyes, she was on her way to Paris to take the *grande coquette* parts at the Théâtre des Funambules; and that she expected to obtain at once an order permitting her to make her début at the Comédie-Française, which she had been soliciting for thirty-six years. Lastly, beside the would-be débutante was a stout man, who slept most of the time, waking up now and then only to say:

"Oh! we're going over! I thought we had upset!"

An exceedingly pleasant neighbor in a diligence.

During the first few moments, Sister Anne heard nothing but a confused jumble of words which she could not understand, the tradesmen's talk of indigo and cochineal being inextricably mingled with the adventures of the *grande coquette*, who paused only to take snuff and say to her neighbor the sleeper:

"Be careful, monsieur; you're rolling over on me. Show me the respect due to my sex!"

"Oh! we're going over!" the stout man would reply, rubbing his eyes.

After attending to our own comfort, we generally end by turning our attention to other people. The party with the sidelong glance had already complimented Sister Anne on the beauty of her son, and had thereby earned a sweet smile from the dumb girl; one is certain to please a mother by praising her child.

The lady in the old hat also scrutinized Sister Anne, and said:

"She's very good-looking, that little woman—a very interesting face. That's just the costume I wore in *Annette et Lubin*, in 1792; how becoming it was to me! I must play that part at the Funambules."

The two tradesmen glanced at Sister Anne; but as little Frédéric had a lump of sugar in his hand, that naturally brought them back to the recent fluctuations in the price of that staple.

"It's a pretty child," said the actress; "he has a lot of expression already. If he was mine, I'd put him on the stage. In a year he could play Little Joas in *Athalie*, and in two he could manage the antics of Polichinello as a vampire. Ah! that's the way children are brought up now! It's superb! All who stand it are Foriosos at twelve years of age!"

Sister Anne had no idea what Forioso was, or Little Joas, but she saw that her companions were noticing her child, and her heart throbbed with the pleasure and pride so natural in a mother. Soon, however, they began to question her.

"Are you going to Paris to have him vaccinated?" said the actress. "Has he been vaccinated at home? What are you going to do in Paris? Has your husband gone ahead of you?"

As she received no reply to any of these questions, the lady began to lose patience and to consider the young woman's conduct exceedingly impertinent.

"Don't you hear me, madame?" she continued, ironically. "It seems to me that you might do me the honor to answer, when I speak to you."

Sister Anne shook her head and sadly lowered her eyes.

"Well! what does that mean?" cried the old débutante; "I verily believe that she means to imply that she won't answer me! Let me tell you, you little hussy, that I can find a way to make you speak, and that Primerose Bérénice de Follencourt is not of a temper to put up with an insult! I've fought on the stage more than once. I've played men's parts, and I know how to use a sword—do you hear, little saucebox?"

Sister Anne, alarmed by the old woman's tone and by her wrathful glance, looked imploringly at her right-hand neighbor; and he, after gazing at her with interest, said to the actress:

"You do wrong to be angry, madame."

"What do you say? I do wrong?"

"Surely; for this young woman's silence is not natural. She has not spoken a word, even to her child, since she has been in the diligence; I think that she is dumb."

"Dumb! a dumb woman! that's impossible, monsieur."

But Sister Anne eagerly nodded her head to confirm the supposition; whereupon the old actress voiced her amazement so emphatically that her neighbor woke up.

"Dumb! can it be possible? Do you hear, monsieur? she's dumb!"

"Oh! I thought we had upset!"

"What an insufferable creature you are! He'll give me the hysterics with his upsets. Poor angel! dear love! are you really dumb, my sweet child? Oh! how I pity you! how you must suffer! I should much rather be blind and deaf. Poor little thing! how interesting she is! what a charming face! And to be unable to talk! How did it happen, my child?"

Sister Anne, almost as surprised by the actress's sudden outpouring of friendliness as she had been by her anger, took her purse from her bosom, took out the paper which she always carried about her, and handed it to her neighbor, who read it to himself and simply said:

"It's the address of the house she's going to."

"To be a wet-nurse, no doubt. Ah! how beautifully she would act in pantomime! Such a pretty face! how lovely she'd be in *Philomèle et Térée*!"

Sister Anne's right-hand neighbor paid no further heed to the old actress; he seemed preoccupied since he had seen the well-filled purse which the young mother took from her breast in order to show him the count's address. From that moment, he redoubled his attentions to her; he caressed little Frédéric, and carried his gallantry so far as to buy him barley candy and gingerbread at the first stopping-place. Sister Anne, whose pure and guileless mind saw only friends and protectors everywhere, did not notice the shiftiness of her neighbor's expression, but, on the contrary, felt disposed to give him her full confidence. Poor child! what will you do in Paris?

During the second day, Sister Anne's neighbor said to her:

"I'm well acquainted with the Comte de Montreville, to whose house you are going. He's a friend of mine. If you like, I'll take you there myself."

The dumb girl signified that she accepted his offer with gratitude; and the old actress, seeing that Sister Anne smiled at her neighbor, pursed up her lips and cast a contemptuous glance at her, muttering between her teeth:

"They're doing well; acquaintance is soon made in a diligence."

Which shows how quick one is to suspect evil, especially when one has done it all one's life. As for Sister Anne, she stared at the actress in amazement; she was utterly unable to understand why, within twenty-four hours, she should treat her with indignation, friendliness, and scorn.

At last the diligence reached the great city: Sister Anne was dazed and bewildered by all that she saw and heard; she felt as if she were in a new world; for having arrived at Lyon after dark and left early in the morning, she had seen nothing of that city, whose great size, wealth, and populousness would have given her some idea of Paris.

The thin, shifty-eyed gentleman, who was persistent in his attentions to the dumb girl and her son, helped them to alight from the diligence; and while the *grande coquette* of the Funambules rearranged her hat and crumpled feathers, while the two tradesmen hurried to the Bourse, and the stout man walked away congratulating himself that the diligence had not been overturned, the gallant man called a cab, and, having put Sister Anne's bundles inside, he got in with her and the child.

The stranger spoke to the driver, then said to the young mother:

"We will go at once to Monsieur le Comte de Montreville's; I am delighted to take you there myself, for, being a stranger in Paris, you might be seriously embarrassed, as you can't make yourself understood."

Sister Anne thanked him with a glance; the poor child had no suspicion that she had fallen into the hands of a sharper, a vile blackleg, who, after exhibiting his talents in all the larger cities, by divers little exploits which had compelled him to fly from one after another, was now returning to Paris in the hope that an absence of eight years would have caused his former dupes to forget him, and that he would be able to make new ones. But it was inevitable that the dumb girl should fall into the first trap that was set for her. Meek, trusting, unacquainted with craft in any form, she never suspected evil. Her adventure in the forest would have made her afraid of robbers under similar circumstances; but it had not taught her to distrust those robbers whom she met in the world, and whom it is much more difficult to recognize, because they cover themselves with the mask of probity, which often makes them more dangerous than those who attack us on the highroad.

The cab stopped in front of a handsome house. Sister Anne's escort at once alighted, saying to her:

"Wait a moment; this is the count's house, but we must make sure that he is at home."

With that, he went in, but returned in a few moments with a disappointed air.

"My dear lady, what I was afraid of has happened: the Comte de Montreville is in the country; he won't return for two days."

The girl's expression seemed to say:

"What shall I do meanwhile? where am I to go?"

"Don't be alarmed," said the obliging man; "I will not leave you in embarrassment; I will take you to a respectable house, where you will be well cared for. Two days are soon passed; then you can return to monsieur le comte's."

Sister Anne again expressed her gratitude; she was touched by all the trouble he took for her, although she was not surprised by it: she imagined that that was the way everybody acted in the large cities. The cab started again. The movement delighted little Frédéric; he crowed, and jumped about on his mother's lap; and she, as she gazed at the tall houses, the shops, and the crowds of people, artlessly manifested her amazement.

"Oh! you'll see much more than this," said her friend; "you'll be surprised in a thousand different ways; this journey will be very useful to you."

The cab stopped in front of a wretched furnished lodging-house in Faubourg Saint-Jacques; and Sister Anne, on going in, found that that respectable abode was very dirty and very gloomy; but she followed her escort, who ordered her bundles carried to the room assigned to them, and was soon left alone there with the young mother and her child.

"Before I leave you," he said to Sister Anne, "I must tell you that there is one little formality to be attended to: when you hire lodgings in Paris, you must make a statement of what money you have about you. This is a rule made by the police, so that nothing can ever be lost in the city; for if you declare to-day that you have forty louis, and one of them is stolen from you to-morrow, then they go about and count the contents of the purses of everybody in the capital, and the man who has one louis too many is the thief. What do you say to that? it's a bright idea, isn't it?"

Sister Anne did not clearly understand what he said; she looked at him as if awaiting a further explanation, and he continued:

"Will you go to settle the matter with the mistress of the house? or would you like me to go for you? That will be better. Give me your purse; it's the quickest way."

The poor child drew her purse from her bosom; and the obliging gentleman took it, saying:

"Don't be impatient; I'll go and count what there is in it."

Then he left the room, and as he went downstairs he gave the mistress of the house a gold piece, saying:

"This is to pay for that young woman's lodging; she's a mute."

With that, he hurried away, flattering himself that he had performed a very neat trick; he went to the Palais-Royal, where he found other blacklegs of his stamp, and soon lost the money he had stolen from a helpless woman; then, as he was unable to find other dupes who would give him their purses, he filched one from the pocket of a stout English milord; the Englishman, having detected him in the act, caused his arrest; he was taken to the Préfecture, then to Bicêtre, then to the galleys, where he kept his hand in by stealing from his fellow convicts. There we will leave him.

Sister Anne waited and waited for the return of the kind friend who had gone out with her purse; the poor child had no suspicion, she was not at all anxious, and played quietly with her son, glancing out of the window now and then, but instantly drawing back in alarm, because the room was on the third floor, and she had never been so far above the ground.

But her friend did not return, and Sister Anne was beginning to wonder at his long absence, when the landlady appeared.

The young mother put out her hand for her purse, but the woman simply asked what she could do for her.

"I'll take good care of you," said she; "for the gentleman, when he went away, paid for your board and lodging and whatever you might want during the two days that he said you would stay here."

He had gone away! A horrible presentiment enlightened Sister Anne at last; she tried to make herself understood, constantly holding out her hand and going through the motion of counting money.

"I am paid, I tell you," said the landlady; "I don't want anything, my child, and I'll send up your dinner."

Sister Anne was overwhelmed; it was not the money simply that she regretted, for she did not realize its value; but the Comte de Montreville's address was in her purse, and the villain had carried that away with all that she possessed. What would become of her? how could she find her protector's house now?

During the day, the young woman still retained a little hope, trying to convince herself that the stranger would return; but night came, and he did not appear. Sister Anne strained her child to her breast, weeping bitterly; it was not for herself alone that she trembled, and her terror was all the more intense on that account. Already she imagined her child deprived of the sustenance he required; she shuddered as the whole horror of their situation dawned upon her, and she was sorry now that she had left the farm, for the thought that her son would suffer destroyed her courage.

She passed in her room the second day after her arrival in Paris; the villain who had robbed her had told her that the count was absent for two days, so she waited until the third day before trying to find him. She flattered herself that she could recognize the house in front of which the cab had stopped. The poor child thought that she could find her way in that immense city, where she had never been before! she did not know that the wretch who had deceived her had caused the cab to stop in front of a house which was not the count's.

The next day, she took her son in her arms, and, with the bundle that contained her effects, left the lodging-house, whose mistress made no attempt to keep her, because she had been paid for two days only. Sister Anne commended herself to Providence, and tried to revive her courage as she ventured forth into that city which was entirely unknown to her. Every minute the horses and carriages frightened her, and the cries of the street peddlers deafened her; the sight of all those people, going and coming in every direction, and often jostling and crowding her, so confused her that she had no idea where she was. The poor child went under a porte cochère and began to cry. The concierge asked her what the trouble was, but Sister Anne was unable to reply except with more tears; whereupon the concierge turned away in a pet, saying:

"What's the use of sympathizing with people who won't tell you what's the matter!"

After she had wept a long while, Sister Anne walked on; but she had been on her feet four hours and had made no progress; she saw nothing but endless streets, and shops; she had no idea in which direction she should go, and often walked a long distance only to find herself at the point she had started from. How was she to recognize that house of the count's? she began to think that it was impossible. She was sinking with fatigue, for she had had her child in her arms all the time; and soon hunger made itself felt, and added to the horror of her plight.

She sat down on a stone bench; the passers-by glanced at her, but went on; they would have stopped if, instead of a woman weeping over a child, they had seen a cat fighting with Polichinello.

Luckily, it was midsummer; the weather was beautiful, and the approach of night did not drive people indoors. The dumb girl entered a pastry-cook's shop and bought cakes for her child, offering a garment from her bundle in payment; but they gave it back, looking at her with compassion and surprise; for her appearance did not denote poverty, and they could not understand her having no money.

She tried to walk on, but the darkness increased her terror tenfold, and, despite the lamps in the streets, the clatter of the horses' feet seemed to her more terrifying than ever; she was in mortal dread of being run over with her son by the carriages which often surrounded her on every side; so she sat down again on a bench.

At this time she was on Rue Montmartre; several times during the day, she had walked through Rue de Provence and had passed Monsieur de Montreville's house; but the poor child did not know it. It was impossible now for her to find her lodging-house, and she was on the point of giving way to despair; but she pressed her son to her heart, and tried to recover her strength by covering him with kisses. The child smiled at her and played with her hair; he was at the age at which a child does not know what unhappiness is when he is in his mother's arms.

The night advanced; the shops were closing, the pedestrians becoming less numerous, the carriages passed at longer intervals. Sister Anne raised her eyes and looked about her with a little more confidence. Where should she ask shelter for the night? She felt lost amid all those buildings; she dared not apply anywhere. She gazed imploringly at those who passed her, and several men stopped to look at her.

"She's very pretty!" they said; but as soon as she held out her child, they walked on.

"Great God!" thought the unhappy girl; "don't the people of Paris love children? they walk away very fast as soon as I show them mine."

About midnight, a patrol passed through the street. As they drew near, she shuddered; one of the soldiers went up to her, and said:

"Come, come! what are you doing here with your child? Go home, or we'll take you to the guard-house!"

The man's harsh tone made her tremble; she rose hastily and hurried away, with her child in her arms. But before she had gone a hundred yards, she discovered that she had left her bundle of clothes on the bench. She went back to look for it, and found the place where she had been sitting; but, alas! her clothes had already disappeared. They were the unfortunate creature's last resource.

She shed no tears over this last catastrophe; an enormous weight seemed to have settled on her chest. She moved away with her child, afraid to think. She walked more rapidly, with no idea where she was going; she embraced her son convulsively; a sort of nervous contraction stiffened her limbs; she had almost lost consciousness of her sufferings. She descended Rue Montmartre to the boulevard, where the trees caught her eye, and her heart dilated. The poor child thought that she had reached the outskirts of that city where fate pursued her so pitilessly; she fancied that she was once more approaching her fields and her woods; and running wildly to the nearest tree, she stood close against it, touched it with rapture, and the tears came at last.

She sat down beneath the foliage, the sight of which had given her fresh courage; she covered her child with her apron and determined to wait there for the dawn.

The day came at last, but the dumb girl had not enjoyed one moment's rest; she thought of the future, and saw

that she must needs appeal to public charity for herself and her son. If she had been alone, she would have preferred death; but for him she could endure everything. She had been so comfortable at the farm, surrounded by people who were attached to her and who loved her son, and now she was reduced to beg for bread! How bitterly she repented having left that peaceful abode! When she looked at her son, she reproached herself even more severely.

"Poor little fellow!" she thought; "all your sufferings will be caused by me. But am I so guilty, after all, for longing to give you a father? Ah, me! if only I could find my way back there! if only I could return to those kind-hearted peasants who treated me like their own daughter! I feel that I must abandon all hope of finding Frédéric; but if my grief kills me, what will become of my son in this great city?"

The poor mother wept as she gazed at little Frédéric, who was still asleep. Some peasants on their way to market offered her bread and fruit; a milkwoman gave her and the child some milk to drink; all hearts are not insensible to pity, and even the Parisians give freely to the poor; if they do not do it more frequently, it is only because they dread to make themselves melancholy by the contemplation of misfortune.

During a large part of the day, Sister Anne continued to wander about the city in search of her protector's abode; she met many men who had Frédéric's figure and were dressed like him; she quickened her pace to overtake them; but when she was near enough to see their faces, recognized her error. Some looked at her in amazement, others with a sneer; whereupon she would turn away, shamefaced and broken-hearted.

"O God!" she thought; "I shall never meet him again!"

By the end of the day, the food that had been given her in the morning was exhausted, and it became necessary to hold out her hand to the passers-by, in quest of charity. In order to obtain courage to beg for bread, Sister Anne had to gaze upon her boy. If those who give alms always did so with a gracious manner, the unfortunate would be less to be pitied; but many persons accompany their charity with a harsh or disdainful air; in fact, they almost grumble at those they relieve.

"Alas!" thought the poor girl, as she wept; "why do they consider it a crime that I am poor?"

She longed to leave Paris, for the country people seemed to her to be more humane and gentle; with them, she felt less abashed. But in what direction must she go to return to the hospitable farm? She could only trust in Providence, which had not thus far been very propitious to her. Poor child! may it guide thee at last to the end of thy woes!

Having no idea what road she should take, but absolutely determined to leave the city, she decided to follow a man who was walking beside a small canvas-covered wagon. As it happened, this man went through one of the faubourgs, and in due time passed the barrier. Thus, by dint of following the wagon, which went always at a walk, the young mother found herself at last in the country; she breathed more freely; she kissed her son, and, beseeching the mercy of heaven for him, bent her steps toward the nearest village to ask hospitality.

XXVIII

CHANCE BRINGS THEM TOGETHER

Frédéric still loved his wife—perhaps with a less violent passion than during the first month of their union; but the husband's facility of intercourse with his wife had not diminished his love, for he discovered new qualities, new virtues, in Constance every day. Beauty of feature fascinates, but does not suffice to enslave; happy the husband who finds in his wife attractions over which time has no power!

Constance was chargeable with but one fault—a very lamentable one when one cannot control it, but which she confined sedulously within her own breast. She was jealous; the very excess of her love for Frédéric sometimes caused her a secret alarm. When he seemed dreamy and pensive, Constance became uneasy, and a multitude of apprehensions crowded into her mind. What could it be that engrossed her husband's thoughts, saddened him, and made him sigh?—for he still sighed sometimes. Before their marriage, she attributed to his love for her the melancholy that often darkened his brow. But now that they were united, now that they could give a free rein to their affection, and there was nothing to mar their happiness, why did Frédéric continue to sigh? why was he sometimes preoccupied? That was what Constance asked herself, but the amiable girl was careful not to let her husband see what she felt; she would have been terribly distressed to display the slightest suspicion. Although jealous, she would not annoy her husband; she would continue to be as loving and sweet as always; and if she suffered, she would carefully conceal her suffering, in order not to distress him whom she loved better than her life.

After a year, their happiness was interrupted for a moment by the general's death. Monsieur de Valmont was beloved by all who knew him; he was very dear to his niece, to whom he had been as an affectionate and indulgent father. Her husband's love alone could comfort Constance in her profound grief for her uncle's death. Monsieur de Montreville mingled his regrets with her tears; he had lost a true friend; but in old age we often show more courage than in the springtime of life, in bearing the death of those who are dear to us. Is it because age makes us selfish? Is it because the heart, having become insensible to the flames of love, closes its doors to the transports of friendship; or is it rather because of the reflection that the separation cannot be for long, and that we shall soon join those whom we have lost?

Constance was her uncle's sole heir; the general was very rich, and owned a number of farms and estates in the provinces, with which Frédéric wished to make himself familiar. So he had formed a plan of visiting their new possessions, and Constance was to remain at Paris, in order not to leave Monsieur de Montreville alone with his grief for the loss of his friend. But how could he make up his mind to leave his wife before her grief had begun to subside? As the visit of inspection was not urgent, Frédéric postponed it from month to month; and Constance, who had not as yet been separated from her husband for a single day, could not decide to let him go.

Some time after the general's death, Frédéric learned that Monsieur Ménard, being frequently incapacitated by the gout, had lost all his pupils and was in very reduced circumstances. So he went to see his former tutor, and asked him to come to live with him.

"I need a prudent, clever man," he said, "to take charge of my affairs, overlook my stewards' accounts, and correspond with them. Be that man, my dear Ménard. Remember that it is not as an employé, but as a friend that I

ask you to come; and if heaven sends me children, you shall be to them what you were to their father."

Ménard accepted gratefully, and he was installed under Frédéric's roof, where Constance treated him with much consideration and affection; she loved the former tutor, because he was attached to her husband, and Ménard, deeply touched by the young woman's attentions, often exclaimed, as he kissed her hand respectfully:

"Ah! madame, do have children! I will be their tutor, and they'll grow up like their excellent father, who was my pupil and who does me credit."

Constance smiled at that; doubtless she would have asked nothing better, but we do not always obtain what we desire.

Dubourg had not abandoned his friend.

"Come and see me whenever you please," Frédéric had said to him; "your room will always be ready for you."

Dubourg made the most of that permission, not to quarter himself on Frédéric in Paris, but to visit him at his country house. He was particularly apt to appear during the latter half of the quarter; for his income was paid quarterly, and he could never succeed in making it last more than six weeks; then he would take his meals at Frédéric's, if he was in Paris, or would visit him in the country.

"Thanks to you, my friend," he would say, "with my sixteen hundred francs a year, I live as if I had twice that; I spend my income in six months, and you pay my expenses the other half of the year."

Dubourg's merry humor pleased Constance, and Frédéric was always glad to see his friend, for he knew that he would never say a word to his wife that she ought not to hear, and that, despite his easy principles, he would look upon her as a sister. We can overlook some faults in the man who respects friendship. There are so many sincere, virtuous, high-minded friends, who take delight in sowing discord in families!

When Dubourg and Ménard met at Frédéric's board, which always happened toward the end of the quarter, the former tutor never failed to sing the praises of the couple who lived under his eyes.

"They are like Orpheus and Eurydice, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Philemon and Baucis, Pyramus and Thisbe!"

"Morbleu! yes," Dubourg would reply; "Frédéric has a charming wife, who has every estimable quality—a perfect treasure, in short. It would be infernally strange if he were not content."

"True enough! But if I had not inculcated in my pupil excellent principles of virtue and morality, perhaps he wouldn't lead so decorous a life as he does, although loving his wife none the less. Peter the Great adored Catherine, but that didn't interfere with his having mistresses; many princes have had concubines; and I have known some excellent husbands who slept with their maid-servants, probably from a sense of ownership."

"Don't extol Frédéric's virtue so highly, my dear Monsieur Ménard! if he had had nobody but you to guide him ——"

"Perhaps you would have done it better; for instance, when you travelled with us as Baron Potoski——"

"Hush, hush, Monsieur Ménard! Let that journey be forgotten; there was nothing to choose between us. I trust that you have never spoken of that little adventure in the woods—that love affair of Frédéric's—before Madame de Montreville?"

"Oh! what do you take me for? I am well aware that it would be a great mistake now: *non est hic locus*; and yet, Madame de Montreville could not take offence; anything that happened before her marriage doesn't concern her; she has too much good sense not to laugh at her husband's little escapades as a bachelor."

"Despite her good sense, there are some things a woman never likes to hear about; we should always avoid saying anything to make her think that another has possessed her husband's heart. Although when she marries a young man, a woman is well aware that he has already known love, she persuades herself that he has never loved anyone as dearly as he loves her; she desires to be the one who has inspired the most ardent passion, and it is a great affliction to her to lose that illusion."

"I understand; it's like telling a cook that one has never eaten a better dish of macaroni."

"Precisely. You're an amazing fellow for similes. Besides, I believe that the young woman is capable of being jealous, she loves her husband so passionately!"

"Indeed, I believe you are right. I noticed one day that she didn't seem in such good spirits as usual; I suppose that it was because her husband had amused himself for some time patting a cat."

"The devil take you and your cats! the idea of suspecting Constance of such folly!"

"Folly? Why, there are men who prefer their dog to their wives, just as there are women who prefer their canary to their husband. I don't refer to my pupil; but——"

"But has Madame de Montreville ever asked you, as she has me, whether Frédéric has always been subject to fits of depression, of melancholy?"

"Yes, yes; I remember that only the other evening she said to me in an undertone: 'See how Frédéric sighs! Do you know whether anything is troubling him? Can you guess the reason?'"

"Well! what was your answer?"

"Parbleu! I answered: 'I suppose it's because he has indigestion, madame; that interferes with the breathing; it is often the case.'—Since then, she hasn't asked me any questions on that subject."

"I can well believe it!"

Although Frédéric was happy, he had not forgotten the dumb girl of the woods, and it was the thought of her that caused his frequent fits of abstraction. He longed to know Sister Anne's fate, but he dared not mention her to his father. The count had told him that he would take care of her, and Frédéric knew that he could rely on his promise; but to have no idea where she was or what she was doing—not even to know whether she still loved him!—The ingrate dared to doubt it, for he had done all that he could to kill her love! Meanwhile, as his love for Constance became more calm and placid, the memory of Sister Anne obtruded itself more frequently upon his mind; a smile or a caress from his wife quickly made him forget the dumb girl, but a little later her image returned again; it would seem that the heart of man always craves memories or hopes.

For more than two years, Frédéric had been Constance's husband. Their only sorrow was their failure to have children. Frédéric longed for a son, Constance would have been overjoyed to present her husband with a pledge of her affection, and Monsieur Ménard ardently desired the arrival of some little pupils.

The Comte de Montreville did not live with his children; but he came often to their house; he still had in his service the man who was with him when he was attacked in the forest, and whom he had forbidden to mention that adventure. But one evening, when he was talking with the other servants, he forgot his master's injunction; and as the others told stories about robbers, he did not fail to tell of the risk he had run in company with monsieur le comte, who had been saved, almost miraculously, by a young dumb woman. Frédéric's valet was present; and the next day, while dressing his master, he asked him if what Dumont had said was true; because he believed that Dumont was a liar, and that monsieur le comte had never mentioned being attacked by robbers and saved by a dumb woman.

These last words attracted Frédéric's attention; a secret presentiment told him that Sister Anne was concerned in the adventure. He made no reply to his servant, but hastened to his father's house. The count was absent, but Dumont was there; Frédéric was able to speak to him alone, which was just what he desired. At his first question, Dumont blushed, remembering his master's orders; but it was too late for him to keep silent. Moreover, it did not seem to him that he was committing any great sin in telling his master's son the whole story, and he could not understand why Monsieur de Montreville wished to make a mystery of the adventure.

Frédéric made him describe the girl his father had taken to the farm; from the beginning, he had no doubt that it was Sister Anne. He asked Dumont innumerable questions, and the valet told him all that he knew.

"Do you think that she remained at the farm?" Frédéric asked.

"Oh! yes, monsieur; she wasn't well enough to continue her journey; and then, I forgot to tell you that she was on the point of becoming a mother."

"What do you say, Dumont?—that girl——"

"Girl or wife, I don't know which; but I can swear she was enceinte."

Sister Anne had a child! Frédéric understood now why his father had acted with so much mystery. He inquired particularly as to the name of the village and the location of the farm at which they had left the dumb girl; then, giving Dumont a handsome present, he enjoined upon him absolute secrecy concerning their interview. Dumont promised not to mention the subject again, and lost himself in conjectures touching the conduct of father and son alike.

After Frédéric had learned that Sister Anne had made him a father, he did not enjoy a moment's repose. The thought haunted him incessantly, and he was consumed by the desire to see his child. His reveries were more frequent, his brow was clouded more often than ever before, and Constance heard him sigh. She dared not question him; but she suffered torments in secret; she flattered herself that she filled Frédéric's heart, that she was the sole object of all his thoughts; but she was always near him, she held his hand in hers, and it could not be she who made him sigh.

When she ventured to ask him what the matter was, he strove to recover himself, pressed her to his heart, and said:

"What more can I possibly desire?"

But, even then, Constance detected a trace of sadness in his smile; he did not seem to her entirely happy.

One day Frédéric told his wife that he was about to undertake the journey which he had postponed so long, but which had become absolutely necessary. Constance had flattered herself that Ménard would go in his stead; indeed, Frédéric himself had suggested it; but he had changed his mind, and was evidently determined to go. Constance dared not try to detain him, or to propose to accompany him; she was afraid of annoying him; she was unwilling to thwart him in the most trivial thing. Moreover, if Frédéric had wanted her to go with him, he would have had but to say the word; she would have left everything to go; but he did not say the word! Constance groaned in secret, but she showed her husband a cloudless brow and a smiling face.

Frédéric embraced her tenderly; he promised to hasten his return, and to be with her again within a month. She tried to be brave; and Frédéric took his departure, commending her to the care of Ménard and Dubourg. But Constance did not need to be entertained: although absent, Frédéric was always with her.

It was the month of August, that lovely season when it is so pleasant to live in the pure air of the country. Constance determined to pass at her country house near Montmorency all the time that her husband was absent. As it was much quieter there than in Paris, it seemed to her that she would be more free to think of him, to count the moments which must pass before his return. Monsieur de Montreville visited his daughter-in-law in the country. But at the count's age a man has settled habits, and amusement becomes a necessity. The count loved Paris, for he had a great number of acquaintances there; and the never-ceasing life and animation of the capital had always attracted him. After a week's stay in the country, he returned to his favorite city and his wonted amusements.

Constance was left alone with Ménard and the servants. It was still early in the quarter, and Dubourg was not in the country; but Constance did not suffer one moment from ennui; when the heart is well occupied, the head is never empty. The old tutor was always ready to bear her company; he talked to her of Greek and Roman history, quoted his favorite Latin authors, and sometimes plunged into Biblical history. It is not certain that Constance was greatly entertained; but when Ménard had finished speaking, she would smile at him so amiably that he was invariably satisfied.

Toward nightfall Constance always went to the summer-house. It was her favorite spot; there she and Frédéric had begun to understand each other, there she had felt the first approach of love. Since that time, she had often visited the summer-house, more often than ever now that she was awaiting her husband's return. From that eminence she could overlook the whole valley and the country round about the walls of her garden.

One fine evening, as she happened to glance at the road which passed the house, Constance noticed a young woman seated at the foot of a tree, with an infant in her arms; the unfortunate creature was evidently in the last stages of destitution; she was gazing mournfully at her child, and, while covering him with kisses, seemed to be utterly hopeless and desperate.

Constance was deeply affected. At that moment, Monsieur Ménard joined her on the platform.

"Look!" she said; "do you see that poor woman? See how frantically she kisses her child! She seems in terrible distress. Do you see her?"

"One moment, madame," said Ménard; "I can't find my spectacles.—Where in the devil have I put them?"

At that instant the poor woman raised her eyes, and, when she saw Constance, her glance became so

expressive, so full of entreaty, that it was impossible not to understand her.

"Oh! she is crying," exclaimed Constance; "wait, wait, my poor woman! I will come down."

She rushed out of the summer-house, while Ménard was still looking for his spectacles.

Not far away was a small gate by which the road was reached. Constance opened it, and soon stood beside the unfortunate creature she longed to assist. As she drew near to her, she was even more touched, for the wayfarer's every feature was eloquent of suffering and despair; but it was for her child, above all, that she implored Constance's pity. She held him out to her, and great tears flowed from her drawn and reddened eyes.

"Poor child!" said Constance; "how pale and thin he is! but what lovely features!"—And she took the child in her arms, saying to the mother: "Come, and I will give you something to restore your strength. Follow me."

The woman walked a few steps, but soon fell to the ground; her strength had failed her.

"Great heaven!" said Constance; "what a state the poor creature is in!—Monsieur Ménard, do come and help me take her to the house."

"Here I am, here I am, madame! They were in my waistcoat pocket," said Ménard. "Oho! this young person seems sadly in need of help."

"Support her—let us help her to walk. Poor woman! how she distresses me! Mon Dieu! is it possible that there can be people so unfortunate?"

"Very possible, certainly, madame; but it is important to know the *causa causarum*."

With the assistance of Ménard and Constance, the latter of whom carried the child as well as supported the mother, the poor woman succeeded in reaching the house. There Constance at once gave her whatever she thought would do her and the child good; and while the mother recovered her strength, she observed her with interest.

"Just see," she said to Ménard, "she is still a mere girl—and already so greatly to be pitied! Her features are sweet and pathetic. Poor mother! where have you come from? what do you mean to do?"

The unfortunate creature did not reply to these questions; the reader will have divined the cause: it was Sister Anne and her son to whom Constance had brought succor.

Ten days had passed since the dumb girl left Paris, during which she had wandered about the country, guided by chance alone. Being forced constantly to beg for shelter and food, often repulsed, often depriving herself of sustenance to give it to her son, she had felt her strength and her courage grow less day by day; despair took possession of her mind, it sapped all her faculties, and the unhappy mother was embracing her child in momentary expectation of death, when chance, which had led her to Madame de Montreville's house, decreed that she should notice her and fly to her assistance.

Surprised at receiving no reply to her questions, Constance repeated them; whereupon Sister Anne, putting her hand to her lips and mournfully shaking her head, succeeded in making her understand her pitiful condition.

"O heaven! she cannot speak! Poor soul! All alone with her child, and without money, without a guide, and unable to ask her way! Oh! this is too much, too many trials at once!"

And Constance stooped over Sister Anne, weeping freely at the sight of her misery, while the dumb girl, touched by a compassion to which she had become unaccustomed, took her benefactress's hand, covered it with kisses, and pressed it to her heart.

"Faith!" said Ménard, drawing his handkerchief,—for the kind-hearted tutor could not witness this scene without emotion,—"faith! I agree that she was in a critical position. Indeed, speech is essential throughout life; and anyone who has no tongue, or can't use it, is like a fox without a tail, a butterfly without wings, or a fish without fins."

Constance continued to devote her whole attention to Sister Anne and her son; already the child was laughing in her arms; he was at the happy age when grief vanishes at sight of a cake or a toy. It seemed that Constance could not tire of caressing him.

"See," she said to Ménard, "see how he smiles at me!"

"Of course, for you are giving him bonbons. Men are caught by sugared words, and children by sugar without words; wherein they show more sagacity than men."

"What pretty features, what lovely eyes! It may be a delusion, but it seems to me that he has my husband's eyes."

"My pupil's? I can hardly conceive eyes of two years resembling eyes of twenty-three."

"Poor little dear! I feel that I love him already. How happy I should be to have a child like him!"

"That will come, madame: Sarah was ninety years old when she gave birth to Isaac. You have plenty of time before you."

Sister Anne's heart throbbed with joy when she saw Constance caress her son. Madame de Montreville did not tire of gazing at him, for she detected in his features some resemblance to those of her husband. Ménard gazed compassionately at Sister Anne; he was very far from suspecting that that poor mendicant was the young girl he had seen seated beside Frédéric in the woods at Vizille. How could he have recognized her! He had seen her only a moment, and then she was radiant with happiness and love; her lovely features were not worn by tears and sorrow; the fatigue of a long and toilsome journey, and of incessant suffering, had not made her body weak and her steps tottering. And, lastly, Ménard did not know that that girl was dumb; so that it was impossible for him to suspect that she was before him at that moment.

"Do you know how to write, poor woman?" Constance asked her.

She shook her head.

"What a pity! I would like to know this pretty boy's name."

The dumb girl looked eagerly about. They had taken her to a room on the ground floor, looking on the garden. She went out, motioning to Constance to follow her. She broke a branch from the first shrub she came to; then, stooping over, she traced on the gravel path her son's name.

"Frédéric!" cried Constance, after reading the name; "what! your child's name is Frédéric? Ah! that will make him all the dearer to me. Frédéric! why, that is my husband's name.—What do you think of this, Monsieur Ménard? isn't it strange?"

"I don't see anything so extraordinary in it," said the tutor. "As there are great numbers of Martins, Pierres, and Pauls, there may very well be as many Frédérics. I know of no name but *Thesaurochrysonicochrysides*, which Plautus invented, that has never become common. So, if I had had a son, I should have insisted on giving him that name, although it isn't very easy to say."

Constance took the child in her arms again. She called him Frédéric; and he, answering to that name, by which he had been called at the farm, lisped the word *mamma*, and looked about as if in search of the good peasants who used to call him so.

"I am determined that my husband shall see this dear child," said Constance; then, after a moment's reflection, she went up to Sister Anne, took her hand, and said, following her signs closely so that she might understand her answers:

"Where were you going with your child?—She doesn't know.—Unfortunate creature! have you no father or mother?—Ah! they are dead!—And your child's father, your husband—why isn't he with you?—She weeps! Poor dear! He has deserted her! The idea of deserting such a pretty child! and such a sweet, unfortunate mother! Why, it's perfectly ghastly! he must have a terribly hard heart.—But cheer up, and dry your tears; I will not abandon you! No, my mind is made up; I will take care of you and your child. You shall not leave me. You shall live with me; I will give you needlework to do; I will teach you to work, and I will have your child educated under your eyes. My husband is kind, tender-hearted, and generous; I am perfectly certain that he won't blame me for what I am doing. He will love you, too, and you shall end your days with us. Do you understand, poor dear? Don't cry any more, don't worry about your child. Hereafter you shall be out of reach of want.—Why, look, Monsieur Ménard! she actually throws herself at my feet and kisses my hand, as if I were a god! What would be the use of wealth, if we could not do a little good with it?"

"To be charitable, madame, is one of the precepts of the Gospel; unfortunately, everybody doesn't put it in practice as you do!"

"But it's high time to think about arranging a room for this young woman," said Constance, leading Sister Anne back to the house. "After all the fatigue she has undergone, she must feel the need of rest. Where shall we put her? Oh! I know; in that little building adjoining the greenhouse in the garden. My husband intended to make a study of it; but he can work in his own room. Yes, that is what we'll do. Be kind enough to give orders accordingly, Monsieur Ménard. Have a bed taken there, and everything she needs for the night; to-morrow, I will have it properly arranged. She will be quiet there, and she will have her son with her and can take him to walk in the garden in the morning."

Ménard went to tell the servants to prepare a room in the pavilion in the garden. Meanwhile, Constance remained with Sister Anne, who was unable to express her boundless gratitude; her features were beginning already to lose their haggard, hopeless look. As she looked at her, Constance found her face more and more interesting; the dumb girl in no respect resembled those beggars who seem determined to extort alms by lamentations and importunities, and who receive it without gratitude. Sister Anne was meek and shrinking; she was amazed at the interest she inspired; her gratitude could be read in her eyes; and in her whole bearing, her whole aspect, there was something which seemed to indicate that she was not born in the lowest rank of society.

"The more I look at her," thought Constance, "the more surprised I am that anyone could have deserted her. Her features are refined, her eyes sweet and full of charm. How lovely she will be in other clothes!—And you, dear love, ah! I will take good care of you!"

Ménard announced that everything was ready in the pavilion for the reception of the poor woman and her son. Constance took Sister Anne's arm and led her thither, made sure that she had everything that she needed for the night, and left her, urging her not to grieve any more, but to go to bed and sleep.

Sister Anne pressed her hand to her heart, and Constance said to Ménard as they walked away:

"Now the time won't seem so long while Frédéric is away! I realize that the best way to divert one's thoughts from one's own troubles is to relieve those of other people."

XXIX

ARRIVAL OF DUBOURG.—THE STORM GATHERS

On waking the next morning, Sister Anne feared for a moment that all that she saw was an illusion of her eyesight. After suffering the most horrible tortures of destitution; after wandering so long, often unable to obtain a place to lay her head and her son's; after going through all that a mother can go through who trembles every moment for her child's life—to find herself in a handsome and comfortable apartment, lying in a soft bed, and with her mind at rest concerning her future; instead of the cold contempt of pity, to receive the loving attentions of a noble-hearted woman, who added tenfold to the value of her kind acts by the grace with which she did them—was to pass abruptly into a situation so entirely different, that her softened heart feared to give way to the enjoyment of a happiness in which it could not as yet believe.

Sister Anne embraced little Frédéric; then rose and took him into the garden, which surrounded on all sides the building in which she was lodged. What a lovely spot! what bliss to live there, and guide her child's first hesitating steps! He tried to run about alone among the paths bordered by roses and lilacs; when he fell, the soft gravel deadened his fall, and the child waited, smiling, for his mother to come and help him to start afresh.

Constance was awake very early; she had thought all night of the dumb girl and her son; her determination to be their benefactress made it impossible for her to sleep; for pleasure has its insomnia, and women display in all their decisions more ardor and more sentiment than men. If they sometimes seem to be unduly engrossed by a piece of jewelry or some other trivial object, with what energy and what heartfelt sympathy do they perform a good deed!

Madame de Montreville hurried down into the garden to see her protégée. She found Sister Anne and the child under an arbor of honeysuckle. The boy was playing by his mother, who, when she saw Constance, flew to meet her, and seized one of her hands, which she held for a long time to her heart.

"Up so early!" said Constance, as she kissed little Frédéric; "how did you pass the night? Well? I am glad. After so much trouble and fatigue, you needed a long rest. The dear boy! see how he smiles at me; one would think that he

recognizes me already. But you must not continue to wear those clothes; come with me and I will give you one of my dresses. It will fit you, for we're very nearly of the same size. Oh! I won't allow you to refuse; remember that you must obey me, or I shall be angry."

Constance took Sister Anne and little Frédéric to her own room, where she selected one of her simplest gowns and compelled her protégée to put it on. In that new costume the dumb girl seemed to acquire new charms, and her timidity and embarrassment were entirely free from the awkwardness which characterizes so many people in clothes that were not made for them.

"She is charming," said Constance, when she had summoned her maid and had caused her to arrange the young woman's hair, quite simply, but with excellent taste. "How lovely she is so! And in a few days, when she has entirely recovered from her fatigue, when her cheeks have a little color, she'll be lovelier still.—Come, come and look at yourself, and don't lower your eyes. Is it anything to be ashamed of that one is pretty?"

Constance led Sister Anne in front of a mirror. The dumb girl looked at her own image, hesitatingly at first; but she soon recovered her self-possession to some extent, and her face flushed with modest pleasure. Is it possible for a woman to be insensible to anything that beautifies her? Sister Anne, after looking at herself for several minutes, fell at Madame de Montreville's knees.

"Oh! I don't want you to do this any more," said Constance, raising her; "I want you to love me and to be happy, that's all. As for your son, I propose to make him handsome, too, and I will send to Paris for whatever is necessary."

Monsieur Ménard, whose sleep had not been interfered with by thoughts of the wayfarer, came down at last, and was thunderstruck when he saw Sister Anne in such different guise.

"Well, Monsieur Ménard, what do you think of her?"

"Faith! madame, she is so much improved that I should not recognize her."

"Because in her other clothes you saw nothing but her misery, and overlooked the refinement of her features."

"It is an undeniable fact that misery is a great disfigurement. Indeed, a handsome setting adds to the charm of everything. We cannot dine so satisfactorily when the cloth is soiled, and the commonest wine tastes much better in a dainty glass."

Constance was busy all day with her plans for Sister Anne. The room on the first floor of the pavilion was arranged, and supplied with everything that could make it more attractive. By Madame de Montreville's orders a pretty cradle was procured, and placed beside the young mother's bed. The windows were embellished with flowers in boxes.

"She is debarred from other enjoyments," said Constance; "books and music are useless to her; as yet, the poor child doesn't know how to do anything, so we must surround her with things that are pleasing to the eye."

Sister Anne was at a loss to express her gratitude for such overwhelming kindness. Constance was much amused by the astonishment which each new thing caused her. Above all, when she heard for the first time the notes of a piano, blended with Constance's sweet voice, was she conscious of a fascination, an intoxicating pleasure, which moved her to tears. The charm of music was keenly appreciated by that ardent soul, which knew not the art of concealing its sensations.

As she watched Constance sew and embroider, Sister Anne sighed and revealed her grief at her inability to do as much. But Constance undertook to teach her; and the dumb girl was so anxious to make herself useful, that in a very short time she did all that she saw others do.

A week had passed since Constance had taken Sister Anne and the child into her family, and every hour seemed to increase her affection for them. The child very soon learned to love her, for she lavished caresses upon him; and Sister Anne, always gentle, attentive, and grateful, proved to her that her benefactions were well bestowed.

One morning, while the dumb girl was walking with her son in the garden, Dubourg appeared at his friend's house; the quarter was more than half gone, and Constance, who knew something of Dubourg's habits from her husband, was not at all surprised at his arrival.

"Welcome!" she said; "you promised my husband that you would come to see me while he was away, and I was beginning to be offended with you."

"Madame," said Dubourg, with a smile, "I am not one of those friends who undertake to make a wife forget her husband; but if I have it in my power to entertain you, I am entirely at your service until next quarter-day; or the whole year, if I can be of any use to you."

"Oh! you will find a change here; I have someone with me. I have made a new acquaintance since Frédéric went away."

"Indeed! I am sure that it is an acquaintance which will be agreeable to your husband too."

"Why, I hope so."

"My dear Dubourg," said Ménard, "madame does not tell you that she has taken into her family an unfortunate woman and her son; she doesn't boast of her good deeds."

"Hush, Monsieur Ménard! as if that young woman did not deserve all that I have done for her! Could I have placed my benefactions more wisely?"

"I agree that she has learned to work beautifully; I expect very soon to teach her to read."

"You will see, Monsieur Dubourg, how pretty and how interesting she is. And then, her child, a boy of two, is a charming little fellow."

"Ah! she has a son, has she?"

"Yes; and I am sure that you will agree with me that he looks like—— But I want you to see for yourself; I will go and find her."

Constance was already in the garden.

"The dear soul!" said Dubourg; "what a happy mortal Frédéric ought to be! And yet, here he is travelling already!"

"Business before everything, my dear Dubourg.—A pinch of snuff, if you please. My pupil has come into extensive estates, through his wife, and a man ought to be familiar with his estates."

"But why not take his wife with him? Don't you think that she would have been very glad to go along?"

"I don't say she wouldn't, but—— What a fellow you are! always harping on the same subject!"

"Hum! I trust that this journey doesn't conceal some scheme! I know that Frédéric would be terribly sorry to cause his wife the slightest pain; but I know also that such sentimental fellows as he take fire when they hear a woman sigh!"

"I tell you that my pupil is visiting his estates, deuce take it!—What about dominoes? are you beginning to be strong at it?"

"Much stronger than you, who can never guess where the double-six is. But let us join Madame de Montreville; I am curious to see this woman she has taken under her wing."

"She's a woman whom you will find it hard not to agree with, for there can't be a quarrel without a dispute; now, when there's no dispute, there can't be a quarrel; and there can't be a dispute in this case, because——"

But Dubourg was not listening; he was already in the garden, where he saw Madame de Montreville in the distance, with a child in her arms, and beside her a young woman dressed in a simple white gown. He walked toward them; the young woman saw him and ran, yes, flew to his side, seized his arm, and gazed at him in anxious suspense; while Dubourg stood like one petrified, for he had recognized Sister Anne.

"Mon Dieu! what has happened to her?" Constance asked Dubourg, who was completely bewildered to find the dumb girl, in such a different costume, walking with Constance, who was carrying her son in her arms. "What an extraordinary effect your presence has produced on her! See how she looks at you! She seems to be questioning you with those eloquent eyes. Do you know this poor child?"

"Why, no—that is, yes, yes, I saw her once; but she was so different then; in this dress—and with this child—faith, I did not recognize her!"

Dubourg was confused and embarrassed; he did not know what he ought to say, and Sister Anne still held his arm, while her eyes implored him to speak.

"What! you know her?" said Constance, in surprise; "but what does she want of you now? can't you guess what it is that she seems to want to know?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon—I begin to understand. I knew this poor girl's lover, and she is trying to ask me about him."

"Well, answer her, then, at once; see! her eyes are full of tears."

"Faith! I have nothing pleasant to tell her; her seducer has gone abroad, and, in all probability, she will never see him again.—I don't know what has become of him," he said to Sister Anne; "I have never seen him since, any more than you. And so, my dear child, you must try to forget him."

Sister Anne, who had listened with the closest attention to every word that fell from Dubourg's lips, dropped her head on her breast when he had finished; then she went and sat down under a tree, and gave free vent to her grief and her tears.

"Poor woman!" said Constance; "alas! she still loves the man who deserted her. Who could have abused her innocence so heartlessly?"

"He was a young painter, madame; he was travelling at the time—for his instruction. While in search of fine views, he fell in with Sister Anne—for that is her name. She is, I believe, the child of peasants; but I can't say so with certainty, for I do not know her family; however, my friend saw her and fell in love with her. These painters have flighty imaginations—and a child was the result. That's all that I know; I never saw this girl but once, when I was riding with my friend."

"In my eyes, he is very blameworthy. You men treat such affairs very lightly. To seduce a woman, and then abandon her, is, in your eyes, a mere youthful escapade, of which, indeed, you often boast!"

"Oh! madame, I can flatter myself that I never seduced anybody."

"I am speaking generally; but I am very certain that my Frédéric never did as so many thoughtless, heedless young men do! He is too sensitive, too loving, to try to deceive a young and inexperienced heart. See what horrible results such reckless conduct may have! This poor child, finding that she was enceinte, must have left her parents and fled from her native place. Without money, and bereft of that organ which is so necessary in the world, she travelled through city and country at random, and exposed to all the horrors of want. The unhappy creature! how she must have suffered! Oh! if you had seen her when I took her in, she would have made your heart ache. But she has found a friend now; I will not desert her, and, if I cannot make her altogether happy, she will not, at all events, have to dread want while she is with me."

Dubourg made no reply; the sight of Sister Anne gave him too much to think about.

"Your presence has renewed her grief by recalling her seducer," said Constance; "go away for a moment, and I will try to comfort her, although I am well aware that for such griefs there is no comfort. Could I enjoy a moment's happiness if Frédéric should forget me? But she has her son at least, and his caresses will allay her sorrow."

Constance carried little Frédéric to his mother and placed him on her knees, while Dubourg walked quickly back to the house and joined Ménard, who did not know what to think when he saw his former travelling companion's horrified expression.

"All is lost, Monsieur Ménard!" cried Dubourg, halting in front of the tutor.

"What? what is lost? King Stanislas's berlin or the King of Prussia's snuff-box? You know perfectly well that I am not to be taken in in that way again."

"Oh! let's hear no more of all that nonsense! This is a very serious matter, involving the happiness and peace of mind of Frédéric and his wife."

"I'll bet that it's not true; you're going to tell me some new fairy tale to lead me into a trap; but *non me ludit amabilis insania*."

"Will you listen to me, Monsieur Ménard? Morbleu! how could a man of your years fail to anticipate what has happened?"

"What do you mean by that? a man of my years! I beg that you will explain yourself, Monsieur Dubourg."

"You allow Madame de Montreville to take into her house, to install there——"

"Whom, in heaven's name?"

"Whom! morbleu! the girl for whom Frédéric made a fool of himself; the girl who turned his head, and with whom he lived six weeks in the woods; the girl whom he adored then, and whom, for all I know, he loves still; for a man's heart is beyond comprehension! In short, Sister Anne, the dumb girl of the woods, of Vizille, is the one whom Madame de Montreville now has in her house!"

"Mon Dieu! what do I hear?"

"Do you mean to say you didn't recognize her?"

"Recognize her! a girl I never saw but once, and then at a distance? I don't scrutinize young women as you do, monsieur; and could I suspect, did I know, that she was dumb? did anyone tell me so? No; no one tells me anything, and then they expect me to know everything by divination! You young men are inconceivable! do you suppose I should know Latin if I had never learned it?"

"Well! you know it now."

"Parbleu! I was thrashed often enough to know it! Gad! how many stripes I got for the *Epitome*, and how many *pensums* for Phædrus's fables!"

"Great heaven! Monsieur Ménard, I am talking about Sister Anne, who is here in this house, with Frédéric's wife."

"I understand, I understand perfectly."

"When Frédéric returns, she will see him; her excitement, her tears, and her caresses will betray the truth. Just think of Madame de Montreville's feelings, when the husband whom she adores and believes to be a model of fidelity finds in his house a mistress and a child—a child, above all!"

"Yes, yes; I realize all that."

"Well, then, speak! what are we to do?"

"I have no idea."

"It is impossible to let Sister Anne live under the same roof as Frédéric."

"Of course; it's most embarrassing! But she was so wretched!"

"Do you think that I mean to abandon her? I've only sixteen hundred francs a year, but I would gladly sacrifice it all to prevent her presence from disturbing the happiness of this young couple. Yes; I will work for my living, if necessary, or I'll pass the whole of every quarter with Frédéric; but that young woman and her child shall be placed beyond the reach of want."

"That is very noble, my dear Dubourg, and if I had any property—but I have nothing save my old classics, which wouldn't be of any use to her, because she can't read."

"But how are we to set about inducing Sister Anne to leave this house?"

"That would be a very hard task: Madame de Montreville is very fond of her, and is wild over the child; she thinks that he looks like my pupil—Frédéric. By the way, I can conceive a reason for that resemblance now."

"I don't know what to do; I can think of nothing. When does Frédéric return?"

"In a week; we have plenty of time."

"Time! a week will soon be gone; and if he finds Sister Anne here!"

"Why, it seems to me that we might tell the girl not to speak."

"Of course she won't speak; but her gestures, the expression of her face, will say enough."

"Indeed! well, I give you my word that I often can't understand her at all."

Dubourg tortured his brain to find some method of sending away Sister Anne and her son. Ménard sat with his eyes fixed on his snuff-box, and pretended to be equally engrossed by that subject, but in reality his thoughts were full of a pâté of hare which had arrived from Paris the night before, and which they were to attack at dinner.

Constance returned to the house with the dumb girl and the child; Sister Anne's face still bore traces of suffering, but she was calmer and more resigned; when she saw Dubourg, she smiled sadly at him, and presented her son, at whom he gazed with interest, dismayed by the striking resemblance between his features and his father's.

"Don't you think he's a lovely boy?" said Constance.

"Yes, madame," Dubourg replied, as he kissed the child; "he's very pretty."

"Does he look like his father?"

"Very much."

"And don't you think he has a look of my husband?"

"Oh! not the slightest!"

"That's strange; it impressed me at once. His name is Frédéric, too, the dear child; I believe that I love him the more for that."

As she spoke, Constance took the child in her arms; Sister Anne watched her, deeply moved, and Dubourg turned his face away to conceal the sensations aroused by that scene.

During the rest of the day, Dubourg cudgelled his brain to think how he could bring about Sister Anne's departure from Madame de Montreville's house, but he could not decide upon any plan. How was he to remove her from a luxurious home, where the most affectionate attentions were lavished upon her, and where her son was overwhelmed with caresses? Would not Sister Anne, far from consenting to such a plan, refuse to see therein anything more than shocking ingratitude, of which her loving, grateful heart was utterly incapable? To tell her that Constance's husband was her seducer would not avail to induce her to go away, for her intense longing to see Frédéric would prevail in her heart over every other consideration. She conceived herself to be united to her lover by the oaths they had exchanged; could she imagine that another woman had rights, more sacred at least, if not more equitable, than her own?

Dubourg dared not risk that method, and he tormented himself in vain to find another. At last he went to Ménard, and said to him:

"Well, have you thought of any expedient to induce Sister Anne to leave this house?"

And Ménard, after taking a pinch of snuff and reflecting for five minutes, led Dubourg into a corner and replied

in an undertone:

"I can't think of anything at all."

While talking with Constance, Dubourg tried to persuade her to send the dumb girl to live on one of her estates at some distance from Paris; but Madame de Montreville scouted the suggestion with much earnestness.

"Why," she said, "should I deprive myself of this young woman's company, and of the presence of her son, whom I love as if he belonged to me? If the unhappy creature were not under my eyes, would she receive all the attentions that tend to alleviate her position? No; I shall never part with her; every day I feel that I become more and more attached to her. If you knew how grateful she is to me for everything I do for her! Ah! I have read to the very bottom of her heart; I have not misplaced my benefactions, and I am certain that Frédéric will not blame me."

"Well," said Dubourg to himself, "I have done all I could; and even if I should give myself the jaundice trying to separate these two women, I fancy that I shouldn't succeed; I'll just let things take their course, and see what happens. The most that I can do will be to warn Frédéric when he comes home."

On the evening after Dubourg's arrival, Constance said to him:

"I want you to see what pleasure my unfortunate companion derives from music; when she hears me play and sing, it always seems to me as if she were going to speak."

She took Sister Anne's hand and led her to a seat near the piano; the dumb girl was more melancholy than usual; Dubourg's presence had revived all her sorrows; however, she smiled at her benefactress, and did her utmost to appear less downcast.

Constance had played several pieces, when she said:

"I believe I have never sung her that pretty little thing that my husband likes so much."

She played the prelude to the air. Dubourg paid little attention to the music; he was still thinking of the strange chance that had brought Sister Anne and Frédéric's wife together. Ménard was sitting in a corner of the salon, doing all that he could to understand the music; and little Frédéric was playing near his mother, who listened intently to her benefactress.

Constance had no sooner sung the first words of the ballad than Sister Anne manifested an emotion which seemed to increase with every measure; she leaned toward the singer, listening with all her ears, and hardly breathing; her whole body shook, all her faculties were absorbed by an overpowering memory; and before Constance had finished the first stanza, a deadly pallor overspread the dumb girl's features; she uttered a plaintive moan, and fainted.

Intent upon her music as she was, Constance had not observed Sister Anne's agitation; but when she heard her groan, she sprang to her feet and flew to her side.

"Great God!" she exclaimed; "what is the matter with her? She is unconscious!"

Dubourg hastened to her assistance, while Ménard ran to fetch salts and call the servants.

"Can you imagine what upset her? She was listening to me with evident pleasure, and suddenly she fainted."

"Madame," said Dubourg, attempting to take advantage of this incident, "haven't you noticed that this young woman is not always in her right mind; that there are moments when she seems—rather light-headed?"

"Why, no; I have never noticed anything of the sort. Since she has been here, she has always been very reasonable, and her depression seems perfectly natural to me. Poor dear! she doesn't open her eyes."

"Oh! this will amount to nothing; probably her emotion when she saw me this morning is the cause of her swoon."

"I am inclined to think so."

Ménard returned, armed with a dozen bottles of salts. For a long while, all their efforts were unavailing: Sister Anne did not recover consciousness, and Constance was in despair; at last, a long-drawn sigh announced that the sufferer was returning to life, and she soon opened her eyes. Her first thought was for her son; he was too young to realize his mother's danger, and had not interrupted his play. Sister Anne took him in her arms and kissed him, then looked at all those who stood about her, as if to thank them for their kindness.

"Come with me, and go to bed," said Madame de Montreville; "all your sorrow has been revived to-day, and you must forget it in sleep."

But, instead of following her, Sister Anne took her hand, led her to the piano, and motioned to her to sit down again.

"No, to-morrow," said Constance; "the music excites you too much. I will sing to you to-morrow."

Sister Anne clasped her hands, and her glance was so expressive, it besought her so earnestly to do what she desired, that Constance had not the heart to refuse; she seated herself at the piano, while Ménard observed *sotto voce*:

"That young woman is passionately fond of music; it would be a good idea to teach her to play."

Constance began an air, but Sister Anne stopped her and shook her head emphatically, as if to say: "Not that."—Thereupon she played another, but still the dumb girl was not satisfied. At last, Constance remembered that she was singing a ballad when she was interrupted; she sang it again, and had no sooner begun it than Sister Anne's emotion and the strained attention with which she listened showed plainly enough that that was what she wanted to hear.

"Just see how this ballad excites her!" said Constance; "it's the one Frédéric always liked so much!"

The words were hardly out of her mouth, when Sister Anne seized her hand, pressed it with all her strength, and nodded her head. Madame de Montreville did not understand her pantomime; she looked at Dubourg, who said in an undertone:

"I assure you that there are times when she doesn't know what she is doing. She thinks that she sees her lover everywhere; love has turned her brain."

Sister Anne's agitation partially subsided; the tears forced their way to the surface and relieved the strain. Constance gazed at her with emotion, repeating again and again:

"Poor child! what a guilty wretch he was to desert you!"

For several minutes everybody was silent. Constance resorted to her usual method of allaying the young

mother's suffering: she took little Frédéric in her arms and carried him to her. She looked up gratefully at her benefactress, and, having covered her son with kisses, rose and prepared to go to her room.

Constance insisted on accompanying her to the pavilion; there she left her, after urging her anew to be brave.

"Your troubles will come to an end before long, I hope," she said. "Yes, your seducer will certainly return to sentiments more worthy of the man you love; he cannot have forgotten you entirely. Dubourg may not be accurately informed. Dry your tears; some day you will see him again; and how can he ever leave you after you put this darling boy in his arms?"

These comforting words went to Sister Anne's heart; she welcomed the soothing hope that Constance held out to her, and parted from her somewhat less unhappy. Madame de Montreville returned slowly to her apartment; the sight of the suffering of the woman she had saved from want made her sad; Frédéric was not there to divert her thoughts and make her forget everything but her own happiness; she had never been separated from him for so long a time, and his absence tended to increase her melancholy.

Ménard had retired, after saying to Dubourg:

"This has been rather a tempestuous day."

"Ah!" was the reply; "I apprehend a much more violent storm! If that young woman fainted simply because she heard the ballad that Frédéric used to sing to her, what will happen to her when she sees him again, and when she learns that he is another woman's husband? I tell you, Monsieur Ménard, I can't think of anything else!"

"I can well believe it; it has taken away my appetite!"

"Let us try to ward off that catastrophe."

"Let us ward it off; I ask nothing better."

"Remember that the repose, the happiness, yes, even the honor, of your pupil are at stake, and that his sins will rebound on you."

"I beg your pardon: a mistake in syntax, or in Latin verses, I agree; but I never taught him to seduce innocent girls; it was rather your evil counsels that perverted him."

"Monsieur Ménard!"

"Monsieur Dubourg!"

"Let's go to bed."

"*Recte dicis.*"

XXX

FRÉDÉRIC'S RETURN.—CONSTANCE AND SISTER ANNE

Dubourg had been Madame de Montreville's guest for ten days, and during those ten days he had not ceased his efforts to invent some means of warding off the effect that the sight of Frédéric would surely produce on Sister Anne. He saw that Constance's attachment to her protégée and the latter's gratitude to her benefactress increased from day to day. To separate them seemed more difficult than ever; Constance frequently said that she could not do without Sister Anne and her son, and the young mother seemed to feel her grief less keenly by her side.

Frédéric was expected at any moment; indeed, he was already overdue. Constance was worried by his delay; she was less cheerful than usual, and her eyes were often wet with tears. At such times, Sister Anne strove to comfort her, and to say to her by signs that her husband would soon return.

"Suppose he no longer loves me!" Constance would say sometimes; and the dumb girl would take her hand and lead her before a mirror, as if to say:

"Look at yourself; can anyone help loving you?"

"Alas!" Constance would reply; "someone forgot you very quickly, and you are as pretty as I am!"

The Comte de Montreville, who had promised to pass a few days in the country, was detained by the gout. Dubourg was not sorry; he preferred that he should not be a witness of the recognition he dreaded; he had no idea that the count knew Sister Anne.

At last, Constance received a letter from her husband: he wrote her that unforeseen circumstances had delayed his return, but that he hoped to arrange everything soon. His letter was affectionate and expansive; he seemed to be as much in love as ever. Nevertheless, Constance was not satisfied: to stay away from her so long seemed in itself to indicate less warmth. Frédéric was not there, so she was at liberty to weep; before him, she concealed her tears. As always, it was to Sister Anne that she confided her troubles; on her bosom she poured out her tears and found consolation.

Dubourg saw in this delay so much time gained.

"Let us try to make use of it to prevent an interview between the lovers," he said to Ménard.

"Let's prevent it; I agree with you."

"But I've been trying for ten days to think up some expedient, and I can't find anything."

"Faith! then I'm luckier than you, for I found something the day before yesterday."

"What! if that's so, for heaven's sake tell me what it is!"

"It's my receipt for making milk punch, which I thought I had lost."

On leaving home, Frédéric had gone at once to the farm to ascertain the whereabouts of Sister Anne, and of his son, whom he ardently desired to embrace. But when he arrived there, he learned from the worthy peasants that the lone girl had started for Paris with her child long before. Frédéric did not know what to do, and what caused him the greatest distress was that a messenger from his father followed close on his heels, bringing, as usual, money and divers other things for her whom the count called his liberatress; which fact proved that he was unaware that Sister Anne had left the farm, and that she had failed to find her friend's house in Paris.

Frédéric was distressed beyond words; the people at the farm shared his disappointment. They regretted that

they had allowed Sister Anne to go; but how could they have opposed her resolution with success? What had become of her? what was she doing in Paris, without friends or protector? If they had known that the unfortunate girl had been heartlessly robbed of all that she possessed, their grief would have been greater.

Frédéric remained only one day at the farm; he started back toward Paris, and all along the road tried to obtain some information that might put him on Sister Anne's track. On reaching Paris, he did not go home; he did not wish his presence in the city to be known, because he desired his wife to remain in ignorance of it, so that he might have time to institute a search for the dumb girl and her son. For more than a week he searched the vast city, visiting the most deserted as well as the most populous quarters, often going up to rooms under the eaves, and asking everywhere if anyone had seen a young woman who could not speak and who had a child. But his search was fruitless; he did not obtain a shred of information to put him on Sister Anne's track. With an aching heart, he decided at last to return to Constance; he was very far from thinking that he would find there those whom he had been seeking so long.

Every day, Dubourg lay in ambush on one road, and stationed Ménard as a sentry on the other to notify him if he should see Frédéric coming. As the country house could not be reached except by those two roads, he felt certain of not missing him. But one morning, Ménard, having taken his Horace with him, became so interested in an ode he was reading, that the man for whom he was watching passed him unnoticed. Frédéric entered the house and hurried to Constance's room, where she was sitting, alone, thinking of her husband.

She looked up, uttered a joyful cry, and flew into his arms. All the pain of separation was instantly forgotten on her husband's breast. Frédéric responded affectionately to her outbursts of love. After the first transports of joy had subsided, Constance said:

"During your absence, I have taken an unfortunate woman into the house. Oh! I hope that you will love her as I do."

"Whatever you do is well done, my dear Constance; your heart could never lead you astray; I am certain beforehand that your benefactions have been well bestowed."

"Oh! she is such an interesting young thing! a victim of love, and we women are always sympathetic with that sort of unhappiness. Her seducer deserted her, with a charming child, whom I am perfectly wild over. His name is Frédéric, like yours.—Why, what's the matter, dear? you are as pale as a ghost, and all of a tremble!"

"Oh!—fatigue, I fancy—I was in such a hurry to get home!"

Frédéric sat down, for his legs were giving way: what Constance had told him caused him an emotion that he could not control. He looked about him, shuddering involuntarily.

"And this woman—this child—where are they?" he asked, in a trembling voice.

"She has a room in the pavilion in the garden. But I see her now.—Come here, my dear, come quickly," Constance called, running to meet Sister Anne, who was coming through the hall with her son. "My husband has returned; oh! I am so happy! Now my happiness is complete!"

She took the dumb girl's hand and drew her into the room, where her husband was still sitting. At sight of Frédéric, Sister Anne uttered a heartrending shriek; she ran to him, threw herself into his arms, pointed to her son, and lost consciousness.

With one hand Frédéric supported Sister Anne, whose lifeless head lay against his breast; with the other he covered his eyes, as if he were afraid to look about him. His son was at his feet, still holding his mother's hand, and Constance, speechless with amazement and trembling from head to foot, stood before them.

In an instant a thousand conflicting sensations seemed to be at work in Constance's breast. She changed color her eyes expressed surprise and apprehension; she shuddered, and seemed to be trying to banish the thought that had forced itself upon her mind. But her glance, resting alternately on Sister Anne and her husband, strove to discover the truth. Her first impulse was to run to Sister Anne and take her from Frédéric's arms.

"What is the matter? Why did the sight of you put her in such a condition?" she faltered, looking at Frédéric. "Answer me, dear; do you know this young woman?"

Frédéric had not the courage to reply, or even to look at Constance. But his eye fell upon his son, and he took him in his arms and covered him with kisses; thereupon Constance's heart received a terrible shock, for the whole truth was laid bare before her.

Dubourg appeared upon the scene, followed by Ménard; at sight of Frédéric, he divined all that had happened, and he instantly ran to the assistance of Sister Anne, crying:

"Fainted again! an attack of madness, I'll wager! I told you before, this poor creature has times when she loses her reason."

Constance made no reply; she left Sister Anne to the ministrations of Dubourg and Ménard, and returned to her husband, who still held the child in his arms.

"He is lovely—is he not?" she asked, in a trembling voice, with her eyes still fastened on Frédéric. He did not speak, whereupon Constance roughly snatched the child from his arms; but soon, repenting of that impulsive movement, which she could not control, she covered the child with kisses, crying in a heart-broken tone:

"Poor child! you are not guilty!"

Dubourg and Ménard carried Sister Anne away to the pavilion, leaving Frédéric and Constance with the child. Frédéric's eyes were fixed on the floor, as if he were afraid to meet those of Constance, who had seated herself a few steps away and had taken little Frédéric on her knees. She tried to restrain her tears, but she had not the courage to speak. For some minutes neither of them broke the silence. At last, Frédéric raised his eyes and saw his wife caressing Sister Anne's son. At that sight he was on the point of throwing himself at her feet and confessing all, when Dubourg rushed into the room.

"It's all right! I don't think it will amount to anything," he said, motioning to Frédéric not to betray himself. "That young woman is subject to attacks of insanity; then she thinks that she sees her lover everywhere. I have already advised madame more than once not to keep her in the house."

"Really," faltered Frédéric, trying to recover his self-possession, "I am utterly unable to understand what has happened. I was so agitated by that poor creature's condition—that I didn't realize what I was doing."

Constance said nothing; she simply looked from her husband to Dubourg.

"I'll take her son to her," said the latter, walking toward Constance to take the child.

"Let him stay," said Constance; "Frédéric will do that."

Frédéric was thrown into confusion again; he could not support his wife's glance. In vain did Dubourg whisper:

"Come, come, morbleu! have your wits about you. Remember that, for her own happiness, you must deceive her."

At that moment Ménard appeared, in a comical state of dismay.

"She has recovered her senses," he said to Dubourg, in an undertone; "but it's impossible to make her stay quietly in her room! She's a perfect devil! She insists on seeing him. She's running about the garden like a madwoman."

"Why did you leave her?"

And Dubourg hurried from the room.

"What is the matter?" said Constance; "is she worse?"

"No, madame," replied Ménard, who had no idea what he ought to say or do; "but, I'm afraid—her head—these women—love—*quid femina possit*."

"I will go and look after her," said Constance; "I will take her her son, and perhaps, when she sees him—— Aren't you coming with me, Frédéric; won't you add your efforts to mine to pacify the poor, unhappy creature?"

Frédéric hesitated; he did not know what it was best for him to do. He longed to see Sister Anne, whose terrible plight had torn his heart; but he was afraid of betraying himself when he saw her. At that moment, they heard cries in the garden; they looked out and saw Sister Anne running hither and thither, pursued by the servants and Dubourg. The former, when they saw how intensely excited she was, rushing in all directions, with her hair flying in the wind, had no doubt that she had lost her reason; and Dubourg confirmed them in that idea, which might prevent their guessing the truth.

But Sister Anne spied Frédéric at one of the windows on the ground floor; instantly she rushed in that direction, entered the room, and, in the twinkling of an eye, threw herself into Frédéric's arms, pushing away Constance, who stood beside him, and looking at her with a jealous and at the same time anxious expression, as if to say:

"I alone have the right to be here."

The servants halted in the doorway and gazed at the picture before them. Constance felt a terrible sinking at the heart when she saw Sister Anne in her husband's arms; but she retained sufficient strength to walk toward the servants and say in a trembling voice:

"Go, my friends; this unhappy woman is not in her right mind, but we shall be able to pacify her."

The servants retired; Ménard had gone in search of Dubourg, to whom he always had recourse at difficult crises; Sister Anne was left alone with her son and Frédéric and Constance.

The dumb girl seemed as if she would attach herself inseparably to Frédéric, who had not the courage to push her away. She smiled at him, she took his hands and held them to her heart, then pointed to their son. At the same time, she glanced uneasily at Constance, who was seated a few steps away, with her face hidden in her hands, unable to endure that scene. But her tears were suffocating her; they burst forth at last, and she sobbed as if her heart would break. Sister Anne shuddered. Constance's grief seemed to touch her to the quick. Frédéric could contain himself no longer; he ran and threw himself at his wife's feet; but she, without looking at him, gently repulsed him.

"Go, go," she said; "this unhappy girl has more claim to your love than I; this child is your son. Console her for all she has suffered since you deserted her. I know the whole truth now. No; she has not lost her reason; she has found her seducer, the father of her child!"

Frédéric was thunderstruck. Pale and trembling, he remained at Constance's feet; and Sister Anne, with her eyes fixed upon his face, seemed to be waiting to hear what he would say. But Frédéric seized his wife's hand and covered it with tears and kisses; at that sight a plaintive moan escaped the dumb girl, and again she fell unconscious to the floor.

Constance hastened to her assistance.

"Leave us," she said to Frédéric; "your presence is too painful to her. Oh! you can trust her to me; I shall be no different to her from what I have always been."

Frédéric made no reply, but left the room, in a state of complete bewilderment. He met Dubourg and Ménard hurrying toward him.

"The pretence is of no avail," he said; "Constance has divined the truth; she knows all."

"As she knows all," said Ménard, "we mustn't conceal anything more from her."

Constance lavished upon Sister Anne the most zealous attention. At last, the dumb girl opened her eyes. When they fell upon Frédéric's wife, her first impulse was to push her away; then she looked about in search of Frédéric. Constance beckoned to the child, who held out his little arms to his mother. Sister Anne seemed touched by Constance's conduct; she looked at her with less jealousy, but she shuddered from head to foot, her teeth chattered violently, her eyes closed again, and a ghastly pallor overspread her cheeks.

Constance ordered the servants to carry her to the pavilion, where she was put to bed. She was in a raging fever, and was really delirious. Her eyes rolled from side to side with an expression of intense anxiety; she recognized nobody, and even repulsed her son.

"Poor dear! I will not abandon you," said Constance; and she passed the whole day beside Sister Anne's bed. Not until evening, when she found that she was a little calmer, did she decide to leave her; but she left her in charge of faithful and willing servants, intending to return frequently to ascertain her condition.

She returned to her own apartment, where Frédéric awaited her. How different was that day, which reunited them, from those that they had previously passed together! Constance said nothing; her heart was drawn hither and thither by a multitude of conflicting emotions; her bosom rose and fell convulsively, but she tried to conceal her suffering and to appear calm before her husband. Frédéric stood before her, motionless, like a criminal awaiting his doom; her kindness made him keenly alive to his wrong-doing. At last he approached her, not daring to speak, and fell at her feet.

"What are you doing?" said Constance, gently; "why do you kneel at my feet? You are not guilty toward me. Ah! it would be more just for you to kneel at the feet of her whom you have betrayed and deserted! I have no right to complain: your fault is only too common among men. You knew this poor girl before your marriage. She has become a mother. But, in the world, your conduct would be considered perfectly natural and proper. Far from blaming you, society would perhaps applaud you for forgetting a woman who could not be your wife. But, I confess, I thought that you were different from the heedless rakes who pride themselves on the tears of which they are the cause. What lamentable results your fault has had! If you only knew all that the unhappy creature has suffered! She was in the last stages of destitution, actually dying of starvation, when I took her in; yes, dying of starvation—with your son in her arms. Oh! Frédéric! do you realize what your remorse would have been? You weep? Ah! my dear, let your tears flow; I would rather lose your heart than believe that it was capable of utter lack of feeling. Listen: you have found your child's mother; you must not abandon her again. If you will leave everything to me, I will assure her future; she shall live in a house which I will buy for her in some pleasant place in the country; she shall want nothing. Her son is a dear boy; I would have liked to be a mother to him, but it would be a horrible thing to separate her from her child. He shall have a good education. When he has grown up, you shall decide his fate; and be assured that I shall never consider anything that you do for him more than you ought to do. That is what I propose to do for the woman you once loved. But it may be that this plan does not satisfy you. Perhaps, on seeing the poor girl again, the love that she formerly inspired in you has revived. Perhaps you love her still. Oh! Frédéric, I entreat you to be sincere with me; let me read in the bottom of your heart. There is no sacrifice of which I am not capable to make you happy. Yes, my dear; I shall be able to endure anything—except the sight of your regret for another. If you love her—if you still feel drawn to her—I will go away, I will bury myself on one of our estates; you will not see me again, and you will be at liberty to keep the mother of your child with you."

Constance could no longer hold back the tears that were suffocating her. She had made a prolonged effort to restrain her feelings, but her courage gave way when she proposed to Frédéric that they should part.

"I, leave you!" he cried, throwing his arms about her. "Oh! Constance, can you believe that I have ceased for one instant to love you? No, I swear to you, you alone possess my heart! I realize the wrong I have done; I propose to assure Sister Anne's future; I must do it. Could I help feeling profoundly moved when I saw her again? And the child—I love him, and I propose to see to his future welfare and happiness; for that you cannot blame me. I approve all your plans; I know the goodness of your heart, the nobility of your soul. How few wives would have acted as you have done! Command me: send Sister Anne away; let her go to-morrow."

"To-morrow! oh! no, dear. The poor child is ill—very ill! she shall not leave this place until she has fully recovered. So long as she is here—you must avoid seeing her; your presence can do her nothing but harm. Promise me that you will not see her; that is the only sacrifice I ask of you."

"I will do whatever you say."

"When she has recovered, I will go with her myself to her new home, and I will not leave her until I am certain that she lacks nothing."

Frédéric embraced Constance with profound affection; her kindness of heart made her even dearer to him. A wife ought never to employ any other weapons; reproaches and complaints repel a husband; gentleness and indulgence always end by winning back his heart.

In her husband's arms, Constance found happiness once more; he swore to her that he loved no one but her, and she believed his oaths: could she live without his love?

Early the next morning, Constance went to the pavilion; and Frédéric sought Dubourg and Ménard, to tell them of his wife's noble conduct.

"There aren't many women like her," said Dubourg; "guard her carefully; you cannot love her too dearly; you have a veritable treasure in her!"

"Madame de Montreville's conduct," said Ménard, "is certainly worthy of one of Plutarch's heroines; and I know of nothing finer in history save that of Cunegunde, wife of the Emperor Henry II, who grasped a red-hot iron to prove her chastity."

Sister Anne was still in an alarming condition; she recognized nobody, but she seemed to be constantly looking for somebody and holding out her arms to him. Constance looked to it that she wanted nothing; she herself brought a doctor to her, and installed at her bedside an old maid-servant, who did not leave her for an instant. Then Constance took little Frédéric and carried him to her husband.

"Love him dearly," she said, as she placed him in his arms; "by making the child happy, you can best atone for the wrong you have done the mother. I feel that I, too, love him as if he were my own son. When I first saw him, a secret presentiment seemed to tell me that he belonged to you; and that thought made me love him more rather than less."

Frédéric embraced his son, who thenceforth passed a large part of the time with him; for the poor child no longer received the caresses of his mother, who was still in a raging fever, and delirious, and, for nearly a fortnight, lay at the gates of death. During that time, Constance passed whole days and often whole nights in the pavilion, refusing to leave to another the nursing that the young patient required; she hung over her pillow, and held her in the most violent paroxysms of her delirium; she triumphed over fatigue, she was unconscious of suffering, she devoted her whole attention to Sister Anne; in vain did Frédéric, day after day, urge her to be careful of her own health and to take some rest.

"Let me nurse her," said Constance; "by devoting myself to her, it seems to me that I repair a part of the wrong that you have done her."

Frédéric had not a moment's peace of mind so long as he knew that Sister Anne was in danger. He was consumed with the longing to see her again, but he had promised his wife not to enter her presence; and how could he break his promise, after all that Constance had done for him? He often hovered about the pavilion where the poor girl lay, and waited impatiently for someone to come out from whom he could obtain news of her condition. But when it was Constance who came out, he concealed a part of what he felt, afraid to reveal the extent of his interest in the dumb girl.

Thanks to the unremitting care of Frédéric's wife, the patient returned to life; her delirium ceased, she recognized her child, strained him to her heart, and refused to be separated from him. When she first saw Constance

again, her whole body quivered; but in a moment she seemed to recover herself, and seized her benefactress's hand, which she covered with tears and kisses; it was as if she were trying to ask her forgiveness for the wrong she had done her.

"Poor girl!" said Constance, affectionately pressing her hand; "I shall always be the same to you; it is my place to try to make up for your misfortunes. I am your friend; your child is mine; henceforth his fate and yours are assured. Oh! don't shake your head—I am simply paying a debt. Your son is a sweet, lovely boy; his happiness will enable you to forget your own sorrows some day. Courage! you may yet be happy!"

Sister Anne sighed, and her eyes seemed to say that it was impossible. Constance herself did not believe that it was possible to forget Frédéric; but it is lawful to lie a little in order to comfort others. The dumb girl looked about the room, but, in a moment, turned her eyes again upon her benefactress, as if resigned to her fate.

"I will do what you order me to do," she seemed to say.

Constance informed her husband that Sister Anne was saved, although her convalescence would be long and slow; the doctor had said that the invalid would not be able to travel for a long time, but that the proximity of the garden would afford her an excellent opportunity to test without injury the return of her strength.

Frédéric was overjoyed to learn that his victim was restored to life; every day the longing to see her, though but for a moment, tormented him more. Nor was that his only longing: while the dumb girl was very ill, they had brought his son to him, and he had passed a great part of the time with him. He had become accustomed to his presence, he had learned to know the pleasures of a father's love; and that sentiment is not one of those which time or separation impairs. Frédéric, who dared not let his wife know of his longing to see Sister Anne, had no hesitation in asking for his son.

"He is his mother's sole consolation now, my dear; do you want to deprive her of him? Later, when time has allayed her suffering somewhat, I have no doubt that she will consent to send him to you now and then; but just at this time she wants him with her every moment."

Frédéric said no more, but tried to conceal his feelings; for Constance was gazing at him as if she would read his inmost thoughts.

Sister Anne recovered her strength very slowly; it was several days before she was able to go down into the garden with her son, leaning on Constance's arm. As she supported the convalescent's tottering steps, Constance glanced anxiously about, dreading to see Frédéric, although she had told him that Sister Anne was coming into the garden, which was equivalent to asking him not to appear there. Frédéric knew that his presence would certainly cause an agitation that would be dangerous to the invalid, and he remained in his apartment.

Sister Anne was calmer, but her calmness seemed to be the result of complete prostration rather than of resignation; she kept her eyes fixed on the ground, except when she turned them on her son; she did not weep, but the expression of her face indicated her mental suffering; meanwhile, her strength constantly increased, and soon she was able to go out alone with her son, to stroll about the pavilion.

A few days more, and Madame de Montreville was to set out with Sister Anne and her son for the estate on which she proposed that they should make their home. Frédéric approved his wife's plan, but he was consumed by the desire to see once more the woman he had loved so dearly, and whom he was not certain that he did not love still.

He knew that Sister Anne and her son went every morning at daybreak to sit in an arbor near the pavilion. One morning he rose softly, while Constance was still asleep; it was almost dawn; he could not resist the craving to see the dumb girl and her son; he did not mean to speak to her, or to show himself to her, but only to see her once more. She was to go away the next day, so that that day was the last on which it would be possible for him to satisfy the desire that beset him.

He dressed noiselessly and walked to the bed where Constance lay; she was not resting quietly, but her eyes were closed, she was asleep; he determined to seize the opportunity, and he stole quickly from the room and into the garden. The first rays of dawn were just beginning to dispel the mists of the night; he walked rapidly toward Sister Anne's favorite arbor; his heart beat fast; it seemed to him that he was living anew those moments of his first love when he arrived at the wood of Vizille and looked for the dumb girl on the bank of the stream where they were wont to meet.

She was not yet in the arbor; she probably would not be there for at least a quarter of an hour; he sat down on the bench where she usually sat, from which he could see the pavilion where she and her son lived. He fastened his eyes upon that building; his heart was full, he felt again the delicious emotion that he used to feel as he gazed at old Marguerite's miserable hovel. At that moment, he forgot all that had happened since; he waited impatiently for her to come out; it seemed to him that he would see her come running toward him, driving her goats.

Time passes very quickly when one is engrossed by such memories. Suddenly the door of the pavilion opened and a child appeared—it was his son. Frédéric was on the point of running forward to embrace him, but he remembered the promise he had given Constance. If he went nearer to the pavilion, Sister Anne would see him, for she could not be far behind her child. He must keep out of her sight; so he crept behind the shrubbery, and there, hidden by a thick clump of hornbeams, he waited tremblingly for her to appear.

He had hardly left the arbor, when the dumb girl came out of the pavilion and took her son by the hand. Frédéric could not take his eyes from her. She was dressed in a plain white gown; her hair, gathered carelessly on top of her head, fell over her forehead, whereon sadness and suffering were written. She smiled, however, as she looked at her child; then paused, glanced about the garden, and heaved a profound sigh.

Frédéric did not tire of gazing at her; that unfamiliar costume, in which he was now for the first time able to examine her at his leisure,—for in his wife's presence he had hardly dared to look at her,—seemed to add to her charms and make her more beautiful than ever. She came toward him, she entered the arbor; he hardly breathed. She sat on the bench—she was close beside him—only a few branches separated them; he heard her sighs, he could count the throbs of her heart. How sad she seemed! Alas! who would console her now? He was the cause of her woes, and he could do nothing to put an end to them. The child put his little arms about his mother's neck; it was as if he were already trying, young as he was, to soothe her grief. She pressed him to her heart, but her tears continued to flow. Frédéric could control himself no longer; he heard her sobs, he forgot his promise, he saw nothing but Sister Anne's tears, which fell upon his heart. He abruptly put aside the branches that separated them; he fell at her feet

and embraced her knees, crying:

"Forgive me!"

At sight of Frédéric, Sister Anne started to rise and fly, but she had not the strength; she fell back on the bench and tried to look the other way, but an irresistible power forced her to turn her eyes upon her lover. He was at her feet, entreating her forgiveness; she had not the courage to repel him; she placed her son in his arms, and soon she was straining him to her heart. At that moment they heard a cry, not far away. Frédéric, disturbed and alarmed, left the arbor and looked in every direction; seeing no one, he returned to Sister Anne. But she was already going back to the pavilion with her son; he tried to detain her; she slipped from his arms, while her eyes bade him an affectionate adieu. She had enjoyed a moment's happiness, but she did not propose to be culpable toward her benefactress by remaining longer with Frédéric.

Sister Anne and the child having returned to the pavilion, Frédéric was alone in the garden; he was still agitated by the pleasure it had afforded him to see his former sweetheart, but that pleasure was mingled with anxiety. The cry he had heard worried him. He searched every part of the garden, but found no one. He persuaded himself that he had made a mistake, that the voice came from the fields. For a moment he thought of his wife. Suppose that Constance had seen him! But he soon rejected that idea, for Constance was asleep when he left his room. He returned to the house. The servants were astir. Dubourg and Ménard came down into the garden. Frédéric dared not go to his wife, but waited till breakfast before seeing her again.

He strolled about the garden with his friends; but he was thoughtful and ill at ease.

"Are you grieving over Sister Anne's approaching departure?" said Dubourg. "I tell you, my dear fellow, it is indispensable. A man can't live under the same roof with his wife and his mistress, even if the latter has ceased to be anything to him; for the wife must always stand in dread of chance meetings and accidents; and if she loves her husband ever so little, she won't sleep peacefully."

"Unquestionably," said Ménard, "one cannot live with the wolf and the lamb. It's as if you should put a canary and a parrot in the same cage; they'll always end by fighting. I don't refer to Madame de Montreville; she's an angel of gentleness; and certainly the other little woman will never talk loud. But, after all: *naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*. Furthermore, a Greek philosopher has said: 'Do you want to have hell on earth? if so, live with your wife and your mistress.'"

"But, Monsieur Ménard, far from having any such desire, I wish with all my heart that the poor creature were already far away. I realize too well that I must not rely on my resolutions."

"There's only one thing in the world you can rely on; and that is indigestion, if you bathe right after eating."

The breakfast hour arrived; Constance appeared, and, as usual, went to her husband and kissed him.

"I was mistaken; she knows nothing," said Frédéric to himself.

However, it seemed to him that she was pale, that her eyes were red and swollen, that her hand trembled in his. He inquired affectionately concerning her health.

"I am all right," said Constance; "I am not sick; there's nothing the matter with me."

But her tone seemed to contradict her words.

The day passed, and Frédéric was surprised to see that Constance made no preparations for Sister Anne's departure and her own. He ventured at last to mention the subject.

"I have changed my mind," said Constance, struggling to conceal her emotion; "I don't see why that young woman should leave the house; she is so happy with us! Her presence cannot be disagreeable to you; on the other hand, her absence might cause you too much regret."

"What do you say?" cried Frédéric.

"No, she shall not go," continued Constance, coldly; apparently not noticing her husband's bewilderment. "It is useless now."

With that, she turned away and shut herself up in her own apartment. Frédéric did not know what to think of that sudden change of plan; but that evening Constance's maid went to the pavilion, at her bidding, and informed Sister Anne that she was to live on at the pavilion; that there was no further question of her going away.

The dumb girl was greatly surprised; but her heart could not be indifferent to the bliss of remaining near Frédéric. She was astonished, however, that her benefactress, who had been so unvaryingly kind to her, did not come to her and explain her change of plan. Several days passed, and she did not see Madame de Montreville. The same attention was paid to her comfort and her son's, but her benefactress had ceased to visit the occupants of the pavilion.

Constance passed all her time in her own room; she did not say a word to Frédéric; but her face was drawn and haggard; it was evident that she was suffering and that she was doing her utmost to conceal it. Frédéric hardly dared to question her, and when he did she always answered gently:

"Nothing is the matter with me."

"Morbleu!" said Dubourg; "this isn't natural! That young woman has something on her mind. She insists now that the other one shall stay; I can't make anything out of it."

"Nor I," said Ménard; "but I think, with you, that there's some mystery about it. Tertullian says that the devil isn't as mischievous as woman, and I agree with Tertullian."

XXXI

THE CATASTROPHE

Sister Anne and her son continued to occupy the pavilion in the garden. She went out very rarely, and then only to walk in the paths that were near by. She did not go near the house; she was afraid of meeting Frédéric again, although her heart still burned for him with the same ardent flame.

Nor did Frédéric dare to go near the pavilion; his wife's conduct, ever since the day that he embraced the dumb

girl, had left no doubt in his mind that it was she who had uttered that cry of which he had unavailingly sought the author. If Constance had seen him at Sister Anne's feet, what could she think of his promises? Of course, she believed now that she was not the sole object of his love. He was often tempted to throw himself at her feet, to assure her that he adored her still; but, in that case, he must confess that he had broken his word; and suppose his wife did not know it, after all! In his uncertainty, Frédéric held his peace, hoping, by keeping a close watch upon himself, to dispel the suspicions which were devouring Constance's heart in secret.

Constance did not leave the house; she did not even go into the garden. Her face was careworn, her cheeks had lost their color; she tried in vain to smile; the melancholy that was eating her heart away betrayed itself in every act. She was still as sweet and amiable as ever; she seemed to appreciate her husband's attentions, and, noticing that he never went into the garden, she often urged him to do so.

"Why do you wish me to leave you?" said Frédéric; "can I be as happy elsewhere as I am with you?"

Whereupon Constance lovingly pressed his hand and turned away to conceal a tear. She had the scene in the arbor constantly before her eyes; she saw her husband pressing Sister Anne to his heart; she believed that she no longer possessed his love, and persuaded herself that he was unhappy because he no longer saw the dumb girl, but that he was sacrificing himself for her peace of mind. That cruel thought was the source of the keenest torture to her heart,—torture the more painful because she strove to conceal it.

"Things can't go on like this," Dubourg often said to Frédéric. "Your wife is changing perceptibly, and the poor dumb girl's melancholy is enough to break one's heart. Morbleu! if these two women remain together, both of them will very soon die of consumption."

"What can I do? Is not Sister Anne's fate absolutely in Constance's hands? When I attempt to speak to her about it, she closes my mouth, or else declares again that she doesn't choose to send her away."

"It's very embarrassing, on my word," said Ménard; "and if I were in my pupil's place, I know what I would do."

"Well, what would you do?" queried Dubourg.

"Pardieu! I would do as he does—not know what to do."

A very simple occurrence was destined to effect a revolution in Frédéric's household: one morning, the Comte de Montreville, having at last shaken off the gout, arrived at his son's country house.

Dubourg, although he had no idea that the count knew Sister Anne, was pleased by his arrival, because he felt sure that his presence would compel Frédéric to take some decisive step. Frédéric was terribly disturbed when his father appeared, having as yet had no explanation with him. Should he tell him the truth—that the dumb girl was under his roof? But, before he was left alone with the count, Constance made him promise that he would not mention Sister Anne; for she thought that the count was ignorant of his son's wrong-doing, and she did not want him to know of it at all.

The Comte de Montreville had been anxious for a long while concerning the fate of the young woman who had saved his life. His last messenger had brought him the intelligence that she had left the farm, intending to go to Paris. As she did not appear at his house, he had caused a search to be made for her, but to no purpose; he had no idea what could have become of her.

On arriving at his son's house, the count was at once impressed by Constance's melancholy and dejection. He inquired anxiously concerning the cause of the change; the young woman tried to evade his questions, on the pretext that she was slightly indisposed; but the old man was sharp-eyed: he saw that some mystery was being hidden from him, and he determined to fathom it. His son was embarrassed in his presence. Ménard avoided him as if he were afraid of being reprimanded for something. Dubourg alone appeared delighted by his arrival. Everything seemed to indicate that something extraordinary was taking place in the house.

As Constance knew that Monsieur de Montreville was accustomed, when he was at Montmorency, to go to the pavilion in the garden to read, she lost no time in informing him that a young woman and her son, of whom she had taken charge, were quartered there. The count asked no questions; he was far from suspecting that that young woman was the one he had been seeking so long: he certainly did not expect to find her under his son's roof.

On the day after his arrival, the count rose early, as usual, and went into the garden. He walked toward the pavilion, and not until he was about to enter did he remember what Constance had told him the day before. He turned away, and was walking in another direction, when a child came out of the pavilion and ran toward him; in a moment, another person had seized his hand and pressed it to her heart. The Comte de Montreville was surprised beyond expression when he found himself in the presence of the dumb girl and her son.

Sister Anne had seen the count from her window as he came toward the pavilion; she recognized him instantly; her protector's features were engraved on her memory. When he turned away, she at once ran after him. The poor girl did her best to express the pleasure she felt at seeing him again; and he was a long while recovering from his amazement.

"You here!" he said, at last; "who took you in? Do you know that the young woman who has given you shelter is Frédéric's wife—your seducer's wife?"

Sister Anne explained by signs that she did know it, that she had seen Frédéric, and that it was Constance who insisted that she should live in that pavilion.

Every instant added to the count's bewilderment. As he could not obtain from the dumb girl all the information he desired, he was intensely anxious to see his son.

"Go back to the pavilion," he said to Sister Anne; "you will soon leave it. You have been here only too long. Go, my poor child; I will see you again soon."

Sister Anne obeyed; she returned to the pavilion with her son, whom the count could not refrain from embracing tenderly.

Frédéric dreaded just what had happened; he trembled lest his father should meet Sister Anne, and was on the point of going to him to tell him the truth, when the count appeared before him; his stern expression announced that it was too late to warn him.

"I have just seen the person who is living in the pavilion in the garden," said the count, watching his son closely; "and I am no longer surprised at the depression, the great change, which I have noticed in your wife's whole appearance. Unhappy man! so this is the recompense of her love! of her virtues! You permit the woman you seduced

to live under the same roof as your wife!"

"I am not to blame in this," said Frédéric; and he told his father how his wife had taken in the dumb girl and her child during his absence; how she had become attached to the unfortunate creature; and everything that had happened on his return.

The count listened in silence to Frédéric's story.

"So your wife knows all!" he said; "she knows that you are that girl's seducer, the father of her child; and she insists that she shall continue to live in your house?"

"Her purpose at first was to send her away, to take her and the child to one of our estates, where she would have everything that her comfort and welfare required; the day for their departure was fixed. I have no idea why she changed her mind, but now she insists that Sister Anne shall not go."

"And you can't divine the reason? My son, such conduct is too extraordinary not to have some secret cause. It is not natural that a wife who loves, yes, adores her husband, should want to keep by her side her rival, or, at all events, the woman he once loved and may love again. But Constance has a soul capable of sacrificing everything, of immolating itself for your happiness! Ought you to allow that? Don't you see how she has changed? She conceals her tears from you, but she can't conceal her pallor, the suffering that is working havoc on her lovely features. There is not a minute in the day when she is not thinking that you are under the same roof as the mother of your son; that you can see her, speak to her."

"Oh! I swear to you, father, that I never——"

"I am glad to believe you; but your wife is in a cruel position. To-morrow, your victim will no longer be under your eyes."

"What! father!"

"Do you disapprove of my determination?"

"I? oh, no! far from it. No; I realize all that I owe you. Surely I do not need to commend that poor creature—and my son—to your care!"

"No, monsieur; I know what my duty is; your wife's beneficent intentions shall be carried out. Indeed, do you suppose that that young woman is indifferent to me, or that her son has no claim upon my heart? Because it is no longer subject to the ardent passions of youth, do you think that it is closed to all sentiment? Let me restore peace of mind and repose to your wife; and do you restore her happiness, if possible, by redoubling your devotion and your love. That is the way to atone for your wrong-doing, Frédéric, and to pay me for all that I propose to do for Sister Anne and her son."

Frédéric shed tears upon his father's hand. The count left him, to go to Constance; he did not mention the dumb girl to her, but, as he looked into her face, he felt that he admired her and loved her more than ever. Constance did not know to what she should attribute the marks of affection which the count, usually so cold, took pleasure in lavishing upon her; she could not divine the explanation of them. She believed that he was ignorant of his son's fault.

The count sent his servant to Paris, with orders to have a post chaise with two good horses at the garden gate the next morning at daybreak. He proposed to accompany Sister Anne, and he went to the pavilion to tell her what he had determined upon.

His frequent going and coming led Dubourg to conclude that the count had some project in contemplation.

"We shall have a change here," he said to Ménard; "God grant that it may restore happiness and pleasure to this house!"

"It certainly hasn't been very gay here of late," said Ménard; "madame la comtesse sighs, my pupil is preoccupied, the dumb girl says nothing; and I can hardly recognize you yourself, my dear Dubourg."

"Well! how do you expect me to be in high spirits, when I see that all the people I love are unhappy? In spite of my philosophy, I am not insensible to my friends' suffering."

"You're like me; I think of it all day long."

"Indeed! but it doesn't take away your appetite."

"Would you have me make myself ill, to cheer them up?"

"You're not likely to; you're getting to be a regular ball!"

"That fool of a cook gives us beefsteak every day; how can I help growing fat?"

"I expect great things from the arrival of Frédéric's father; he has been to the pavilion and seen Sister Anne, and a change is coming, I am sure of it."

"Ah! do you think that we shan't have any more beefsteaks?"

"Really, Monsieur Ménard, you weren't born to live in France; you ought to take up your abode in Switzerland, where they eat all day."

"I was born, monsieur, to live anywhere; and when you called yourself Baron Potoski, you had a pretty knack of squandering our funds with your three-course dinners; but I won't say of you: *Quantum mutatus ab illo*, because I noticed you at table yesterday; you ate all the tunny, and when I wanted some more it was all gone."

"Tunny is very indigestible, Monsieur Ménard; it isn't good for you."

"I beg you, monsieur, not to worry about my health, and to leave some tunny for me at the next opportunity. You will see that, old as I am, I can steer clear of indigestion if I choose!"

While those whom he left in the house lost themselves in conjectures, the count walked through the garden to the pavilion. It was dark when he was ready to tell Sister Anne what he proposed to do. Her room was on the first floor; he hesitated a moment before he went upstairs to the woman who had saved his life.

"Poor child!" he said to himself; "I am going to deal her a heavy blow. I must take her away from Frédéric; I must separate them forever; but I am simply doing my duty, and her heart is too pure not to feel that she must think first of all of the peace of mind, yes, the life, of the woman who saved her and her son from the horrors of starvation, and who has taken pleasure in heaping kindnesses upon her."

The old man entered the dumb girl's room; at sight of him, she rose and ran to meet him; one could read in her eyes the respect and affection that she felt for him. The count was touched to the heart; he looked at her for several

minutes in silence; but he felt that he must say at once what he had to say, so that she might be ready at dawn.

"My child," he said, "I told you this morning that you cannot, you must not, remain any longer in this house; your presence here will in the end be fatal to her who rescued you. Constance loves her husband dearly; do you wish to rob her of repose and happiness forever? She conceals the torments she is suffering; but I have read her inmost thoughts. You surely do not wish to cause the death of the woman who saved your son?"

Sister Anne, by a most eloquent gesture, signified that she was prepared to sacrifice herself for Constance.

"Very well," continued the count; "then you must go away, you must leave this place—to-morrow at daybreak—without seeing your benefactress. I will undertake to tell her all that your heart would impel you to say to her. You must not see any of this household again; it is unnecessary. There is one person in particular—but I need not urge upon you the necessity of taking every precaution to avoid meeting him."

Sister Anne was overwhelmed with grief. To go away so suddenly, without any preparation! to go without seeing him, and forever! Her courage failed her, and the tears gushed from her eyes.

The count went to her and took her hand.

"Poor child!" he said; "this sudden departure grieves you, but it must be; under such circumstances, every minute's delay is a crime. I tear you away from this house, but I have a right to be harsh. Courage, dear child! It is Frédéric's father, whom you saved from the knives of the brigands, it is he who asks you to sacrifice yourself once more, for his son's good."

These words produced upon the dumb girl all the effect that the count anticipated; on learning that he was her lover's father, she fell at his knees, and with clasped hands seemed to implore his forgiveness.

"Rise, rise," he said, kissing her on the forehead; "unfortunate girl! would to God that I could give you back your happiness! At all events, you may be assured of a comfortable home, and your son's future is provided for. I am going to take you to a farm, which I propose to give you; there is a pretty little cottage connected with it, where you will live, attended by faithful servants who will love you dearly. There you will bring up your son; I will come often to share your retirement, and before long, I hope, peace and tranquillity will have returned to your heart."

Sister Anne listened, and was ready to obey; she had no hope of being happy again, but her eyes seemed to say:

"Do with me as you will; I am ready to abide by your slightest wish."

"Until to-morrow, then," said the count; "I will come for you at daybreak; I want to be away before anybody in the house is astir. A comfortable carriage will be ready for us at the garden gate. Make all your preparations to-night; they need not be long, for you will find in your new home everything that you and your son will require. Au revoir, dear child; be brave! At daybreak I shall be with you."

The count took his leave, and Sister Anne was alone; her son was asleep; it was night, the last night that she was to pass near Frédéric. She must go away from him—fly from him forever. That thought overwhelmed her. She sat, perfectly motionless, on a chair beside her son's cradle; a single thought absorbed all her faculties: she must go away from him whom her heart had ached to find, whom she idolized, and who, in the arbor, had acted as if he loved her still; she must go away from him; the peace of mind, the existence, of her benefactress demanded that terrible sacrifice.

The last hours that she was to pass in the house seemed to fly with unexampled rapidity. Engrossed by these thoughts, she had done nothing toward preparing for her departure. The village clock struck twelve, and the dumb girl still sat beside her son's cradle, in the same position in which the count had left her.

The mournful clang of the bell roused her from her reverie; she rose, and made a small bundle of her clothes; her preparations were soon completed, and there were still several hours before the dawn. Should she try to sleep? no; she knew that it would be in vain! But what thought is this that makes her heart beat fast? Everybody in the house is asleep; suppose she should take advantage of her last remaining moments to go a little nearer to him! She did not propose to see him, for she knew that that would be a breach of her promise to the count and of her duty to her benefactress. But she could go, without Frédéric's knowledge, to bid him a last farewell; she knew which were the windows of his room; it seemed to her that she should go away a little less unhappy, and that Frédéric might perhaps hear her whispered farewell in his sleep.

She hesitated no longer; she put her bundles on a chair and placed her candle on the hearth. Her son was sleeping soundly; she leaned over and looked at him, and shed tears upon his pillow at the thought that she was soon to take him away from his father.

Everything was perfectly quiet, as she stole noiselessly from the pavilion. It was a dark night, but she was familiar with the garden. Like a shadow, her feet barely touching the earth, she glided swiftly along the paths, until at last she reached the house. Frédéric's apartment was on the first floor, at the right; she knelt under his windows, she held out her arms to him, and bade him a last farewell.

Weeping bitterly, with her head resting on her hand, but unable to remove her eyes from the room in which she knew him to be, Sister Anne abandoned herself to her love, her regret, her despair. It was a long while since she had left the pavilion; the minutes were passing rapidly, but she could not tear herself away from that spot. But it must be done. The unhappy girl made a final effort; she rose and walked away, broken-hearted; she staggered along the paths, hardly able to restrain her sobs.

Suddenly she became conscious of a bright light in the garden; she raised her eyes; she could not conceive where it came from. As she walked on, the light became brighter and brighter; the darkness of the night was succeeded by a terrifying glare; it was fire, which lighted up every nook and corner of the garden. As that certainty burst upon her mind, Sister Anne, seized by an indescribable fear, no longer walked, but ran, aye, flew toward the pavilion; the flames were pouring forth in clouds from the windows of the first floor.

A heartrending shriek burst from the young mother's lips; she could see nothing but her son, whom she had left in that room, her son, whom the flames were perhaps already consuming!

In her desperation, she recovered her strength; she rushed into the pavilion; the hall was filled with dense smoke; but a mother knows no danger, she must have her child. She groped her way upstairs, felt for the door, which the smoke concealed and which her trembling hands sought in vain. At last the flames guided her; she entered the room; everything was ablaze. A bundle of clothes had fallen against the candle, and the flames had spread rapidly to all parts of the room. Sister Anne ran to the cradle, which the fire had just reached; she held her son in her

arms; she tried to go out, but she could not see what direction to take. Already the flames surrounded her; her limbs were badly burned; she tried to call, for she felt that she was dying. At that moment, her voice, yielding to a mighty effort of nature, broke the bonds that held it; and the unfortunate girl, as she fell, exclaimed distinctly:

"Frédéric, come and save your son!"

The flames rising from the pavilion had been seen by the people at the house, several of whom were unable to sleep. Frédéric rushed from his room in dismay, shouting as he ran. Everyone rose and dressed in haste.

"The pavilion's on fire!" was the general cry.

Frédéric arrived there ahead of all the rest; he defied death, to make his way to Sister Anne; he entered the room a few seconds after she had lost consciousness; he took her on one arm and his son on the other; he passed through the flames into the garden; he had saved them both.

On learning what had happened, everybody had followed Frédéric. Constance was not the last to fly upon her husband's footsteps. It was she who received Sister Anne in her arms, who hung over her with loving solicitude, and ordered the unconscious girl to be carried to her apartment. They all gathered about the young woman, whose body bore the marks of the flames; but her son was uninjured, and they waited impatiently for her to open her eyes, so that they might show him to her safe and sound.

At last, she drew a long, quivering breath; her eyes opened. Constance led her child to her side.

"My son!" cried Sister Anne, covering the child with kisses.

Those words caused the greatest surprise to all who heard them. They stared at Sister Anne, listening intently, as if they doubted whether they had heard aright.

"O my God!" continued the young mother; "it is not a dream; Thou hast given me back the use of my tongue.—Ah! Frédéric! I can tell you now how I loved you—how I love you still! Forgive me, madame; I feel that I shall not long enjoy this voice which has been restored to me. All that I have suffered to-day has exhausted my strength; I am going to die, but my son is saved. Oh! don't pity me!"

The unfortunate woman had made a mighty effort to say thus much; her eyes lost their expression, her hand became like ice, a ghastly pallor overspread her face. Frédéric fell on his knees beside her; he bathed with his tears the hand she abandoned to him. The count was overcome by grief. Constance tried to recall the dying girl to life by holding up her son before her. Even Dubourg, the man who had never shed a tear, could not restrain his sobs as he supported Sister Anne's head.

"Why do you weep for me?" she said, making a final effort; "I could not be happy, but I die less wretched. Keep my son, madame; he is so happy in your arms! you will be a mother to him. Adieu, Frédéric—and you—his father—oh! forgive me for loving him so much!"

Sister Anne cast a last glance at Constance, who held little Frédéric in her arms; then she closed her eyes, still smiling at her son.

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