

*Fannie J. Loring*  
A

# CROWN FROM THE SPEAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

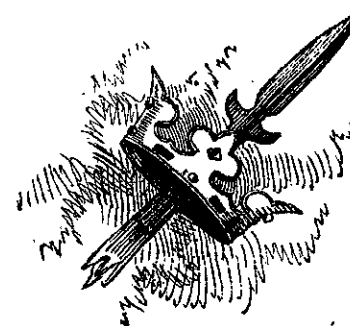
"WOVEN OF MANY THREADS."

Samson, Cecilia Viets (Dakin)

.... dabit Deus his quoque finem.

VIRGIL.

These vexing ills the hand of God will end.



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amers, Good.

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*I will not write thy name upon this page  
For the wide eye of all the world to see,  
Nor will I blazon forth thy noble deeds;  
Enough that they are known to God and me.  
Straight to the garner of thy heart I send  
This sheaf that I have gleaned, 'mid hopes and fears,  
From fields where I would fain have reaped with joy  
Fair fruit from seeds not wet, as these, with tears.*

*Sure of thy truthful praise, if praise I earn,  
Sure of thy gentle blame, if blame thou must,  
To thee I give this harvest of my thoughts  
With timid hand, but strong, unshaken trust.  
Accept my waiting gift, and know thou well  
That I have wrought my work to gain from thee  
The voice of just approval; for I would  
That thine should be the world's great voice to me.*

February, 1872.

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A CROWN FROM THE SPEAR.

BOOK FIRST.

NOTRE DAME DE ROUEN.

PROEMIAL.

BETWEEN Havre and Paris, on the banks of the Seine, stands the ancient and picturesque city of Rouen. Its majestic and sombre aspect, its historic associations, its marvels of ecclesiastical architecture, its mediæval monuments, its labyrinths of winding streets, its quaint houses dim and dingy with the stains of time, the narrow windows looking like half-shut eyes from their queer gable faces, impress one with its antiquity as well as with its historical importance.

In the centre of the town the venerable Cathedral of Notre Dame towers above the Place de la Pucelle, where the hapless Maid of Orleans was burned in 1451. How often the stranger pauses to look with wonder and admiration at that immense pile! Impressed with a feeling of almost awe, the eye wanders over the vast proportions of the Gothic façade, following from point to point the exquisite tracery and elaborate carving of the profuse ornamentation, until, nearly bewildered by the complication of design, it seeks relief above, even to the summit of the lofty towers that stand like sentinels with their feet upon the earth and their heads wrapped in clouds. One enters reverently its deeply recessed and grandly sculptured portals, and gazes with serious delight down the mysterious and shadowy length of the nave, crossed with trembling rays of crimson and gold that fall from the great rose-window of delicate and exquisite design, flaming with the most brilliant colors blended with remarkable skill and beauty.

In the choir these many-colored rays illuminate a tablet, let into the marble of the pavement, that marks the spot where the heart of Richard Cœur de Lion was interred; his body rests at Fontevrault, but his lion heart he gave to Rouen because of his great love for Normandy.

Behind the high altar is the interesting and elaborate monument of Cardinal d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen and Minister of Louis XII. The stranger who pauses to look at this may notice under his very feet a small black marble cross on which is a half-effaced Latin inscription:—

*Infelicissima.*

If he observes it, he may possibly kneel to trace out the nearly obliterated letters, and in so doing he will discover another inscription crossing the original epitaph in minute characters:—

*Cor Meum Tecum Sepultum Est.*

A fearful tempest was abroad on the wings of the night, the thunder raved and roared around the solemn edifice; the blue lightning flashed through the windows and down the deserted nave, illuminating carved capital and column, piercing even into the secret recesses of the groined roof, wrapping the marble images in a spectral light until they seemed to melt like phantoms into shadow. The great bell in the tower of St. Romain clanged and clashed the hour of midnight, when the eastern portal opened and a man entered, carrying a lantern, the feeble light of which made but a faint ring under the flame of the tempest. He was followed by a silent



and stately companion, who glided in his shadow, like a mournful spirit, through the nave and across the transept to the high altar, where stood a catafalque supporting a coffin covered with a velvet pall. Eight tall candles threw a sickly light over the kneeling figure of a priest, who crossed himself from time to time, muttering *Ora pro nobis* in a sepulchral voice. The man who entered first set down his lantern and drew back the velvet pall, revealing a silver plate on which was engraved a heart pierced with a spear, and below it the word *Aimée*. The air seemed to tremble with a sigh as the tall figure drew near and looked upon the placid face of the sleeper; then he fell on his knees, and, leaning his head against the coffin, sharp, short sobs burst from his lips,—the convulsive moans of those who cannot weep. Beneath his black mantle were visible the crimson-corded robe, the violet sash and heavy chain of a dignitary of the Church. It was Monseigneur the Archbishop of Rouen who wept with his head against the coffin that contained the body of a young and lovely woman,—young, although the eyes were sunken and the mass of hair that fell back from her forehead was as white as snow.

Every day when the great rose-window burns like a fiery eye under the level rays of the setting sun, the Archbishop of Rouen enters the eastern portal with a stately step, and crosses the nave to the high altar; there, dismissing his servant who follows him, he falls on his knees upon the cross, clasps his hands over his heart, utters a dreary sigh, bows his head, and remains long in silent prayer.

When he leaves the spot, there are tears on the epitaph.

## PART FIRST.

FABIEN THE CANON.

"A FINE morning," said Fabien, the canon and secretary to his lordship the Archbishop of Rouen, as he returned the profound reverence of the wizened old woman who raised the

leather curtain that hung over the eastern portal of the Cathedral.

"Yes, monseigneur, a fine clear morning to see Rouen from the Tour de Burre. I wish God would give me a little more strength, that I might creep up to the platform again and see the blessed city below me. Ah!" with a dolorous shake of the head, "the desire always remains, monseigneur, the heart is always young, even after old age takes away the strength."

"Is it possible? Is the heart always young?" murmured Fabien in a dreamy voice, as the leather curtain fell behind him with a flap that started out a cloud of dust and drowned the old woman's quavering voice. "Is the heart always young?" he repeated slowly as he crossed the transept and nave to the little door opening on the staircase that leads to the Tour de Burre. "Her philosophy, simple, ignorant old soul, is the philosophy of an age long past; yes, to such as she the heart may be always young, for, after all, it is not time that wears a thing out, it is use. Rationalists tell us that the heart, the soul, the mind, are one. If so, then such clouds may well have young hearts, for they use them but little. I am twenty-five to-day, and I am older than that old crone. I have lived centuries, because I have gained the knowledge of centuries, because to-day I understand all that has exhausted time since the creation to develop. All that the research of ages and the experiments of science, all that theology and metaphysics have revealed, I am master of. What does it matter if we have lived a few years more or less, if we have the experience of ages? 'Knowledge is power, knowledge is power,' he repeated again and again as he hurried up the winding steps; "knowledge alone is power, but knowledge combined with wealth is double power. I have toiled all the years of my life for the first; now," clasping his hands with a sharp and energetic stroke, "now for the other. I am sure of myself, the power is within me. I will conquer every obstacle and attain my end. What emoluments, what honors, the Church offers to her zealous disciples! literature, science, art, are all very well to serve as means, but these

puerilities belong to feeble souls; he who would climb must use religion as a ladder, and the Church as his topstone of power."

He went on rapidly, flight after flight, never pausing to rest for a moment, his body as erect, his step as firm, as though he were walking on level ground. When he reached the summit of the Tour de Burre and stepped out on the platform, he seemed not at all exhausted from his great exertion. There was something in the clear eyes, the tightly closed lips, the firm and defiant step, that showed the strength of the man's will. For a moment he leaned over the parapet and looked into the square below. There seemed to be some unusual commotion; a number of people were gathered before the western portal of the Cathedral, and several mounted gendarmes were galloping across the place. So absorbed was he in his ambitious scheming, that he scarce noticed this unwonted stir; and if he had, he would not have been curious to know the cause. His gaze wandered away from the scene below him to the banks of the Seine, until it rested upon the white turrets of the Château de Clermont rising distinct above the thick forest that surrounded them. A sort of vindictive joy sparkled in his eyes, and, clasping his hands fiercely, he paced the platform with long, rapid strides. "Ah! there is the source from whence must flow my golden river; step by step I am approaching it. It has been a toilsome journey, first to gain knowledge, then to gain the esteem and confidence of suspecting humanity, who give to one grudgingly, mite by mite, doling them out as a miser does his cherished hoard. But what right have I to complain? I who was an outcast, nameless, friendless, a dependant on the bounty of strangers, wronged, cheated out of my birthright and inheritance, commencing at the base, even in the dirt and mire! I have toiled so far up this steep ascent. I am now above the level of the herd. I feel the breath of the mountains upon my brow. But beyond me are still greater heights which I must reach. The path is dangerously steep, uncertain, almost impracticable; but I am not dismayed; I will persevere and

stand on the topmost summit. An heroic soul, an unflinching will, is impelled onward by difficulties; the greater they are, the more desire is there to conquer them. How I have delved, how I have dug into the mines of knowledge, that I might find the rare gems below the ken of superficial seekers! I have explored the mysteries of the Cabala; that wonderful science has been my study day and night; the Zohar is my code; the languages of the past, most hidden among the things hidden, are as familiar to me as household words. Alchemy has revealed to me its secrets and its marvellous laws. Metaphysics have become to me but a repetition of commonplace dogmas. I have analyzed all, and each particle is before me separated from all foreign matter. I can weigh them in the minutest scale, and my nice balance is my judgment. The ignorant look upon me as a sorcerer. I am a sorcerer, for knowledge is sorcery. Fabien the canon, at twenty-five, has more within the circle of his brain than the oldest doctor of the schools. *Laus Deo* for such power. My peers look upon me with amazement. Honors are being heaped upon me. The Archbishop has made me a canon and his private secretary; through this channel I will discover all the secrets of the Church and State. The old Count de Clermont is dying, and he has chosen me to be tutor and guardian of his only son; there is the source from which I must draw my wealth. I will avenge my mother and reap a rich harvest from the fields out of which she was driven. It is but a pace from a canon to a deacon, and then a natural gradation to an arch-deacon, a step upward to a bishop, and the hat of a cardinal does not press heavily after the mitre of an archbishop."

## PART SECOND.

AN ASYLUM.

THE platform of the Tour de Burre was a favorite promenade of Fabien the canon. First, because before reaching it there was a difficulty to overcome.

In mounting the hundreds of steps, he tested his indomitable will and his physical strength. Secondly, it presented the greater attraction of being above the world, and consequently isolated and free from intrusion. There his unfettered fancy soared highest, shook off, for the time, the shackles with which the lower world and his necessary intercourse with men heavily trammelled him. There he could scheme and plan more clearly, because the fresh breeze at that height seemed to blow away the cobwebs from his brain, seemed to quicken and strengthen his intellect, that sometimes became a little dull and weak from pouring over musty old parchments and time-stained manuscripts. There, when he worked himself up to a frenzy of self-laudation and anticipated glory, at which times he desired to hear his success sounded in his own ears, he could shout them aloud, and there was no living thing to listen, only the thousands of swallows that built in every niche, and they would not reveal his secrets. There he could madden himself by repeating over and over the wrongs of his life, by doing which he fanned a fire of hate and revenge that he never allowed to become extinguished; and when that fire sometimes burned too fiercely, threatening to break into open conflagration, when the strong will was necessary to subdue and deaden it, he found a powerful aid in the physical exertion required to reach the spot, where alone and unmolested he could bare his head and breast to the breeze, shout, curse, wring his hands, and tear back and forth like an infuriated tiger.

There were tempests in this man that must break forth at times and rage with fearful strength, but no living being had ever witnessed them. Only the wandering wind and the moaning sea had heard his frenzied cries, and they kept their secret.

This morning he had hurried there to congratulate himself on an event which he considered the most important of his life, and for which he had striven with unwearied diligence. He had at last succeeded, after many rebuffs and discouragements, in gaining the confidence and friendship of the Count de

Clermont, who was dying, and who, on that very morning, had sent for him, and after acknowledging, in words that were honey to the listener, his admiration of his superior talents and his esteem for his character, had besought him, in feeble but earnest tones, to become the guardian and tutor of his only son, who would soon be an orphan, and the sole survivor of the family of Clermont. That he, Fabien, the poor young scholar, should be chosen from among all whom the Count had honored with his friendship, was indeed a proof of confidence rarely bestowed. A few more days and he would receive into his charge this child, the only heir to the rich estate of Clermont, all of whose treasures would be given into his keeping; and he had resolved that he would guard them well, for when that which he had so long coveted was once within his grasp it should remain there.

"It is sooner than I expected, but not too soon," he said, as he gazed at the turrets of the château, with greedy speculation in his eyes and inexpressible satisfaction in his voice.

So absorbed was Fabien with his own ambitious plans, that he did not observe he was no longer alone, for suddenly another person appeared on the platform, who, seeing it was already occupied, turned to flee; but he was too late, for at that moment Fabien turned also, and their eyes met. The priest uttered an exclamation, half of surprise, half of terror, for he had never before seen such an object; even he, stoic though he was, could scarce believe it to be human. He had a ghastly face, covered with a short, bristling beard, cropped white hair standing up on his head as if in mortal fear; wild, bloodshot eyes, and drawn lips, parched and blackened with fever and thirst, revealing a row of long yellow teeth that snapped together like a hungry wolf's. A few tattered rags that had once been a convict's dress partially clothed a gaunt, meagre form that was bowed as though a hundred years pressed upon it, and his bare, emaciated feet and bony hands were covered with dirt and bruises.

"*Mon Dieu!* who are you? and, in the name of Heaven, where did you

come from?" gasped Fabien, after a moment's survey.

The poor wretch replied not a word, but dropped upon his knees as though his lower limbs were palsied, and, clasping his hands, raised his haggard face with eyes so full of anguish and entreaty that they smote the heart of Fabien with sudden pain. He did not like to be so easily softened and touched to pity, so it was with no very gentle grasp that he took the intruder by the shoulder, and, shaking him, said again sternly, "Who are you?"

The man's head and hands fell despondently, and tears gathered in his eyes as he replied with a heavy, long-drawn sigh, and with hopelessness in his voice, "I am an escaped convict. I have sought an asylum here, here in the house of God. You are his priest, and you will not betray me? I am starving," he cried, starting from his attitude of despair, while his teeth gleamed between his parched lips,—"I am starving! and how am I to get food? Here there is nothing but bare stones!" And he glanced around with famished scrutiny.

"Starving," repeated Fabien in a softened voice; "poor wretch! what crime has brought you to this?"

The creature tottered upright, and, leaning heavily against the stone balustrade for support, laid his emaciated hand on the arm of the priest, and said in a husky whisper, "Listen, and I will tell you what I have never yet confessed to any one. I have committed no crime; another sinned, and I, to keep an oath made to one I loved, suffer the penalty. For four years, for four dead years, I have been chained and driven like a beast; I have suffered hunger, cold, and heat; I have been bound to a creature I loathed; I have cursed the night, and longed for day, and when the day came I cursed it and longed for the night. All the slow moments of four years have dragged along in agony. I have become old before my time, bowed and crushed, scorned and smitten even of God. And yet I have endured all this to keep an oath I made to one dying, to serve one I loved more than life or liberty. It wanted four days to complete four years,

when I escaped from what was to have been half a life of cruel servitude. I went back to my home. It was desolate and deserted. My wife was dead, and my child was in the house of a stranger. I stole my child. She did not know me, for she was but a babe when I was taken to prison; and she feared me, and struggled to free herself from my arms, and wept and implored to be taken back to those who had robbed me of her love. I have walked day and night, carrying her in my arms. Avoiding the highways, I have toiled over rough fields, through forests, across mountains and hills, under the burning sun and the chilling dews; sometimes, believing I was pursued, I have hidden in hedges, in ditches, and in caves. My feet have been wounded by the broken stones and rough ways. My hands have been torn by the thorns and brambles through which I have forced a passage. I have begged morsels of black bread from the shepherds and peasants, I have gathered fruit and berries, but I have eaten none myself, so that she should not suffer hunger. I have given her the water I drained from the scanty rivulets, while I famished with the thirst of fever. And yet my child fears me and looks upon me with horror. To-day I could go no farther. My strength failed, and God's temple, that is closed to none, offered me an asylum. I thought among some of the dark passages, the cells, the towers, or even the vaults, I might find a hiding-place from the searching eye of justice. But I must have food for my child and myself, for I am fainting with hunger, and these bare stones offer nothing."

He had spoken with a desperate eagerness. His features were convulsed, and his voice was broken with sobs that ended in a prayer as he clasped his hands and fell again on his knees, crying, "Bread! monseigneur, bread for my starving child!"

### PART THIRD.

AIMEE.

"WHERE is she?" inquired Fabien, in a suffocated voice, for he felt like one

in a nightmare, who arouses himself only by a strong exertion of his will. In all the suffering he had witnessed, he had never seen a human being so utterly crushed and wretched, and he had never before listened to a tale of woe recited with such pathos and despair. "Where is she?" he repeated; for the man's head had fallen on his breast, and he seemed in a sort of stupor. At the priest's question he looked up, and pointed silently down the stairs to the bell-tower.

Concealed in an angle of the tower by a great coil of rope, and almost covered by a huge projecting gargoyle, carved in the form of a monster, crouched a child of about five years. She was amusing herself by thrusting a stone into the open jaws of the monster, which rolled out directly, while with a dreary significance she persisted in returning what could not be eaten to the mouth that could not eat, repeating over and over in a pitiful, whining voice, "Give me something to eat! Give me something to eat!"

The moment her eyes fell upon Fabien she dropped the stone, and, springing toward him, seized his hand and cried imploringly, "Give me something to eat!"

The touch of her hand, or the wistful expression of the eyes raised to his, visibly affected the priest; for he said in the gentlest and kindest voice, "*Pauvre petite!* Have patience for a few moments and you shall be fed; remain here with your father, and I will fetch you some food at once."

"My father! He is not my father." And she drew up her little mouth with scorn, as her eye followed the glance Fabien directed toward the miserable creature at his side. "He is not my father. He is a thief who stole me from my home, where I had a bed to sleep in and plenty to eat. I hate him! I hate him!" she added vehemently, while she still clung to the priest's hand.

The convict said not a word, but the large tears rolled slowly over his haggard face, and dropped one by one on the pitiful hands he clasped in silent entreaty.

Fabien glanced from one to the other, his heart filled with commiseration for

both, while he gently tried to disengage his hand from the clinging clasp of the little child.

At that moment the sound of voices and the tramping of feet mounting the stairs, with now and then the clanking of a spur and the clashing of a sabre, told that the new-comers were armed.

The face of the poor convict grew more ghastly if possible, and a groan burst from his full heart as he said, "It is the gendarmes. They are after me. Where shall I conceal myself? O, save me, save me!"

Fabien glanced around. There was no place safe from the intrusion of the law. His first impulse was to hide the poor wretch, but where? Below there were numbers of dark cells and vaults where he would be as secure as though he were hidden in his grave; but here all was open and exposed to the light of day. They could not go down, because of the officers who were ascending, and above them was nothing but the platform, parapet, and blue heavens.

A few feet below the platform of the bell-tower projected a ledge of stone some fifteen inches wide, that formed the top of a carved cornice. Looking eagerly from one of the open arches, the hunted creature caught sight of this. If he could drop down to it and lie close against the face of the tower, he might escape detection. To think, in his case, was to act. He clasped the reluctant child in a frenzied embrace, kissed the hand of the priest, and then disappeared through the open arch.

Fabien watched with a shudder the thin, brown fingers clutch convulsively the projecting ornaments, as he slid down to his terrible hiding-place. His feet touched the ledge, and he writhed, serpent-like, to a prostrate position. As his eye fell on the dizzy depths below him, the priest saw a shiver pass through his battered frame.

Before Fabien had fairly turned from the open arch, the helmeted heads of the gendarmes appeared above the stairs. The leader started back in astonishment when he found his way barred by the tall black-robed form of the young priest. However, he touched his helmet respectfully, and said, while he directed his searching glance into

every corner of the bell-tower, "We are in pursuit of an escaped convict, who, we are assured, took refuge here a short time ago. Have you seen him?"

Fabien did not answer at once; and while he hesitated, one of the men nudged another, saying, in a low voice, with a significant wink, "We have him now, the priest won't dare to lie."

Fabien did not fear a lie, but he did fear being detected in one, and therefore he did not reply to the direct question of the officer, who fixed upon him his inquisitorial eye. There was no evading; so he said, in a firm and defiant voice, "Yes, I have seen him."

"Where is he?"

"I am not obliged to answer that question."

"What!" said the officer, taking a high tone, "is it possible you wish to defraud justice by assisting a condemned convict to escape?"

"I have offered him no assistance," replied Fabien, stolidly.

Again the officer resorted to the majesty of the law. "Justice demands that you should reveal his hiding-place. Did he descend?"

"He descended," replied the priest, curtly.

"How long since?"

"A few moments ago."

"That is not true," said the officer, sententiously, — "that is not true. My men have been stationed below, and every avenue of escape has been guarded since he entered the door leading to this tower."

By this time four or five more armed men had mounted to the platform, each equally eager to be the first to discover the hiding-place of the poor trembling wretch.

"Here is the child," cried one, as his eye fell upon the little girl, almost hidden by the mantle of the priest.

"Yes, he carried a child in his arms," said another; "here is the child, but where is the man?"

A feeling of terror began to take possession of the ignorant gendarmes; they thought some singular transformation had taken place, and that the priest and the convict were one and the same.

The officer, seeing the confusion of his

men, determined to make another effort to solve the enigma. Taking hold of the impish-looking little child, who still clung to Fabien's mantle, he placed her before him, and raising his finger threateningly, said, in a voice of awful majesty, "Remember. Nothing but the truth. Where is your father?"

"In Châteauroux," replied the child, gravely.

Whereupon, in spite of the majesty of the law, all laughed, except the priest and the questioner. The child's countenance never changed as she turned her great eyes seriously from one to the other. The officer looked sternly at his men, and said, "No trifling!" then to the child in the same tone of command, "Listen again. What is your name?"

"Aimée."

"Who brought you here?"

"A wicked man."

"Where is he?"

"There," said she, pointing to the arch through which the convict had disappeared.

#### PART FOURTH.

##### ASSISTING TO CAPTURE ONE'S SELF.

FABIEN sprang at the child, dashing down the little hand that pointed to the arch; but he was too late, all saw the action, and all rushed simultaneously to the opening.

"Yes, here he is, sure enough," came from the one who was so fortunate as to thrust his head out first and thereby to make the important discovery. "Here he is, but *morbleu!* how are we to get at him?"

"*Précisément,* how are we to get at him?" said another, peeping out. "No one will risk his life by going down there for him."

And now each one was as anxious to shirk the glory of the capture as he had been before to desire it.

"Is there really much danger?" said the officer, venturing forward and looking down, while he debated in his mind whether he had not gained enough honor during the expedition by the clever way in which he had led the miserable little child to point out the

hiding-place of her father. "I will give some one else a chance to distinguish himself," he thought, as he drew back.

By the time the poor convict knew he was discovered, the strongest desire in his heart was to be rescued from his perilous situation, for he could not support his cramped and painful position, and he felt that to move was to plunge himself into the abyss below. The desire for liberty is the strongest feeling of our nature, next to the desire for life, and that is paramount to all else. Feeling that death was inevitable if he remained there, the poor wretch was now as anxious to be captured as he was before to evade it; but how to effect it, was the question that floated through his confused brain. If he writhed to an upright position and stretched his arms to their extreme length, he could not reach the projecting ledge from which he had dropped, and the face of the smooth stone presented nothing to cling to. Despair took possession of his soul. Would they abandon him to his fate, starving, famishing, suspended above a frightful abyss? The galleys, the chains, the toil under the scorching sun, the privation, the misery, anything was better than the horrible death he contemplated from his dizzy height.

When the officer drew back with his generous resolve, Fabien drew near and looked down again on the suffering man; while the child, always at his side, peeped timidly over, and then with a sigh of relief said, in a voice loud enough to fall distinctly upon the ear of her father, "I am so glad he is there, and that no one will help to get him up."

Again Fabien saw a shiver convulse the poor creature. "*Malheureuse!*" he cried, pushing the child away; "are you an imp of Satan?" Then turning to the men, "Some of you throw a rope to this unhappy wretch, or in a moment his brains will be dashed out on the pavement below."

"O yes, a rope," they all cried. "Why did we not think of that at first?"

In a moment the active executors of justice appropriated a part of the coil attached to the bell, and lowered it to

the wretched convict, who clutched it convulsively, thereby eagerly assisting to capture himself. As soon as he was drawn to the platform of the tower, the heroic officer stepped forward and, laying his hand upon the exhausted man, pronounced him his prisoner. Weak from fasting, fear, and the exertion to save himself, he made no resistance; but there was something more touching than resistance in the look of pitiful reproach he turned upon Fabien, as he said, "You betrayed me!"

The priest did not reply; he preferred that the convict should believe it to have been he, rather than the child, who made known his hiding-place.

"No, it was not monseigneur," replied the officer in a voice of severe reproof. "Much to my surprise, he tried to defend justice by refusing to tell us where you were. If it had not been for the child, you would have escaped, and we should have had our labor for nothing, and the majesty of the law would have been dishonored, and justice defrauded, and — and —" Here the indignant speaker's eloquence failed him, and he took refuge in a fit of coughing.

"Was it my child who betrayed me?" said the convict in broken tones.

"She says she is not your child," continued the officer, who had recovered his voice. "If she is not your child, what right have you with her?"

"*O mon capitaine!* she is my child," he cried, wringing his hands with anguish. "But she does not know it. She was a babe when I went to prison, and it is four years; she does not know me; beside, look at me!" And he glanced at his tatters with deplorable self-abasement. "I am a horror to myself, it is no wonder the child fears me." Then, covering his face with his hands, he burst into sobs that shook him as though he were a reed swayed by the wind.

"Come, that is enough," said the officer, turning his back to his men; "you must go with us, the law must be enforced."

"Yes, the law must be enforced," echoed the others.

"Come here, my child, come to your father," said the prisoner, trying to smile encouragingly as he held out his

arms. The smile was a ghastly effort, more pitiful than his sobs.

Fabien pushed the reluctant little creature toward him; he clutched her, and drew her to his embrace, almost stifling her with tears and kisses.

"Poor little child," he said with intense love in his voice; "my precious Aimée, my little darling, you have forgotten your poor father. Once you loved me so you would cry when I left you, and hold out your little dimpled hands and scream with joy when I returned; and when I took you in my arms you would rub your soft cheek against my hair and beard. O my God! I have felt your loving caresses, your soft arms around my neck, for all these years. That memory has kept me alive. It has been light and air, bread and water, hope and faith, all, all; for that I did not sink into a besotted brute. I strove to keep alive all that was good in my nature; morning and night I prayed to God that he would not obliterate that memory from my heart. Sometimes, when the weight of my chains pressed too heavily, and I feared my reason would leave me forever, and I should be in utter darkness, the thought of thy bright little face would lighten all around me. It was for thee I tried to escape, that I might hold thee once again to my heart, that I might feel thy little face pressed against mine, that I might hear thee say, Father. But thou hast forgotten me, and thou hast only fear and horror of me. I must go back again to my chains, to suffering, despair, and death, with the knowledge that my child fears me and hates me. Does not your little heart tell you I am your father? Is there no memory of your sweet infancy to plead for me?" he implored. "My heart is breaking! My child, tell me but once you love me, call me father but once, and I will go back to my imprisonment happy."

"No, no, you are not my father, and I do not love you," she cried, passionately struggling to free herself from his embrace. "I love my good papa in Châteauroux, and I want to go back to him. I am afraid of you and I hate you."

The countenance of the convict fell into settled hopelessness; he put the

child away from him suddenly, and turning toward Fabien, who stood with bent head and folded arms, so absorbed in thought as to seem unmindful of what was passing, he said in a voice of intense entreaty: "Monseigneur, have pity on me; you see how my heart is torn, you have witnessed my agony; for the love of God, take care of my child. Do not let her come to want and sin; teach her to be virtuous; never speak to her of her father, it is better she should not know what he has been. I leave her to you. If I survive the term of my imprisonment, I will demand her from you. If death frees me from my sufferings, hereafter, in the presence of God, you must account to me for my child."

Without looking at Aimée, who had drawn near the officer and was playing with the tassel of his sash, he tottered to the head of the staircase and began to descend.

The men gathered near the arch were looking persistently toward the Seine, while the officer seemed to be clearing his vision from some obstruction. When they saw the convict turn to go down, they touched the fronts of their helmets to the priest, and followed their prisoner.

## PART FIFTH.

### A STRANGE LEGACY.

FABIEN stood for a moment looking with feelings of mingled distrust, pity, and dislike at the child thus suddenly thrust upon him.

"What am I to do with her?" he thought. "Such an unfeeling little wretch, and such a strange-looking object. She is so ugly one can never love her, and she is so wicked one can scarcely pity her. What am I to do with her? She is certainly a most troublesome legacy to be left to a priest."

When he thought she was a strange looking object, he thought correctly; for a more impish, weird-looking little creature, with folded hands and ridiculously grave face, never disturbed the peace of a celibate.

Her head was too large and too well developed for her body; her great eyes



had the thoughtful, anxious expression of one well acquainted with life and its cares; her lips, serious and firmly closed, had no line or curve of dimpled childhood; her forehead was low and full, and seemed already to bear traces of deep thought; yet there was something in her face that attracted the interest of the priest. He saw plainly stamped there embryo passions of startling intensity. On the little face were written a strong will, powerful cunning, and a deep intelligence, such as are rarely seen in a child. There was something exceedingly graceful in her movements, in spite of her disproportionate head, — a clinging, serpent-like charm that seemed to coil around the priest against his inclination. There was a treacherous softness and sweetness in her voice, an inscrutable puzzling expression in her eyes, that always evaded his glance, a something in her *tout ensemble* that disturbed and fascinated him.

While Fabien looked at her, making his mental estimate of her character, she was also gravely surveying him from head to foot. Her eyes wandered slowly over his handsome face, down his black-robed, elegant figure, to the small feet that stood so firmly, and turned outward at just the right angle. In appearance he was a most prepossessing canon, and the child felt it, for she drew near him and slipped her little hand into his, saying, "You are so handsome I like you, and I will go with you." Then she added in a more childish tone, as nature asserted itself, "I am so hungry. Will you give me something to eat?"

"Yes, come with me, and you shall eat your fill, although you deserve to starve and die, you wicked little creature," he said, impatiently, as he drew her after him down the stairs. "Why did you tell the soldiers where your father was?"

"Because I wanted them to take him away," she replied, firmly. "I am glad he is gone. You will give me something to eat, and a bed to sleep in, won't you? and let me stay with you always. I like you even better than my papa in Châteauroux. He is old and poor, but he was good to me, and gave

me a goat, and plenty to eat; but that wicked old man took me away to starve me, and made me sleep on the ground with nothing but his ragged, dirty jacket to cover me; and all day I cried for my papa and my little goat, and he would not take me back, but walked always so fast, telling me we should soon come to the sea, where we should find a great ship, and afterward plenty to eat in another country across the water. Now I am glad the soldiers did not let him go any farther, because I have found you, and I like you; you are not a bit like Monsieur le Curé in Châteauroux; he is fat and ugly, but you are so handsome." And she raised her eyes to the face of the priest with such a look of earnest admiration that he almost blushed. Flattery even from a child, was pleasant to him; he had known so little of the sweet amenities of life, that its newness charmed him, and softened his heart to the little serpent who was creeping into it even without his knowledge and against his will.

When Fabien crossed the nave to the eastern portal it seemed as though he had been a long time away, and that something had changed in his life. A feeling like a nightmare hung around him, and he would almost have believed the whole scene to have been a dream, or the working of a diseased imagination, if it had not been for the little creature who trotted at his side. The old woman at the door uttered an exclamation of surprise, and crossed herself, when he raised the curtain and pushed the child out before him. She did not know what had transpired at the western portal, by which the gendarmes had entered, so she knew nothing of the capture of the convict, and consequently could not understand where the canon had found the child.

"You did not get her from Heaven," she exclaimed, while she regarded the sudden apparition with fear and curiosity; "no, you did not get her from Heaven, for she looks as though she came from below. I am afraid she is a changeling!" And she crossed herself again.

Fabien smiled as he said, "I found her in the bell-tower, feeding a waterspout with stone. She may have come

from below, I cannot say, but in any case she won't harm you, my good woman. You must not be afraid of her, you must take her home to your daughter directly. Poor little thing! she is hungry and dirty; give her plenty of food, wash her, and dress her in clean clothes." And putting some silver into the old woman's hand, he added, impressively, "Remember to make her comfortable, and to-morrow I will give you as much more."

The old crone hesitated. "Go at once and do as I tell you; to-morrow I will find some other place for her, but to-day you must take her to your daughter," he said, sternly.

There was no refusing the canon when he spoke in that tone, and especially when he was so generous with his silver. So the old woman hobbled up, took her box for alms, her dirty knitting, and her three-legged stool under one arm, while she reached out her other hand reluctantly to the child, who still clung to the priest's gown.

"Go," he said, gently disengaging himself, — "go and get some food, and to-morrow I will find you a better home."

She was very hungry, and so she was docile, and willing to be taken anywhere if she might find something to eat; but before she went she clasped the hand of the priest passionately, kissed it, and left a tear upon it.

The tear of the child acted like a charm on the heart of Fabien, for he said to himself, as he walked slowly toward the bishop's palace, "I believe I shall learn to love the wretched little thing."

## PART SIXTH.

### HOW A PHILOSOPHER MAY DIE.

THE Count de Clermont was dying. For many days the servants had passed in and out, up and down the stairs, and through the long corridors of the chateau, with soft footsteps, grave faces, and compressed lips. All the outward semblances of sorrow were observed, whether the heart suffered or not. Those who serve for gain seldom love, and the

dozens of obsequious lackeys who bowed before the Count de Clermont were no exceptions to the great mass of hirelings.

The only real mourner, the only one among all that surrounded him who felt any sincere love for the profligate old Count, was his only child, a boy of twelve years, who sat day after day within sound of his father's voice, watching with intense anxiety the face of the physician, who passed in and out, absorbed in his effort to prolong for a little time a life that had been of no benefit to mankind; for the highest aim of the dying man had been pleasure, and the only generous deeds he had done had been the heaping of thousands of favors upon himself. He suffered no pangs of remorse, no twinges of conscience for the past, no fears nor doubts for the future. His philosophy was simple, and easily defined. Life was given to man that he might enjoy it. He had fulfilled his duty, and therefore he had nothing with which to reproach himself.

While speaking to his physician, who, because he expected a legacy, showed the tenderest sympathy, he said, "I am dying, it is true, but I have lived as long as one ought; when the power of enjoyment dies, the body should die also. What use is there of spreading a feast before a man who has no appetite for it? When the ear is dull, the taste blunted, the eye dim, draw a curtain between the banquet and the automaton who is no longer a welcome guest. Life is day, and death is night. In the day we feast, we sing, we dance, and at night we sleep. In my youth I studied Voltaire, and the light of his intellect illumined all the chambers of my mind. I laid out my future according to his teaching, and I have carefully followed my plan. I have let no opportunity for enjoyment pass unimproved. I have pressed all the sweetness from life. It has nothing more to give me; therefore I am contented that it is finished."

The boy with the spiritual face, dreamy eyes, and thoughtful smile, sometimes heard fragments of these conversations, and wondered if it were true that life is day, and death is night, and eternity an unbroken sleep. Strange

and vague dreams floated through his mind, which the remarks of his father to the physician sadly disturbed.

The day had worn away in pain and distress to the dying Count, yet he affected not to feel that he was suffering. A smile always hovered around his pallid lips, his hands were folded over the silken cover of his bed. There was no moaning, no restlessness, no complaining; he was determined his death should be an example of fortitude and resignation. During his life he had never had cause to murmur at the sharp strokes of ungrateful fortune; a favorable breeze had carried him prosperously across the broad ocean; and he was now entering the last port with what he believed to be flying colors.

"I will show you how a philosopher should die," he said more than once to his physician, as he raised his heavy eyes to a portrait of Voltaire that hung before his bed. He had yet to learn that the death of a philosopher and the death of a sinner may teach one and the same lesson.

Darkness gathered in the great chambers and deserted corridors, and in the silent anteroom where the boy dreamer slept from weariness and watchings, with the open book that he no longer cared to read clasped in his hands. All was silent throughout the château, although a mighty conqueror, with a shadowy retinue, was even then approaching.

The door of the anteroom softly opened, so softly that it did not disturb the young sleeper, and Fabien entered the sick-room of the Count. The physician, in spite of his anticipated legacy, overcome by weariness, nodded at his post, and did not awake until the priest touched his arm and said softly, "I will watch while you take your dinner. Do not hurry, for I have some private business with M. le Comte."

The heavy eyes of the sick man lighted up a little, and the painful smile broadened and deepened, as the canon took his cold hand in what seemed a friendly clasp, but which in reality was as treacherous as the kiss of Judas.

Perhaps the intellect, illuminated by the near approach of death, understood more clearly than ever before; for some-

thing of the real character of the man who bent over him evidently impressed itself on the mind of the dying Count. He tried to fix his dim, wandering eyes on the face of Fabien. There was something of anxious scrutiny in their regard, and an inflection of doubt and uneasiness in his voice, when he said, "Is all arranged with the bishop, and are you ready to enter upon your new duties?"

"Yes," replied the canon, "all is arranged, and I am quite prepared to show you how deeply I appreciate the friendship and confidence of which you have given me so great a proof."

Again the Count's eyes wandered to the face of the priest, and he said drowsily and at intervals, "I cannot be mistaken, — I am never mistaken; I can read the human heart — as one reads an open book. I have studied you carefully and closely, — when you were unconscious of it, — and I have found nothing to condemn. You are a scholar, — you are a philosopher, — you know how to live, — and knowing how to live teaches one how to die. My son will be instructed by a great mind, — one who understands the true philosophy of life. I am sure I have chosen well, — you have a strong will and a decided character, — you will correct the feebleness and vacillation of his. I have confidence in you, — and I know you will never abuse it. You will be true to the trust I repose on you." With the last words his voice gathered strength, and his eyes were filled with entreaty as he fixed them on the inscrutable face of his companion.

Fabien clasped closer the hand that lay in his, and replied earnestly: "I will be true to the trust; your wishes shall be obeyed to the letter, your confidence in me will make my duty the most sacred of my life. I will instruct him faithfully. I will strive to make him profound in knowledge, pure in heart, and strong in will and self-government. I will hold up to him the lives of the great philosophers as a standard to which he must toil to attain. I will teach him to live worthily, both by example and precept. I speak with a single heart, an earnest inten-

tion. Rest in peace! your son and heir shall be a most sacred trust."

Although the voice of the priest was gently modulated to that consoling evenness, that impressive calm, which indicates a serene and truthful nature, and although the clear eyes looked straight and steadily into the failing sight of the dying man, there was nothing in their gaze that reassured him. On the contrary, their expression seemed to torment him, for the thin hands moved restlessly, clutching at what they could not hold in their relaxing grasp, and his head turned uneasily on the pillow, while his eyes sought every part of the room with intense anxiety. He seemed like one who, believing himself on solid ground, finds it suddenly giving away beneath his feet, and strives to clutch at impossibilities to save himself. His reason was sinking below his grasp, receding beyond his reach, and he was vainly trying to cling to it a little longer. And just at that moment, when he needed something substantial and sure to lean upon, one after another the foundations beneath him were falling away, and his structure built on sand was floating a wreck toward the unexplored ocean of eternity. And with all this came an uncertainty, a bewilderment; he had lost his way in the twilight, profound darkness was fast surrounding him, and he had neither compass or guiding star. He groped helplessly in his obscurity, but it was too late; he could not find his path, his philosophy had blinded him. In his anguish he forgot to be a hero, he forgot to be composed and dignified, and, like any other suffering, dying mortal, he threw his arms wildly about, struggled to a sitting position, and cried out for the doctor.

Fabien quietly laid him back on his pillow, took the restless hands firmly in his strong grasp, fixed his metallic eyes on the drawn and pallid face, and said in a hard and distinct tone, "It is true you are dying, you have but a few moments to live, and there is something pressing upon your conscience like a heavy weight. It will relieve you to confess it; I am ready to hear you, speak while you have the time."

The hand, half palsied by death,

groped blindly for the little silver bell that lay on the silken cover of the bed, while he gasped in a weak voice, "You have deceived me — it is her face that bends over me — my child — Claude — call the doctor. It is not too late — I will change my will — I will not leave him to you — I will not die with this doubt pressing on me. Will no one come — Claude — Claude!"

Whenever the hand approached the bell, Fabien gently drew it back, while he tried to fix the wandering mind with his firm, steady gaze. He wished to be alone with the dying Count, for he believed that in the last agony, in the supreme moment, when the soul was wrenching itself free from its prison of clay, he might wring a secret from the sufferer, — a secret he had striven to possess, and around which centred all his plans of ambition and future aggrandizement. Sooner than he expected the grim tyrant had seized his victim, and the priest knew the struggle would be brief. "Is there nothing you wish to confess?" he urged again. But he was too late. A mortal spasm convulsed the face of the dying. He sprang from his pillow, threw up his arms, and almost shrieking the name "Genevieve," fell back in the arms of Fabien, motionless.

The philosopher, the scholar, the courted leader of fashion, the gay, profligate Count de Clermont, had finished a career that had afforded him much worldly pleasure and satisfaction, and left him no pangs of remorse or regret, for so he had boastfully said a few days before his death. He was dead; the secret of his wrongs to others, his follies, his passions, were locked forever within his frozen heart, only to be revealed before that Judge who is most just as well as merciful.

## PART SEVENTH.

### THE YOUNG COUNT.

FABIEN laid the Count de Clermont back on his pillow, and stood looking at him with a strange expression on his face, a blending of triumph, defeat, and

pity, if one can understand those diverse passions being apparent at the same moment. For a long time he remained silent; then he said, in a mournful voice, "Genevieve, unhappy soul, thy name was the last upon his lips. O, why did not death spare him a little longer! A few moments more of mortal anguish would have wrung the secret from him; but now it is too late, it is too late, I have failed in this. I counted upon it too surely; death has defeated me; now the study of my life will be to discover it by some other means."

Then he stooped lower and looked long and earnestly on the pallid face death was fast changing into settled calm. It must have been a wonderfully beautiful face in youth, for the features were perfect, and there was a certain nobility stamped upon the broad brow on which time had ploughed but light furrows. It seemed as though the priest's gaze was riveted by a spell, so long did he remain motionless as a statue.

All was silent; profound darkness filled the great chamber, only broken by the feeble flame of the night-lamp, that fell over the silken curtains, the face of the dead, and the black robe of the priest. The wind came down the chimney with a piercing wail; a gust rattled the casement, and startled Fabien from his absorbed contemplation; but he only changed his position to fold his arms, and still gaze on the form before him, while he said in a low voice that was tremulous with some hidden emotion, "Poor gentle soul, how she loved and suffered! she was pierced with woes, but from the spear she gained the crown. Will she be glad, in Paradise, to know her name was the last on his lips? I could almost forgive him if I could believe he had ever felt one pang of regret while living, ever dropped a tear at her unhappy fate, ever allowed a thought of her misery to disturb his riots and debauches. No, no, he crushed her mercilessly and left her to die without care, without pity. I would have gloated over his death-agonies if it had been prolonged as long as her pain; but no, it was brief. It was over too soon, the dawning of

remorse was put out before he experienced its full power. He died as he lived, insensible. If there is a hell, it is for such as he. Thanks be to God, he cannot disturb her in Paradise."

With these words, and without another look, he turned and went into the anteroom where the young Count still slumbered. Laying his hand on the boy's head he said very gently, "Claude."

The sleeper started up and rubbed his eyes confusedly as he turned toward the room of his father; his first thought was for him.

Fabien put his arm around him and drew him away from the door.

"Is papa sleeping?" he inquired as he dropped into his chair again, for he was overcome with weariness.

"Yes," replied the canon, "he sleeps, and he will never awaken. My boy, he is dead, and you must bear your loss with courage."

Claude was no hero, he was only a child, and he heard nothing but the words "he is dead." They awakened him thoroughly and sharply enough. Springing from his chair, he fell on his knees, and, burying his face in the priest's mantle, burst into loud weeping.

Fabien made no effort to console him. "He must weep," he thought; "tears and sorrow are the inheritance his father has left him. 'The sins of his father shall be visited upon him.' The spear he sharpened for another must pierce the soul of the innocent. Poor child! one would scarce envy you your patrimony."

After a few moments of passionate weeping, Claude looked with something like grieved surprise into the stony face that bent over him; but seeing neither pity nor tenderness there, he turned, bewildered and affrighted, toward the room where his father lay.

The canon took him by the arm and said coldly, "You have no one there. Leave the dead and turn to the living. Life is before you, and you have nothing to do with death."

"O my father!" sobbed the boy as the priest led him from the room, now fast filling with the excited servants.

## BOOK SECOND.

## CHÂTEAU DE CLERMONT.

## PART FIRST.

## FABIEN, THE ARCHDEACON.

GENTLE reader, — for all readers are gentle, except critics, and it is fair to presume they would be, if their professional reputation did not require them to be just, — is it allowed to us devourers of time and paper to swallow ten long years at one draught? — ten long years during which kingdoms are lost and won; nations beaten down in the dust; republics created, tried, and disproved; governments overthrown; principalities crushed; new doctrines promulgated and explored; millions born, millions wedded, and millions buried; tragedies without number; woes repeated in every form; joys newly tasted and become distasteful; the birth, the growth, the death of love; friendship betrayed, trust deceived, and hope disappointed. But as these events during this time have no immediate connection with our story, here they can have no interest for the reader; therefore we will let them slip quietly into the river of time, and leave them to float away with other lost years.

Methinks you, sweet maiden, with soft eyes and smiling lips, who read a novel as you smell a rose, crushing it in your slender fingers and throwing it away after you have extracted all the sweetness, will bless the author who leaves out of his books all the dry-as-dust years. And you, weary matron and cankered man of care, who take up a romance as a respite from daily duty and profound thought, would find little pleasure in the uninteresting details of a boy's growing and a priest's scheming. Therefore we will say to the dead years, rest in peace! and pray to be allowed to present our *dramatis personæ* under the most favorable auspices.

The private study in the Château de Clermont, where Fabien, now the Arch-

deacon, spent the greater part of his time, was a study nominally and actually, for a more *bizarre* combination was never grouped together within four walls. Russet Flanders leather hung from the ceiling to the floor, covered with wickedly quaint designs embossed in gold; processions of dancing satyrs; leering fauns, and voluptuous nymphs; grinning fiends torturing weeping creatures; demons twisting serpent-like tails around monsters half human and half beast; withered hags with diabolical faces, pointing lean fingers at struggling souls being drawn into dark chasms by long-nailed imps. All the horrors of Orgagna's Last Judgment, mingled with the dissolute grace of the Pompeian frescos, were portrayed on these lofty walls. In one corner stood a gigantic figure clad in armor which may have been worn by that Robert Comte de Clermont who received a blow in his brains, as the French historian graphically has it, at a tournament given by his brother, Philip III.; and as the same historian adds that the Comte Robert was altogether handsome and of an astonishing height, the remarkable size of the armor goes to prove the tradition. However, no joyous young face now smiled from its iron casement; only a grinning skull represented the head that once had supported the plumed helmet. Between pedestals upholding, one the figure of the Madonna, and the other a crowned Bacchus, stood a curious old cabinet, covered with hieroglyphics, and filled with stuffed serpents, dried bats, and crumbling bones which must have belonged to an order of creation long since extinct. Over the mantel-piece hung a Titian; doubtless the great master had designed it for a Venus, but, to please some virtuous ecclesiastic, had changed it to a Magdalen. There was neither penitence nor sorrow in the sensual face that smiled from the glowing canvas; neither did the scanty and

transparent drapery conceal one line of the voluptuous form. If it was a Magdalen, it was the sinner, not the penitent. Above the frame were crossed several formidable-looking sabres and daggers, which served for a background to a delicate Toledo sword with an exquisitely engraved hilt. A pair of antique bronze urns ornamented each end of the mantel-piece, and in the centre a Louis XIV. clock marked the hour. On a heavy ebony table, with elaborately carved feet, stood a brass tripod, with a bronze cat perched gravely on its edge. A small crucible containing a greenish liquid sat on the extinguished embers. A globe, hour-glass, square, and compasses, with many geometrical instruments, lay carelessly around, intermixed with half-open rolls of yellow parchment covered with cabalistic characters, ancient missals, and old books with worm-eaten covers. Before a Venetian mirror, on an altar of *verde antique* marble, was a terra-cotta statue of our Saviour, by Lucca della Robbia. The dying Christ was fearfully distorted, and the disciples who surrounded him looked like brigands. An ancient fireplace, setting forth in bas-relief the triumphs of Jupiter, beginning with the not very chaste story of Danaë, contained some smouldering logs, upheld by irons in the form of centaurs clasping their hands above their shaggy heads. Before this fire, and near the table, in a high-backed carved chair which a king of France might have liked, sat Fabien, handsome, elegant, composed, and scrupulously neat in his dress. His small polished shoes with silver buckles rested on a rich Persian rug, over which fell his crimson corded robe. The narrow linen band that encircled his throat, and the cuffs that fell over his hands, were of immaculate purity. The rings of his glossy hair curled over the edge of his small purple cap and around his white forehead; and his cleanly shaven face, clear eyes, and firm mouth seemed in perfect harmony with every detail of his dress. Looking at him as he sat there, some would have said, "He is a successful man"; more, "He is a good man"; and others, "He is a great man." The air of refinement about him denoted worldly prosperity, and there was nothing in the placid brow, fine mouth, and earnest eyes that betokened a weird nature, an undue ambition, a faithlessness and hypocrisy of the deepest dye. So far his appearance deceived one; but there was nothing spurious in the stamp that profound thought, constant study, and careful culture had impressed upon his face. He was a prosperous man. He had succeeded beyond even his most ardent expectations. He was no longer the poor scholar of the college of St. Vincent, the young and dreamy philosopher who went hungry that he might have books, and slept cold that he might not sleep much; who knew everything that science could teach, and yet was very ignorant of the refinements of life. Now he was *par excellence* above most of those who had despised him in his humble days. At thirty-five he was a high dignitary of the Church, with souls in his care, austere, grave, serious, and imposing. The children of the choir, the acolytes, the clerks, the sacristans, the poor worshippers, all revered him when he passed slowly across the choir of Notre Dame, majestic, pensive, and absorbed, his eyes cast down, his arms folded, and his face composed to a becoming stolidity. Yet he had not arrived at the supreme end, the great goal to which he aspired. Slowly one obstacle after another had been removed. As he approached, the mountains had levelled before him, dark and uncertain paths became clear and straight. Circumstances seemed to combine to make him great. Responsible offices were thrust upon him. Important trusts were confided to his care. The Church looked upon him as her most zealous disciple and brightest light. Philosophers and scholars did not disdain to defer their opinion to his. All classes came to him for advice and counsel. He was gentle, he was patient and generous, giving freely of what was not his own, thereby teaching his young pupil practically the beauty of charity. What more could this man desire than the honor, the esteem, the confidence of his fellow-men? Much more; for with all these he was favored, yet he was unsatisfied. A dark passion filled his soul, which he concealed beneath a mantle

of hypocrisy; but day and night, alone or with the world, silently he brooded, planned, and schemed for the accomplishment of one object.

## PART SECOND.

### A COUNT, A LILY, AND A ROSE.

CLAUDE DE CLERMONT was a strange youth, quiet, gentle, thoughtful. Unlike most rich young nobles of his age, he loved to be alone with his books and nature. A dreamy sadness softened his dark eyes, and stamped his face with an indescribable charm. When he spoke, his voice was soft and low; when he smiled, his smile was like a child's; and his manners were refined and caressing, yet a little shy and reserved. He seldom opened his heart to Fabien, seeming to live a life apart from his tutor, who, it is true, had never encouraged any confidences. He was a hard student, and spent the greater part of his time with his books, they were his favorite companions. He found in them society that never disappointed him; they did not flatter him to his face and censure him when he had turned away, they poured out their rich treasures freely, and he might gather up all he wished without being avaricious, or he might scatter them without being spendthrift; they were friends that were plastic in his hands to do with as he wished; he loved them, and he rarely ever neglected them.

Fabien, true to his promise to the dying Count, had made a scholar of the boy. He had given him the example of an upright, honorable life. He had taught him the sublime doctrines of the ancient philosophers; he had not interfered with his religious impressions; he had left him free to choose for his master Christ or Voltaire, whichever he preferred, without advice or counsel; he had not endeavored to bias his mind toward any one doctrine or profession. He had obeyed the old Count's commands literally; he had taught the boy science and philosophy, but he had taken no pains to fashion his soul to noble and holy desires. There was fer-

tile soil ready to receive the seed, but he had sown nothing. The boy's vague fancies and confused thoughts had fairly struggled to refine themselves into something like pure gold, but there was too much of foreign matter picked up from desultory reading that would not unite with a naturally good and noble nature. Sometimes he longed to go to his tutor, open his heart to him, and tell him all his doubts and desires, but there was something forbidding in the manner of the priest that kept the boy at a distance. So he studied, read, and dreamed away his days in the pleasant seclusion of Clermont, wondering what the world was like; longing for, and yet shrinking from, the time when he might be allowed to enter the field and engage in the conflict for himself.

Two young girls with arms entwined and heads pressed together in confidential discourse walked slowly down a garden path, followed by an elderly woman, who was knitting and humming, as she went, an old tune of Provence. The Lily and the Rose, as they were named by the people for miles around, did not feel the sharp-eyed old woman to be any restraint, for they repeated their most important secrets, and laughed over their girlish pranks, as though there was nothing but the birds and flowers to listen to them.

The Lily was Céleste Monthelon, a tall, graceful, white lily, with soft, gentle ways, downcast eyes, and a sweet face, on which were stamped peace and purity.

The Rose was Aimée, the convict's child. She was not a white rose, nor a red rose of Provins, but a *rose de thé*, velvety, creamy, with passionate color at the heart, wild fragrance, and fatal grace. At six, she was an ugly, weird little creature; at sixteen, she was a rose. The body had grown up to the disproportioned head, which would now seem small, only for its crown of blue-black hair, breaking into a thousand ripples of light. There was something startling in the expression of her eyes when they looked at one, which was seldom, for they were like nothing but the eyes of a tiger; in color reddish-



brown, with large pupils that one would have sworn were a little oblong, yet, veiled as they were by the thickest and darkest of lashes, they appeared soft and pensive; only when they flashed a glance straight at one, then their fire and passion made the heart shiver. Her eyebrows turned down a little at the nose, and up a little at the temples, which gave to the face a maliciously mischievous expression, that the roundness and beauty of the cheek, perfect nose, mouth, and chin fully redeemed. Her nature was a combination of good and evil; generous, passionate, loving to desperation those she loved, and hating bitterly, vindictively, revengefully those she hated. And she was ambitious; she wished to be a lady, a great lady; she wished to see unnumbered adorers at her feet. She declared many times, in confidence to Céleste, that her beauty should win her a title. She hated the quiet and retirement of Clermont, and desired to see the great world of Paris. She would prefer a life of excitement and adventure, in which she must play the first part. At other times, she hated everything, and declared she would enter a convent, become a hermit, a pilgrim, or a sister of charity. Then she wished to be a man, that she might lead the life of a soldier, and fight and die for her country. She talked well and eloquently, for a girl, of heroism and self-immolation; yet declared in the same breath that she was capable of neither. She was torn to pieces by contending emotions; subject to fits of melancholy depression, sudden abandonment to tears, furious and almost insane bursts of passion, reckless and noisy mirth, thoughtfulness and reserve, followed by an expansiveness, winning and gracious. She was moody, uncertain as the wind, unstable as water; yet she exercised a wonderful fascination, an irresistible influence, over those around her. Fabien was her slave. In no other hands but hers was he plastic; and she moulded him to her will with a despotism as remarkable as it was powerful.

After the death of the Count de Clermont, in accordance with his wishes the canon fixed his residence permanently

at the château, bringing Aimée with him; he placed her under the charge of the housekeeper, representing her to be the orphan of a dear friend to whom he was deeply indebted for many favors in former days. This explanation allayed whatever suspicion the gossips of the household may have had, and established the little girl on a sort of level with the young Count. She had grown up with him as a sister, they had studied and played together, and she had been more than once a mediator between the boy and his stern tutor. The tear she left on the hand of Fabien the day he led her out from the shadow of Notre Dame had indeed worked its charm, for she was the only thing in the wide world he loved, and he worshipped this little waif thrown upon his mercy with all the strength and intensity of his strange nature.

The Lily, Céleste Monthelon, was also Fabien's ward. Her father was a rich button-manufacturer, who, during the life of the former Count de Clermont, had purchased the adjoining estate. But the old aristocrat had never condescended to notice his plebeian neighbor, whose beautiful grounds were only separated from his by a row of poplars and a low rustic fence. However, the old Count did not live long after; and when Fabien became master of Clermont, which he was virtually, he made the kindest and most winning advances to the honest man, who gladly met him half-way. In this manner an intimate friendship was soon established between the two families. Madame Monthelon was an invalid, suffering from an incurable disease, when Fabien first made his flattering and disinterested overtures to the good manufacturer, and during all the years that followed she never left her room, or was seen in the society of her husband and little girl, who with the servants comprised the whole family of M. Monthelon. When Céleste was a little more than twelve years of age, her father too became a confirmed invalid. From one of the windows of the Château de Clermont Fabien could overlook the grounds of Monthelon; there he often watched the feeble man tottering about, leaning on the shoulder of his little daughter, who was his insepar-

able companion, and speculated on the chances of being her guardian when her natural protector should be removed by death. With this intention he was not long in winning the entire confidence of the invalid, who was deceived into believing all the priest's attention and kindness to be but disinterested friendship.

Shortly before his death, during a conversation with his daughter respecting her future, M. Monthelon said, "The canon is a good man, and I have a sincere affection for him. I know of no one to whom I can intrust thee and thy fortune with equal satisfaction and confidence." And Céleste, who always complied with her father's wishes, found nothing to object to in such an arrangement; for she too liked and trusted the grave and handsome priest, who always spoke to her as one would to a child, with gentle and caressing speech.

After her father's death Céleste spent much of her time at the Château de Clermont with Aimée and the young Count. The girls read, walked, and gossiped together, followed and watched by the sharp-eyed Fanchette, who was foster-mother, governess, and humble companion to Céleste. This kind-hearted woman of Provence had taken her a baby from her feeble mother's arms, and bestowed upon her all the affection and care of the fondest heart. It was the only maternal love she had ever known, for poor Madame Monthelon, feeble in mind as well as in body, scarcely ever saw her child. Fanchette loved the girl most tenderly; she humored her, petted her, and sang to her the sweet airs of Provence, while she guarded her carefully. Yet sharp-eyed and quick-witted as she was, she could not discover under the robe of the priest the wolf who was to devour her lamb, for she believed in Fabien as one believes in the God he worships.

The Lily and the Rose, as they were called by all the servants and all the people, grew and leaned toward each other lovingly for a time, until the hot breath of the sun wooed from the Rose the pure embraces of the Lily, then Aimée hated Céleste with all the strength of her nature. This passion was born suddenly. It started into life

one day when the young Count, meeting them in their walk, lingered by the side of Céleste and looked into her soft eyes with unmistakable love.

### PART THIRD.

#### A FACE AT A WINDOW.

THERE were merriment and revelry in the great *salon* at the Château de Clermont. Sounds of fresh, girlish voices, laughing with unaffected enjoyment, mingled with the soft tones of a piano, upon which some one was playing a dreamy waltz. The wax candles were lit in the brackets on the wall and in the Venetian glass chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. Flowers were everywhere twisted in garlands around the pictures, and twined about the neck and dainty limbs of the Venus that gleamed from a background of crimson tapestry. Every urn and every niche was filled with the fragrant beauties, until the room seemed a bower of roses.

It was Claude's birthday, and the girls were celebrating it in a merry, innocent fashion. They had decorated the *salon* secretly, and had surprised Claude by covering his eyes and leading him within the door. When the brilliantly lighted, flower-bedecked room fell upon his sight, he expressed his astonishment and pleasure with more than usual demonstrativeness, by seizing the hand of Céleste and kissing it heartily, at which the girl blushed, Fanchette frowned, and Aimée burst into a ringing laugh.

"Now," said Aimée with vivacity, after they had sufficiently admired the decorations and each other's dresses,—"now we will have a ball. Claude shall play a bewitching waltz while we dance. Not you, Madame Fanchette," pushing the woman brusquely into a chair. "Sit there, with your everlasting knitting and watch our graceful evolutions. Come, my Lily, to your Rose; but beware of her thorns. They are long and sharp, and they may pierce your tender whiteness."

Throwing her arm around the slender waist of Céleste with a savage clasp, as

though she would devour her, she drew her into the centre of the room, and began whirling around with the most graceful abandon. Céleste, understanding the moods of her friend, resigned herself to her rough embrace, and entered into the spirit of the dance with the utmost enjoyment. Claude played as though he were inspired with the soul of mirth, and Fanchette dropped her knitting, her grave features relaxing into something like a smile, as she watched the charming girls, their lovely faces wreathed with smiles, their hair floating in careless confusion, their gauzy white dresses enveloping them in a cloud, until one could scarcely tell which was the lily and which was the rose.

At last Céleste, completely overcome by her rapid whirl, broke away from her companion and sank into a chair. Aimée seemed possessed with the spirit of Terpsichore. Her little feet scarcely touched the Persian carpet as she turned and floated lightly, making the largest circuit of the room. Her beautiful arms clasped over her head, her graceful figure displaying every line of beauty, her eyes aflame, and her lips parted in a dazzling smile, she seemed a supernatural being, an angel, a fairy, a nymph, a Bacchante, anything but a human being. Suddenly stopping in her mad evolutions and uttering a little scream, she sprang away from a large window at the lower end of the *salon*, that opened on a terrace, and, seizing Claude by the arm, she cried, "Look, do you see that face at the window, that horrid, ghastly face?"

Claude started up. Fanchette dropped her knitting, and Céleste retreated into a farther corner.

"I see nothing," said Claude, directing his glance toward the window, — "I see nothing. Your dance has turned your brain. It was an optical illusion."

"You see nothing. Stupid! How should you see anything when there is nothing to see now? It was a face, I tell you, and the face of a thief. Do you suppose he will stand there and let us all look at him?"

"Perhaps it was Father Fabien," suggested Céleste, timidly.

"Father Fabien, — nonsense! I tell

you it was a horrid face, a ghastly face, with great hungry eyes that seemed devouring me," she said vehemently.

Claude only laughed, and it seemed to irritate her beyond description.

"You coward!" she cried, "you don't believe it because you are frightened. I tell you it was a thief. I am not afraid. I will see." And straightening herself like a young grenadier, while she shook her small fist significantly, she marched direct to the window. Fanchette followed her, and Claude improved the opportunity to kiss again the hand of Céleste.

Aimée flung open the window bravely, and stepped out on the terrace. It was dark, and Fanchette drew back afraid.

"Here he is," she said, savagely pressing her underlip with her white teeth, as she went toward a miserable-looking creature huddled against the wall with his face buried in his hands. "*Malheureux!* What are you doing here? Why have you frightened us, and interrupted our pleasure?"

The voice that addressed the poor creature was so stern and harsh, so unlike the voice of a girl, that he started, but did not raise his head, nor reply; only, bending lower, he clasped timidly the hem of her white dress, and pressed it to his lips.

She drew her dress away from his grasp with a sharp stroke of her hand, saying, "Are you a thief, or are you mad?" Then turning toward the window, she cried in a loud, clear voice, "Claude, Claude!"

When Claude reached her side the man was gone; and if it had not been for the glimpse he had of a dark figure disappearing in the shrubbery below, he would have declared again that the dance had turned her brain, and she was laboring under a delusion. As it was, he looked a little grave when he entered the room.

Céleste was trembling with fear behind Fanchette, and to her eager, "Who was it?" he replied; "I don't know, but I think it was most likely one of the peasants who, in crossing the park, was attracted by the light and music, and was curious to know what was going on within."

Aimée entered with Claude, but she said not a word. Dropping into a chair, she remained with her arms folded and her eyes fixed on a certain pattern in the carpet, lost in profound thought. Her face was stern and pale; all the light and laughter had passed away from it, and now she looked more like a young Nemesis than a fairy or a nymph.

## PART FOURTH.

### I CAN MAKE HIM USEFUL.

WHEN Aimée had cried "Claude, Claude," the vagrant had started to his feet and dashed down the terrace, never pausing to look behind him until he reached the thickest shrubbery in a part of the park remote from the *château*. There he threw himself prostrate on the ground, and, extending his arms, clutched with convulsive grasp the dried leaves and moss, digging his long fingers deep into the earth, and moaning and writhing with suppressed agony. Then he suddenly started to his feet, and, clinching his hand, shook it defiantly at the star-lit heavens, crying in sharp tones of grief and incredulity, "Thou art God, and thou sittest in the heavens and metest out justice to the children of men? With what irony thou callest thyself just! Is it just to implant within our hearts natural affection, to be returned with scorn and hate? Is it just to make us worms, and then crush us in the dust? In thy supreme power, hast thou no pity for the weakness of the creature thou hast created and called good? Where is thy mercy when thou turnest a deaf ear to those who cry unto thee? Thou art unjust! and the strongest passion thou hast implanted in the heart of humanity is injustice. I prayed to thee, I trusted thee; and I believed if I could but see her face again, thou wouldst reveal to her the infinite love of my heart. I have seen her. Again she has treated me with scorn, and driven me from her. There is no truth in the instincts of nature. Blood is not thicker than water. I have nothing more to live for, to hope for, to struggle for. Outcast,

branded, a fugitive, hunted like a wild beast, every man's hand is against me. Until now I have wronged none, neither have I desired to; but from this moment the world is my adversary. I will regard all humanity as one regards a personal enemy. Indiscriminately I will avenge on all my own sufferings. Henceforth there shall be neither pity, truth, nor love in my heart. I hate mankind, and I will prove it."

"My friend, my brother," interrupted a stern, sad voice, "these are bitter words to fall from the lips of a feeble mortal; these are fearful words of defiance. What great wrong hath so embittered thee against thy fellow-creatures?"

The unfortunate turned, and saw before him, in the dim light, the tall, black-robed form of a priest. It was Fabien, who was taking one of his nocturnal rambles. Something had occurred to disturb him during the day, and rapid walking in this lonely spot was the escape-valve that freed his pent-up passions. He had been attracted a little from his path by the tragic and somewhat startling tones of the wretch who defied God. From his youth he had been accustomed to mysterious and solemn scenes, and besides the indomitable courage in his character was stimulated and excited by the contact of what might be danger; so he turned aside toward the spot from whence came the voice that uttered undistinguishable words, thinking, "It is probably some fanatic who beats the air and defies the immovable heavens, or a lunatic poet addressing a sonnet to the moon. At all events, I will know who it is."

When he came face to face with the man, and had clearly traced the outline of form and features, so indistinct in the feeble light, he seemed more startled than a brave man should have been, and the calm words he began to address to the stranger ended in an exclamation of surprise.

For more than an hour the Arch-deacon and the unfortunate remained in an earnest conversation, during which the poor vagrant wept, implored, and promised, while Fabien calmed, urged, and assured; then he left him, and

walked slowly back to the château, saying now and then to himself, "It is most fortunate for me. I can make him useful, and no one will ever discover him in that disguise."

The lights were extinguished in the *salon*. Céleste had gone home, accompanied by Fanchette and Claude, who both declared it was not safe for two women to walk alone across the park at that hour, and after such an adventure.

Fabien had scarcely entered his study when some one tapped at the door, and, without waiting for a reply, threw it open impatiently, and entered brusquely. It was Aimée. Her face was very pale, her teeth firmly set together, and her eyes on fire. These were portentous signs, and Fabien understood them.

"What is it, *ma chérie*?" he inquired, soothingly, as he drew her to his side.

She did not notice his kind speech nor his gentle caress, but, disengaging herself from his encircling arm, with a gesture of impatience she commenced walking the floor rapidly.

The priest said nothing, took up a book, and, apparently began to read; but all the while his gaze was fixed on the restless movements of the young girl. Suddenly she stopped before him, and levelling her eyes steadily to his sphinx-like face, said, "Have you been in the park to-night?"

"Yes."

"Did you see any one, that is, any stranger?"

"No."

"Did you come up the linden avenue to the château?"

"Yes."

"And you saw no one?"

"I saw no one; but why do you ask these questions? whom do you think I have seen?"

"The same person I have seen," she replied, with a shiver. "We were dancing in the *salon*, when suddenly I saw a face, a horrid white face, pressed against the glass of the north window. I screamed, and he disappeared."

"My child," said Fabien, firmly, "it was nothing but your imagination."

"My imagination!" she cried, drawing up her mouth with scorn. "Does

imagination supply people to talk with you, and to clasp and kiss your clothes? I tell you I saw and spoke to this man. And I have seen his face before, where and when I cannot tell; but I have seen it, and it brought back some memory like a horrid nightmare."

"It was probably some half-insane creature," said the priest, gently. "It is late; go to bed, my child, and think no more of it."

"I cannot help thinking; the face and the voice haunt me, and fill me with fear."

She glanced around the room, and for the first time the weird objects seemed to trouble her, for she said, "How can you live in this gloomy place? I should go mad to look always at that grinning skull."

"My child," said Fabien, solemnly, "we are all grinning skulls; and later we too shall become objects of horror and disgust to our survivors. It is well to think of that, and then we shall have no such childish aversion to things the most harmless and simple."

"That is very well for a sermon," she returned, with a mocking laugh; "but now confess, would you not rather look at the lovely Magdalen clothed with flesh, than these dry bones?"

"*Méchante!*" he replied, flushing slightly. "I would rather look at you."

Aimée darted a withering glance toward him, and, without replying, hastily left the room.

## PART FIFTH.

### A VAGRANT CHANGED TO A PRIEST.

THE dressing-room and bedroom of Fabien opened out of his study, and there he retired after Aimée left him. These chambers were more luxurious than austere men of the Church usually indulge in. Before a bright wood-fire stood a large crimson arm-chair, and near it a table, on which were arranged several decanters of choice wines, a Turkish pipe, and a tray of cigars, the odor of which would have rejoiced the olfactories of the most fastidious

smoker. Fabien doffed his priest's dress, and donned a purple *robe de chambre*; then pouring out a glass of sparkling *Lachryma Christi* and lighting a cigar he threw himself back in his comfortable easy-chair like one prepared for a fireside revery.

What his thoughts were we certainly cannot tell, but we can judge they were rather troublesome by the furious clouds of smoke he puffed out, and the restless way in which he moved his feet, threatening to dislocate the slender legs of the ottoman on which they rested. He glanced at his watch; it was midnight, and he grew silent and attentive to the slightest sound. An owl from a neighboring tree told that night was the time for dark deeds; and a watch-dog chained at the entrance of the château barked and whined as though he desired to break his fastenings and rush upon some nocturnal prowler.

Presently there was a light tap at the window, so light that it seemed but the rustle of a dry leaf whirled by the wind. Fabien started up briskly, and, raising the curtain, peered out; then he softly undid the fastenings of the casement, and a man stepped from the darkness of the terrace into the room. He glanced around eagerly. The warmth and light seemed to overcome him, for he pressed his hands over his eyes and sank into a chair with a moan.

The Archdeacon looked at him with pity; then pouring out a glass of wine he gave it to him, saying, "Drink this and you will be better."

"It is not thirst, monseigneur, it is hunger," he said as he took the glass with a trembling hand.

Fabien opened a closet, and took from it a loaf of bread and some *fromage de Brie*, which he placed before the unfortunate, who devoured them ravenously, gathering up with his thin fingers every crumb. When he had finished he looked up like a hungry dog who has only half appeased his appetite.

The priest understood the expression, and smiled compassionately as he said, "That will do for to-night, I have nothing more, but to-morrow you shall eat your fill."

"Thank you," replied the man with a look of gratitude and relief. "It has

been so long since I had enough to eat."

"Poor soul!" said Fabien, "you shall not go hungry again while I live. Now for the transformation. Come with me." And he opened softly the door of his dressing-room.

Taking from a wardrobe a suit of plain clothes that he had worn in his humbler days, he gave them to the man, and, laying before him all the articles necessary for a toilet, said, "Make yourself decent as quickly as possible. Shave your beard, and cut your hair, and you will not recognize yourself. These rags must be concealed for the present, and afterwards destroyed," pointing to the tattered garments that the man was rapidly divesting himself of.

Half an hour later Fabien looked up and the unfortunate stood before him transformed into a priest. A perfect specimen of the stern ascetic type, — an emaciated face, great hollow eyes, and a narrow fringe of clipped gray hair.

"That is well," said the Archdeacon with satisfaction; "the disguise is complete; your mother, if she could see you, would not recognize you. You may sleep here for the remainder of the night," indicating a sofa in his dressing-room, "but with the early dawn you must slip away as you entered, and remember to present yourself to-morrow at ten o'clock and ask for me, giving your name as Père Benoit of the college of St. Vincent."

The new-made priest stood before his benefactor in a humble attitude, his head bent and his hands clasped tightly. He had said nothing, for various and powerful emotions were struggling into expression, and his heart was too full to find utterance suddenly. At length, when the Archdeacon was turning to leave him, he seized his hand, and, covering it with tears and kisses, cried, "You have saved me; henceforth my life is yours to use as you wish. I am your slave, do with me as you will."

Fabien drew away his hand as if the tears burned him, and said kindly but curtly, "Words are useless, your deeds will best show your gratitude; you can serve me, and you are willing, that is all I desire."

## PART SIXTH.

## YOU MUST DECIDE FOR YOURSELF.

WHEN Claude started to walk across the park with Céleste and Fanchette, he had decided to put his fate to the test by asking the Lily to become his wife. He loved her, he had loved her for two years, and he intended to make her Countess of Clermont. It had been his decision from the first, but for some reason, although they saw each other often, the opportunity to declare his love had never occurred; he was sure Céleste returned his affection, and in the security of this conviction he had remained silent. Now he felt the time to speak had arrived, and he was determined to delay no longer.

It was a moonless night, but the air was keen and clear, and the Milky Way made a luminous path across the wilderness of the heavens. The autumn leaves and the cones of the pines cracked under their feet, the wind moaned among the dried branches like a lost spirit doomed to wail forever over barren plains and leafless trees, and the darkness seemed filled with the murmuring of invisible sorrows. Yet they did not feel the depressing influence, for they were in the youth of life and the new moon of love, and to them there was no dreary night, no dead leaves, no weird branches, no moaning wind. They walked within the walls of paradise, and light, music, and flowers sprang into life as they passed.

Fanchette was diplomatic, and, desiring to see her young mistress a countess, she lingered behind, so she did not hear the conversation; neither did we, and for that reason we cannot give it literally. However, when they parted at the door of the Château Monthelon, while Fanchette was looking at the constellations of the heavens, Claude imprinted the first kiss of love on the trembling lips of Céleste in return for a sweet little "yes" she had whispered after some maidenly hesitation.

"To-morrow I will speak to Father Fabien," he said. Then he pressed the hand that lay in his, nodded significantly to Fanchette, and went away exulting like a king, a hero, a great

general who had won an important battle with all the chances against him. He congratulated himself that he had gained a victory, when in fact the enemy had surrendered, the citadel had fallen at the first shot, almost before the siege commenced. Nevertheless he believed himself to be a hero; in that he was deluded, but his joy was real. His heart was as light as air, and his feet seemed to partake of the same lightness, for he bounded over the low fence that separated the two parks with the agility of a deer, and almost ran into the arms of two men who were earnestly talking together in the shadow of a great trunk.

Claude was a little startled at first, but recognizing Fabien in the taller figure, and being too happy for suspicion, he merely glanced at them and hastened toward the château.

Céleste, panting under the burden of her first secret, her heart beating tumultuously in her rosy ears, her cheeks aglow, and her lips warm with her lover's first kiss, flew to her room that she might be alone to think over that brief moment of joy.

The next morning Aimée tapped at the door of the Archdeacon's study, and while she paused a moment for an answer it was thrown open and a strange priest came out. When his eyes fell upon her, he started as though he had been shot, and turned, if possible, to a more deathly pallor.

The girl flashed a glance straight through all disguises, and recognized in the priest the unfortunate who, the night before, had clasped and kissed the hem of her dress. Passing him like an arrow from a bow, she darted into the presence of Fabien, and almost startled him out of his composure by exclaiming, in a clear and confident voice, "That is the old man who disturbed us last night; who is he?"

"You must be mistaken, my child," replied the priest very firmly and calmly. "He is Père Benoit, a friend of mine, and a teacher in the college of St. Vincent."

"*N'importe!*" she replied with an indisputable air of conviction. "He may be St. Vincent himself for aught I know, but he is none the less the man

who knelt on the terrace and kissed the hem of my dress."

Fabien looked at her and smiled indulgently, as one would at a wilful child whose opinion is not worth disputing.

Her face turned crimson, and her eyes flashed preparatory to an outburst, which was prevented by a tap at the door, and Claude entering.

"I am more than fortunate this morning in the number of my visitors," said the Archdeacon with stately but satirical courtesy, as he pushed a chair toward the new-comer.

"I should like a little private conversation with you, if it will not inconvenience you," returned Claude, glancing at Aimée, who was making disdainful grimaces behind Fabien's back as she pointed to the heterogeneous collection on the table. Noticing Claude's glance, and angry that he should have any secret from her, she threw an old parchment she held in her hand with such force against the tripod that it made the bronze cat clatter, and elicited a gentle remonstrance from the Archdeacon.

"There seem to be a great many mysterious things here," she said, glancing reproachfully at Claude and scornfully at Fabien as she left the room, closing the door with a sharp bang.

The Archdeacon and Claude maintained a silence of some moments after Aimée went out, each waiting for the other to make the first remark.

It is, no doubt, a trying piece of business for a shy and modest youth to confess his love to the object of his devotion, even when he may know that he will not be repulsed, and that all the fair recipient's interest is enlisted in his favor. But how much more difficult to sit calmly down, free from the sweet excitement of the angel's presence, and tell to a cold and disinterested listener the story of his first love; its birth, its growth, its maturity; and then demand formally, practically, and with conscious irony, permission to marry this chosen being, whom he knows he shall marry whether permission be given or not.

Claude was young, and Claude was shy; and, besides, there was no sym-

thy between him and his guardian. For some time it had been dawning upon him that, though nominally the master, he was actually the subject; that the strong will and persevering energy of his tutor had fettered him with chains he could not throw off. At first he had not tried, and later, when he wished to, his gentle *insouciant* nature preferred peace rather than a severe struggle; so he let matters take their course, and submitted to being little more than an automaton in the direction of his own affairs. But love had emboldened him, and now he was determined to marry Céleste Monthelon with or without her guardian's consent. So it was with more manly courage than Fabien would have accredited to him that he said, "The subject I wish to speak of is this: I have asked Mademoiselle Monthelon to be my wife, she has consented, and we await your sanction. Can we depend upon it?"

A hectic flush dyed for a moment the cheek of the Archdeacon, and his eyes grew restless while his fingers moved with a scarcely perceptible writhing motion, peculiar to him when laboring under a suppressed excitement. Yet he said with his usual calm, though perhaps an inflection more of force in his voice than Claude liked to hear, "Would your father, if he were living, approve of this marriage? Would he sanction an alliance with the child of a manufacturer whom he despised and considered an inferior? Should a son of one of the oldest and noblest families of France marry with a daughter of the people? I repeat again, if your father were living would he consent to this marriage?"

Claude worshipped the memory of his father, and no stronger argument than his disapproval could have been used against his cause. For a moment it startled and confused him; then his love gained the ascendancy, and he raised his head, and said, firmly, "If my father had lived to know Mademoiselle Monthelon, I believe he would have loved her, and forgotten his prejudices against her position. And I have such confidence in his love for me, that I am sure he would have made



any sacrifice for my happiness. Céleste is young, lovely, and rich. We have known each other from childhood. Our estates join; united, what a noble property it would become. But more than all worldly advantages," here his voice took a deeper tone of pride and resolve, "she loves me, and I adore her. Then what can be a more suitable alliance?"

Claude paused, and looked at the Archdeacon as though he believed his words had carried conviction with them, and had shattered at one blow the frail barrier he would oppose.

"You must decide for yourself," said Fabien, deliberately, after a few moments of deep thought,—"you must decide for yourself, but I shall reserve the right to decide for my ward, Mademoiselle Monthelon."

"And you will decide against me," replied Claude, bitterly. "I am convinced that you will strive to make me miserable, but you will not succeed, for I am determined she shall be my wife; I love her, and nothing shall part us." And as he spoke, he rose excitedly, and turned to leave the room.

This was the first time the docile pupil had rebelled, and the Archdeacon, believing he had sounded the depths of the young count's nature, was surprised at this new development. Here was determination and courage he had not prepared himself to struggle with; yet he was equal to the emergency. Laying his hand heavily on the shoulder of Claude, and fixing him with his clear, intense gaze, he said, between his clenched teeth, "Now it is your turn to listen to me. I have an account to settle with you. What can you say in regard to your intentions toward Aimée, my other ward? You have won the love of this poor child with false professions, and now you intend to desert her for another."

Claude stood aghast. "I do not quite understand you," he faltered; "Aimée! I have thought of her only as a sister. We have been like brother and sister from childhood, she loves me as a brother."

"She loves you deeply, passionately, with all the strength of her strong nature, and you will desert her and marry

another. It will kill her!" cried the priest with frenzy in his voice.

Something had escaped from his heart in this moment of excitement that he did not intend to reveal; so instantly crushing his emotion, and changing his voice, he continued calmly, "I have done wrong to betray the poor child's secret. It is only lately that I have known it, otherwise I would not have exposed her to your dangerous companionship. You have trifled with Aimée, whether intentionally or thoughtlessly I cannot tell; then how can I be assured of the sincerity of your affection for Mademoiselle Monthelon?"

"It is not necessary you should be assured. If Céleste is convinced of my love, that is sufficient," returned Claude haughtily and angrily. "I only pray that you will save yourself the trouble of putting obstacles in my path, for, whatever they may be, I have the strength and the will to overcome them." And with this he went out and left the Archdeacon alone to think of what he had said.

When Claude rushed out into the open air, the hot blood was seething through his veins, anger, disappointment, contempt, and astonishment were all struggling together in his vexed soul. Hitherto he had experienced no stronger emotion than love, his heart had been a stranger to resentment and suspicion. Now he seemed to be in the midst of a whirlwind of conflicting passions, the strongest of which was indignation at the unjust accusation of the Archdeacon that he had trifled with the girl whom he had loved and cherished as a sister. Then a new thought dawned upon his mind. The priest was ambitious for this girl, who must be connected with him by some tie stronger than friendship; he was ambitious, and wished to see her Countess of Clermont. Now that he imagined he had discovered a motive for his guardian's strange conduct, he was a little appeased and walked more calmly toward Monthelon, for he wished to see Céleste, to prepare her for possible obstacles, and to conjure her to be firm and faithful under every trial.

For some moments the Archdeacon stood where Claude had left him, his

hands clenched and his eyes fixed on the floor. Then he said with a profound sigh, shaking his head mournfully, "He does not love her, he does not love her. Poor child! I foresee tears and sorrow for her. She loves him and she will suffer for him. That is another incentive to revenge. Rash, defiant fool! does he think to sweep me away with a blow of his hand, as one does a gnat that stings? Before this new moon of love grows old, I will teach him the strength of my opposition. I have other designs for my ward, the fair Lily must be transplanted to another garden." And with these oracular words he turned to his crucible, shook together vehemently some different colored liquids, kindled a fire in the tripod, turned his hour-glass, and set himself down to a chemical experiment as energetically and resolutely as though he expected thereby to discover a remedy for the difficulties that had arisen during the interview with his defiant pupil.

## PART SEVENTH.

### THERE IS BUT ONE MAY IN A YEAR.

It was one of those brilliant and exhilarating mornings in May that so often follow a succession of dreary days; when the sun shines like a child who laughs with all its heart, after having wept much; when the earth seems to throb with the new life that runs through its veins; when the buds burst into blossom almost while we gaze upon them; when the harebells and half-fledged ferns murmur and whisper together like young lovers with heads touching; when the sluggish blood of age and the warm blood of youth quicken into a more fervent flow; when the heart dances in the bosom of the happy, and even the lips of the sorrowful tremble with a smile.

"Nature is in *fête* this morning," said the Archdeacon, as he stepped from his room on to the terrace. Throwing back his shoulders, he inhaled with intense satisfaction a long breath of pure air, while his eyes wandered down the shady walks, bordered with acacia, toward the

Seine, whose serpentine track sparkled here and there through the shrubbery. After he had gazed for a few moments on the exquisite scene, he walked slowly across the terrace, stooping often over a blossoming border to examine with the closest scrutiny some flower that attracted his attention. Plucking a bunch of scarlet geranium that flaunted in the sun, he looked at it curiously, inquiringly, touching almost tenderly its velvet petals. "What wonderful design is displayed here," he said; "how simple, and yet how perfect; how one part is adapted to the other with a subtle mechanism that defies imitation! Who planned this delicate yet marvelous thing? Who touched it with flame, and wove it into a tissue of matchless beauty? Those who would be wiser than their Creator, say it is but chance. How the simple things of creation confound the false reasoning of the scholar! It is well that those desiring to be infidels are dull and stupid to such wonderful revelations. I have studied and investigated, believing that science would confound religion, but it is in vain; the most inferior creation of God puts it to shame." The face that had beamed for a moment under the glorious light of nature suddenly clouded over, and a profound sadness filled his voice as he continued: "I am a contradiction to myself. I would be a stoic, and I cannot. I doubt, and I believe even while I doubt. I am utterly reckless and unscrupulous in many things, and yet I trust and hope like a child. Why does God send such days? They but soften the heart and draw it away from its purpose. It is better to be deaf and blind than to be constantly invaded by these influences of nature." He followed his winding walk along the edge of the river, now and then pausing to examine a curiously striped butterfly fluttering from flower to flower, or a lizard stretching its graceful length in the warmth of the sun, or the incessant struggling of life represented by an ant-hill; these seemed to absorb him, in fact the most insignificant things interested him, and one seeing him would have declared him to be a naturalist searching for new specimens of insect creation.

And so sauntering along, the Archdeacon turned a serpentine path and came suddenly upon two persons sitting on a stone bench, near an ancient fountain, overshadowed by roses and laurel. One was a young man with a book in his hand, and his head bent over the book. The other a girl, her elbow resting on her knee, her open palm supporting her cheek, and her eyes devouring the face of her companion. The young man was Claude. The girl was Aimée.

The cheek of Fabien blanched, and he turned hastily away without being seen. "He does not love her," he thought, "he does not love her; if he loved her he would look at her instead of his book. And she—she loves him, and will never love another. I know her nature, she will be constant to this fatal affection. Poor child! why did I not foresee this danger for her? Ah! what a tempest there will be when she knows he loves Céleste." With these unhappy thoughts filling his heart, he turned into a walk that led to the château, and, raising his eyes, a vision of placid beauty suddenly appeared before him.

Mademoiselle Monthelon was coming slowly down the avenue, between the rows of shining laurel. The sunlight flickered over her white dress and yellow hair, and in her white hands was a tangled mass of violets and daisies. She did not see the priest, but came softly toward him, her eyes fixed on her flowers, a smile dimpling her mouth and trembling under her downcast lids. What a sweet, frail thing she was, so delicate, so gentle and innocent! and yet the Archdeacon, as he looked at her, hated her bitterly, for she had come between him and his fondly cherished plans, and he was determined she should be swept aside as one would sweep away the fallen leaf of a rose. Fair and gentle, a very lily of purity, she must be crushed and blighted for his ambition.

"A title for my Aimée, a convent for Céleste; Monthelon for the Church, and—a dead heart for me," he muttered, turning toward the girl and addressing her with a more gentle voice and a more gracious manner than usual.

"You see I am alone," she said, in reply to his salutation. "Fanchette

stepped aside to gather some brier-roses for my bouquet, while I walked on in search of Aimée. Can you tell me where she is?"

"Yes," replied Fabien, fixing his piercing eyes steadily on the face of the girl; "she is with *your lover*."

Céleste flushed rosy red at the term so startling and yet so delightful, and said, with a little touch of jealousy in her voice, "I thought he would have come to walk with me this lovely morning."

"They are evidently very happy in each other's society," returned the priest, insinuatingly.

Céleste fingered her violets nervously, with a troubled expression on her face, while the Archdeacon went on to sow the first seeds of suspicion in her gentle heart.

"Trust to nothing; there is nothing true but religion," he said; "it is the only thing that will not deceive you; it is a sure and safe anchor for the soul. The heart of man is feeble and uncertain, and love is like the wind that changes each day. My child, school your heart to bear disappointment and sorrow. Remember the sun does not always shine, and there is but one May in a year."

"That is true," she replied, while a bright smile chased away the cloud from her face; "but there are other months as fair as May, and love makes sunlight always."

"Perhaps; but there is so little love, and so few are constant. And then, a youth does not understand his own heart; the first emotion he experiences he imagines to be love."

"O mon père!" she cried, with mingled trust and doubt in her voice, "you cannot mean that Claude has deceived me, that he does not love me, that—that he is mistaken in thinking he loves me?"

"My child," said Fabien, looking into her face with gentle interest, "it is most painful to me to tell you this, but I fear he has deceived you. I believe he loves another."

"Who?" she gasped, letting the violets fall from her hands, as though they were smitten with palsy.

"You shall see for yourself." And

he turned toward the laurel-shaded fountain.

Claude still read, and Aimée still gazed into his face. The youth's eyes were bent upon his book, but his hand lay with a caressing touch on the head of his companion.

Céleste took in the living picture at a glance, and long after it haunted her with its grace and beauty. She said not a word, but clasping her hand tightly over her heart, turned away, followed by her guardian.

Neither spoke until they reached the end of the laurel walk, and went out of the flickering sunlight into the shadowy avenue of elms; then Céleste raised a sorrow-stricken face, and said, in a voice burdened with tears, "It is true, there is but one May in a year."

## PART EIGHTH.

### THE HEART OF A PRIEST IS THE HEART OF A MAN.

PÈRE BENOIT of the college of St. Vincent and the Archdeacon were often closeted together for long hours, and in the mysterious study there was much investigation that was not of a strictly scientific character. The inlaid cabinet that had been stuffed from time immemorial with musty, dusty, yellow papers, the chronicles of all the Clermonts, was emptied of its contents, examined in every part, tapped upon, and thumped upon, after the manner of a physician who would like to discover a disease in a perfectly sound chest; but all in vain, for the old cabinet was as intact as the most exasperatingly healthy person who ever defrauded a doctor of a patient. There were no holes but tiny wormholes, that were too small to conceal anything larger than the worms that bored them; there were no secret drawers, no double panels; it was a very simple piece of furniture as far as mechanism was displayed, but it seemed to have a strange interest for the men who examined it. The Archdeacon wiped away the perspiration from his forehead as he assisted Père Benoit to return it to its place against the Flan-

ders leather hanging, for it was very heavy, and such exertion was unusual. Then they replaced the drawers, and rearranged the dried bats and serpents on their dusty shelves, closed the glass doors, and set to work to examine carefully the pile of papers that lay on the floor. Fabien's brow wrinkled more than once with dissatisfaction as he threw one after another aside, until he had gone over all and found nothing he desired to find.

Afterwards they held a long and confidential discourse, in which they expressed their surprise, regret, and mutual disappointment at the failure of their search, and their firm determination to continue an investigation which was not to be baffled by the first ill success.

No one seemed to like this haggard-faced, hollow-eyed Père Benoit. As did the man without a shadow, he carried fear and distrust wherever he went. The servants at Clermont eyed him askance, although he was very gentle and courteous to all, creeping in and out with a sort of deprecating humility. Claude rarely noticed him, believing him to be a sort of dependant on the bounty of Fabien. But yet he felt an aversion toward him that he considered as foolish as it was unjust. Aimée avoided him as she would a pest; if he entered the study of Fabien when she was there, she would glance at him with visible dislike and fear, and rush out as though she were pursued by a dragon.

For several days after the Archdeacon had planted his first crop of tares in the heart of Céleste, she remained shut up in her own château, refusing to see or write to either Claude or Aimée. The young Count was desperate; he despatched note after note, but received no reply; he assailed Fanchette with entreaties and threats, but she was invulnerable, and the only information he received from her was that her mistress was suffering from a nervous attack and did not wish to be disturbed. Claude was miserable; he half suspected that some influence of the Archdeacon was at work against him, yet he could discover nothing. In the first flush of his joy he had often repeated to himself,

"How happy one is when one loves!" Now in the first moment of sorrow and disappointment he was constrained to say, "How miserable one is when one loves!"

Aimée secretly rejoiced that Céleste kept out of her way. Lately she had suspected that Claude was deeply in love with her friend, and that some misunderstanding had occurred between them which she believed would end in a final rupture if she could regain her former influence over him. She was selfish, if not unscrupulous, and she did not care who suffered, if she was happy.

One morning while Céleste remained a voluntary prisoner in her château among the elms, Aimée came up the broad steps and through the cool breezy corridors of Clermont, singing in a clear voice the song of the *Hirondelle*; the Archdeacon met her, and telling her he had something to say to her, took her hand and led her to his study. When there he closed the door, and pushed a chair toward her. She did not sit down, but leaned on it with folded arms, while she regarded with contempt the Venus changed to a Magdalen; it always seemed to irritate her, with its smile of sin and semblance of piety. Girl though she was, she understood the nature of the deception and scorned it.

"Look at me, Aimée, and not at the Magdalen," said Fabien severely, after a moment's pause.

"Why should I not look at the picture and listen to you at the same time?" she replied, impertinently. "In that way I can take a double lesson, one in deception, the other in religion, because it is to lecture me that you have brought me here, to scold me for not having been to communion this morning. Is it not?"

"It is," answered the Archdeacon. "You have been very remiss lately in your religious duties."

"I fear I have, *mon père*," she said, sinking on her knees, and bending her head over her clasped hands with mocking gravity; "but I will confess all now, and you shall give me absolution."

Fabien did not speak, but regarded earnestly the lovely kneeling figure before him, and while he looked at her his face seemed a mirror in which was

reflected many emotions. Admiration, love, pity, passion, tenderness, and despair, all swept over him, until he could scarce resist the desire to clasp her to his heart and pour out his soul in frenzied protestations. "My God," he thought, "I ought to drive her from my presence and never look upon her again; she crushes my will as though it were a bubble, she drives reason and ambition from my brain. No matter how I struggle against her power, she teaches me that the heart of a priest is the heart of a man, and its cries will not always be stifled."

Only an instant these thoughts filled his mind; then he swept them away with a supreme effort, and said calmly, "I await your confession, my child."

Aimée remained silent.

"Hast thou broken any of the Commandments since thy last confession?"

"Yes," she replied, not without emotion.

"Which?"

"The first; I have loved another better than God."

"Oh!" sighed the Archdeacon, like one racked with pain; "that is indeed a sin, but who is the object of thy idolatry?"

Her face and neck flushed crimson, but she raised her eyes and replied firmly, "Claude."

"Poor child, I pity thee! but thou art young, and it is not difficult at thy age to kill this affection, which —"

"To kill," she interrupted. "Why should it be killed? It is not a sin to love, if we do not forget God."

"It is a sin to love, if thy love is unlawful."

"I never heard that love was unlawful between those who are free to love."

"Claude is not free, he is the promised husband of Mademoiselle Monthelon."

Aimée forgot her confession, forgot she was on her knees before an archdeacon, forgot that she was outraging the privileges of the Church, and springing up, with clenched hands, dilated pupils, and anger stamped on every line of her face, she cried, "That is a falsehood; how dare you tell me a thing so false? Claude never kept any secret from me. If he was promised to Céleste, he would have told me."

"Calm yourself, *ma chérie*," said Fabien gently, almost afraid of the tempest he had raised, — "calm yourself and listen to me. I will explain all and convince you that what I say is true."

She looked at him a moment, her brow contracted, her eyes flashing, and her teeth pressed hard into her underlip. Then a smile of scorn and doubt flickered over her face, and she said with a gasp, "I don't know that I can believe you, for you are not sincere. All these things," with a sweep of her hand toward the Magdalen, the Flanders leather, and the triumphs of Jupiter, "convince me that you are not good and true; these are not the sacred subjects that should surround a priest. A shepherd of souls should look at none of these things."

Fabien winced, but he smiled indulgently, treating her like a child, as he always did. "Your simplicity excuses your rudeness, my daughter. But if you doubt me," he added a little sternly, "leave my room and come to me no more. It is for your own good that I desire to open your eyes, and let you see things as they are; but if you prefer not to see, why then remain blind."

"I wish to see. I will see. I will know all," she returned fiercely. "I will hear your explanation, but I will not believe Claude intends to marry Céleste until I hear it from his own lips."

She folded her arms, straightened herself to a grim rigidity, fixed her eyes on the armor with the ugly skull, and listened while the Archdeacon told her of his interview with Claude some time before.

When he had finished, the girl's face was very pale and resolute, the marked eyebrows had a decidedly wicked curve, and the eyes a subtle intensity, like a young tiger ready to spring upon its prey.

"He loves her then, if I am to believe this; but he will never marry her, I will kill them both first," she cried, with insane rage.

"For God's sake hush, my child," implored the Archdeacon, "There are other means less tragic by which this marriage may be prevented. Listen to me, and I will show you how easily it may be managed. Céleste even now, at

the birth of her love, is suspicious and jealous of you. It is because she doubts her lover that she shuts herself up at Monthelon, under the pretence of illness." Aimée's eyes sparkled with vindictive joy. "And it is not altogether a pretence. She is ill, but it is the heart, the mind, and no physician can cure that malady, but the slightest look, tone, hint, will augment it. She is physically weak, she has not a strong character, there is no heroism in her nature, she will sink under the slightest attack without combating it, she is too credulous and yielding to resist or dispute, and so can easily be disposed of. A convent is the place for such a feeble spirit as hers. My influence is great, she is pious and devout. I will show her how fair and peaceful a refuge she will find in the Church, and her bruised heart will aid me in an object that is, after all, right. We should benefit the Church at any cost, at any sacrifice. And the end always justifies the means."

"Disinterested reasoning," cried the girl scornfully, "but of what advantage will your success be to me? You will separate them, and he will love her the more. It is not alone his wealth and title I want, it is his love."

"Your charms will win that in time," said the Archdeacon with conviction.

"Never; if with truth and innocence I have failed, I cannot succeed when my heart is tarnished with falsehood and deceit. He has a more noble soul than yours, and he would detect the imposition. No, no, I will not be your accomplice, for it would be useless. If I was sure a crime would win his love, I would, commit it, but my heart tells me it would be in vain. It would separate me from him forever. Do what you will, but I cannot aid you. I will hear the truth from his lips, and — and my resolve is taken. I will not come between him and his desires. I love him enough to suffer for him, to die for him, and too much to see his happiness with her I hate. Yes, I hate her, with her deceitful white face and innocent ways. She knew I loved him, that I had always loved him, and she has come between us and separated us. I hate her!" she hissed venomously, —

"I hate her. Make her suffer if you can, but spare him. Remember what I say. If you injure a hair of his head, my vengeance will be terrible."

Since the day the child betrayed her father in the tower of Notre Dame, Fabien had known that there was something fierce, implacable, stubborn, and defiant in her nature, but he had never understood the full strength of it until now. He felt a shiver pass over him as she looked at him with eyes that seemed to emit sparks of baleful light; and when she turned to leave the room he had no power to detain her, although there were a thousand things he wished to say. She had reached the door, when suddenly the thought of what he had done for her since the hour when she was cast a waif on his mercy, his indulgence, his love, his patience, his care, all overpowered her and filled her heart with remorse. She glanced at him. His head was bowed; seemingly he was crushed beneath her scorn, her reproaches, her threats. In a moment she was on her knees before him, covering his hands with tears and kisses, imploring him to have pity on her, to forgive her, and to love her always.

The Archdeacon folded her to his heart. In that supreme moment he forgot he was a priest, and therefore not a feeble man. All the love and passion of his soul overflowed and drowned his reason. He was only conscious of one thing,—this girl whom he adored with all the intensity of his nature, and who until then had treated him with coldness and indifference, had thrown herself voluntarily at his feet and covered his hands with her tears and kisses. And while he held her to his heart, this stern cold priest, this immaculate shepherd of souls, this man whom the world believed dead to the passions of life, experienced for a moment

"That part of Paradise which man  
Without the portal knows,  
Which hath been since the world began,  
And shall be to its close."

An instant only, and then Aimée tore herself from his embrace, and without a glance or word fled from the room; and as she went she dashed from her face tears that had fallen from eyes which had seldom wept before.

## PART NINTH.

### THE ALLEY OF SIGHS.

On the left of the grand avenue that crossed the park of Clermont was a winding walk, shaded by pines and willows, that terminated, more than a mile from the château, in an abrupt and dangerous precipice which rose above the Seine to the height of more than two hundred feet, forming a part of the base of Mont St. Catherine. At a little distance from the extreme edge of this precipice the trees were cut away, leaving an open space from which one could see the city of Rouen and the serpentine winding of the river far below him. The shaded walk leading to this cliff had always been known as the Allée des Soupirs. Perhaps its umbrageous gloom and the moaning of the wind, that seemed to sigh mysteriously among the mournful pines when it was heard nowhere else, suggested the name. It was not a retreat a happy person would have chosen. Only one steeped in melancholy would have sought it as a congenial spot to nurse his morbid fancies. Nevertheless it was a favorite resort of the Archdeacon when he wished to be quite alone to brood over his cherished schemes, and the stone seat facing the Seine scarcely ever had any other occupant.

But on this day, when Fabien, in the privacy of his study, plotted with Aimée, Claude sat there with a book in his hand, out of which he read from time to time passages that seemed to interest him. He had wandered down the Alley of Sighs miserably dejected, his heart filled with doubt, sorrow, and disappointment at the unaccountable check to his ardent love. He had written note after note filled with the most tender expressions of affection. The notes had been retained, but only a cold, verbal message had come that Mademoiselle Monthelon was too ill to reply to Monsieur le Comte. Not knowing what course to take, he was in tortures of uncertainty. Sometimes indignant, and suspecting some plot of the Archdeacon and Fanchette, he determined to storm the citadel and force a passage into the presence of his beloved. Then he thought how unwise and ridiculous such

a step would be, if she were really ill, too ill to see him. Tormented with these conflicting emotions, he found very little distraction in the scene before him, and less consolation in the pages of the book which he turned listlessly over. It was the *Pensées de Blaise Pascal*, and this passage on the possibilities of a future life attracted his attention: "Vous me direz ici que je confonds mal à propos le bonheur actuel dont je jouis avec le parfait bonheur; qu'il y a cependant grande différence de l'un à l'autre." He pondered over the words, "Permanent duration is the marked characteristic of true happiness; present happiness is not only short-lived, but it often produces a succession of sorrows the most redoubtable." Again he read: "Les stoïques disent: Rentrez au-dedans de vous-mêmes. C'est là où vous trouverez votre repos; et cela n'est pas vrai. Les autres disent: Sortez dehors, et cherchez le bonheur en vous divertissant; et cela n'est pas vrai. Les maladies viennent; le bonheur n'est ni dans nous, ni hors de nous, il est en Dieu et en nous." These sentiments impressed him with their truth, because he had already found how uncertain is earthly happiness, and how useless it is to strive to find it within ourselves or without, in the midst of the diversions of life. It must be the gift of God, or otherwise it is but a momentary satisfaction.

Claude had studied and thought much, but in a desultory way,—the result of leisure and general reading; therefore he had not reached the great fundamental principles of life, which perhaps, after all, we oftener learn from sorrow and the experience that we gain from contact with the great heart of humanity, that heart which must throb and burn with ours before we can enter into rapport with it. He had passed his life, so far, in dreamy inaction, doing nothing, because there was no necessity to impel him. Yet there were times when he questioned himself sharply, as to what right he had, simply because God had given him wealth, to be an idler. While others of his fellow-men endured the heat of the day, toiling like patient beasts of burden for the bare necessities of life, he folded his

hands in luxurious ease, doing nothing for himself or humanity. His soul was full of generous impulses. He had given freely of his wealth to the poor, to the Church, to charitable institutions, through the medium of the Archdeacon, and had never refused the heavy demands he constantly made upon his charity. One knowing how freely he dispensed his bounties would have said that he believed, to the full extent, in the Scriptural adage, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. There was something of prodigality in the freedom with which he showered benefits on all, still there was very little satisfaction in it. He did not delude himself with sophistry; he knew he made no sacrifice of self, therefore there could be no merit in it. At times, before he was conscious of his great love for Céleste, ambitious desires had stirred the placid stream of his life, but only at short intervals; the natural indolence of his nature usually asserted itself, and he would decide that, after all, a life of political or literary activity was but a conflict in which one was almost always ingloriously defeated. When he loved Céleste and knew that love returned, he desired nothing more. A calm, domestic life with her seemed to him the supreme good, the ultimate blessing, that could be added to his already favored existence. That certainty had been short-lived. The Archdeacon had presented obstacles that annoyed him at first, and that now threatened him with the annihilation of all his hopes. Searching his brain for some assistance in his trouble, he suddenly thought of Aimée, and decided he would make her his mediator, as she had often been between him and the Archdeacon, and his intercessor with Céleste. This thought encouraged and comforted him, and he arose with a lighter heart to return to the château. Then, for the first time, he was aware how long he had sat there musing over his book and his sorrows. The afternoon was gone, and night was rapidly obliterating the golden footsteps of the sun. He lingered to look down on Rouen. The sombre city was growing solemn in the twilight. The majestic towers of Notre Dame and St. Ouen



made a *silhouette* against the gray sky. A light mist rose up ghost-like from the river, the wind swept in little gusty moans down the Alley of Sighs. His afternoon reverie and the sadness of the scene filled his heart with a gentle melancholy that perhaps was augmented by the coming events that threw their shadows before. With a heavy sigh he turned to leave the spot, and came face to face with Aimée. A spectre could not have startled him more, she was so pale, and her eyes met his with such a strange expression that he shivered. Then her dress of black, which was unusual, relieved only by a scarlet scarf wound around her throat, made a most disagreeable impression. She seemed to be transformed into something different from the Aimée he had parted with a few hours before; the white-robed, laughing girl of the morning appeared in the twilight like a ghost clothed in diabolical colors.

"How did you know I was here?" was Claude's first exclamation, when he had recovered a little from his surprise.

"I searched everywhere for you, until one of the gardeners told me he saw you enter the Alley of Sighs, and as I wished to talk with you free from interruption I followed you here."

She spoke calmly, but Claude discovered an increasing agitation, that was apparent in the hectic color of her cheek and her restless eyes.

"You are the one of all others I most wished to see at this moment, Aimée. I, too, have something to say to you; you can do me a great service, if you will," he said, earnestly, laying both hands on her shoulders, and looking into her half-averted face.

"Indeed! and what is the service?" she inquired, coldly.

Claude told her briefly of his love for Céleste, and his suffering at being separated from her, and was going on to implore her intercession, when the girl interrupted him with a cry of anguish that startled him. "Then you indeed love her so much?"

"Better than my life," he replied, firmly.

Her hands fell, and she stood motionless, her eyes fixed on vacancy, while

from time to time she sobbed, "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

Claude looked at her stupidly, not understanding; then suddenly the thought flashed upon him that perhaps her emotion was caused by some misfortune that had befallen Céleste, and he cried in a voice of entreaty, "Tell me, Aimée, is Céleste seriously ill? has anything happened to her? Tell me, for I am dying of anxiety."

These passionate words startled her from her rigidity, and fixing her eyes fiercely on him she replied, "Do not speak to me of Céleste. I hate her so that I would gladly see her dead before me. She is well; she is happy. It is I who am suffering, who am dying. She triumphs over me, and you have no pity for me. O Claude, how I have loved you! I have prayed for you as we only pray for those who are a part of ourselves. I have thought of you as no other ever will. You have been my idol, my god, my religion, ever since the day I first saw you. I would have suffered the pain and sorrow that is coming upon you gladly, and counted myself more than blessed to share any fate with you. I would have lived for you, I would have died for you, if you had but loved me instead of that white-faced, passionless creature, that hypocritical—"

"Hush!" cried Claude, sternly; "not a word against Céleste, she is an angel."

No woman can endure to hear her rival praised, and to such a nature as Aimée's it was fuel to fire; it was the spark that exploded the pent-up passions of her heart; and she broke out into such frenzied invectives that Claude was dumb with amazement. She went on insanely, heaping injustice upon injustice, insult upon insult.

"I hate her; I despise her; she is a cowardly, deceitful intruder, who has come between us, and changed your heart by her wiles. You loved me once, you thought me an angel; you praised my beauty; you sought my society and my sympathy; you made me love you by a thousand tendernesses and professions; and now you have grown weary of me, and you fling me aside and seek a new love."

Claude regarded her with deep com-

miseration; so young, so lovely, yet so entirely controlled by these passionate emotions. His eyes filled with tears as he looked at her, and he said, in a voice of extreme pity and gentleness, "Aimée, how you will suffer for having been so unjust toward Céleste, toward me, who have both loved you as a sister. Have I ever professed any other love for you than the simple and sincere love of a brother? If you have mistaken my kindness, my forbearance, my indulgence, for other than a fraternal love, am I to blame? Think of it calmly, without passion, and you will see that I have always treated you as a beloved sister."

His gentle words pierced her heart with a spasm of pain. She indeed remembered his love, his kindness, his generosity toward her who had no claims upon him. This thought calmed the tempest of anger as nothing else could, and her voice was filled with contrition, as she said, "It is true, you have done nothing that I should reproach you for. You are not to blame that you do not love me; it is my own miserable heart that has deceived me, for I once was sure of your affection; now I know you have never loved me, and all this maddens me, and robs me of hope. You were my life, without you I will not live, I cannot live. All is lost; I am resolved, I will not live to know you hate me."

Her voice was broken, and her eyes were filled with tears that did not fall, as she raised her despairing young face to Claude. He took her hands in his, and pressing them fondly to his lips he said in tones of touching tenderness, for his heart was moved with pity, "Aimée, my little sister, my playmate from childhood, my dearest thing on earth beside Céleste, you know I love you with all a brother's heart. Let us forget these bitter words. Your passion has blinded you; you cannot see clearly into your own heart; you have mistaken the nature of your love for me, it is but the deep affection of a sister; so be to me indeed a sister; help me in my trouble with Céleste, and I will love and bless you always."

She looked into his face with a long, devouring gaze, as though she would

imprint every feature upon her heart forever, and said in a slow, solemn tone, "It is impossible, Claude; I cannot help to make you happy with another, but I can retire from your life. I can leave you to accomplish your desires alone. If I should remain with you, I should be but a discordant element. My place is no longer here. Adieu! Claude, adieu!" she cried, with passionate sobs breaking into the fixed calmness of her words. "Adieu forever. Let no thought of me intrude upon your hours of content. Death is a thousand times preferable to the sight of your happiness with another. You will see me no more; my resolve is taken, I will tear myself from a life that imposes a burden heavier than I can bear. A silence shall come between us, an eternal silence, and you will forget I have ever lived." Her lips were white and tremulous, and her voice clear and piercing with the suffering that only an excitable and highly wrought temperament experiences in moments of extreme mental distress.

Claude was alarmed; for although he had often witnessed her tempests, and listened to her exaggerated threats, during her frequent passionate outbursts, he had never seen such traces of anguish upon her face as now. He attempted again to take her hands, to draw her near him, to soothe her with gentle words, but with one look of reproach and sorrow that he never forgot she sprang from him and darted through the laurels into the thicket of trees that grew close to the precipitous bank of the river.

For a moment Claude was stupefied, then with an effort he recovered himself and sprang after her. A crash, a cry, a long piteous wail. Was it the shriek of a soul in pain, or the wind wandering down the Alley of Sighs? He knew not, but a sudden chill passed over him. All was silent now; he parted the branches and looked down, down into the shadowy depths of the Seine, growing dark and mysterious in the fast-gathering twilight. A deadly pallor passed over his face, and great drops of sweat fell from his brow while he gazed, for he fancied the water eddied and rippled as though lately disturbed by a falling body, and he could have sworn that he saw a gleam of

scarlet, a white face, and the tinge of a black dress under the yellow surface of the river. For years after to see that combination of colors made him turn sick, so vividly did they impress themselves upon his brain in that moment. "My God!" he cried, pressing his hand to his beating heart, "is it possible she meant what she said? Has she thrown herself into the river? And have I been the cause? Can it be that my words drove the poor girl to sudden and dreadful death? O Heaven! what can I do? No help can reach her from this height, and before I can descend it will be too late." Again he looked eagerly down, crying, "Aimée! Aimée!" but the placid water returned no answer. All was silent above and beneath him. A bird hopped across the branches, a bat whirled around his head; nature made no reply to his despairing voice. It was dumb, because it was unconscious of the tragedy that filled his soul with horror. Bewildered, hopeless, almost maddened by the succession of thoughts that rushed through his burning brain, he turned to seek help, although he felt it useless, and saw before him the gaunt figure, the haggard face, of Père Benoit.

Before Claude was well aware of the priest's presence, he felt his claw-like hand clutching his throat, and his voice like the hiss of a serpent, as he said, close to his ear, "I know all. You are a murderer! You have driven the poor girl to death to hide your crime from the world. You plunged her down the precipice into the river. I heard her call for help."

"My God!" cried Claude, wrenching himself from the priest's grasp. "Are you mad, that you utter such a lie? I have not harmed the poor girl. I loved her as a sister, how then could I injure one hair of her head? If she has come to harm, it was her own uncontrolled passion that led to such a fearful result. I am innocent. God above knows I am innocent. Do not stand here accusing me. Let us try to reach the river; if she has fallen down the precipice, we at least may find her body."

The priest turned mechanically and followed Claude, who with livid face and bloodshot eyes rushed down the narrow winding path.

"She may have descended this way," he cried, after a few moments, turning suddenly upon the priest, who was following him desperately, his black robe torn by the thorns and jagged rocks. His hands were clenched and his lips compressed, while his eyes were fixed menacingly on the sorrow-stricken young man before him.

When Claude turned his anxious face upon him, the priest's eyes fell, and he crossed himself, saying only, "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

"Do you not think, that, after all, she may have rushed down this path, and gone on by the beach-road to St. Ouen? See, here are certainly marks of a woman's shoe in the sand."

"A woman's shoe," repeated the priest bitterly and laconically, "I see only the track of a goat's hoof."

Claude said no more, but sighed heavily as he glanced down on the river a few paces from him. In a moment they stood on the shore side by side, Claude trembling visibly, for he expected to see a white, reproachful face looking at him from the depths of the shadowy river into which he gazed long and intently; but he saw nothing save the shadow of the overhanging cliff, and one trembling star reflected from the azure heavens. Then he raised his eyes to the face of the precipice with its weird, waving branches, and cried out with sharp anguish, as we sometimes cry to the dead, even when we know they cannot hear us, "Aimée, Aimée."

There was no reply, only the long-continued melancholy echo, "Aimée, Aimée!"

## PART TENTH.

### THIS IS ALL WE HAVE FOUND.

BOTH men stood looking silently each into the face of the other, and the silence was not broken until Claude gasped, hopelessly, "Then we can do nothing?"

"Yes; we can try to find the body," said the priest, in a voice of suppressed emotion; "let us return to the château and send some one for boatmen to drag the river before the tide takes it beyond their reach."

Claude shuddered at the word "it," and covering his face with his hands he sobbed aloud. Was it possible, then, that Aimée, the perfection of health and beauty, the gayest, brightest creature that ever made sunlight in the old château, she who had occupied so important a place in the hearts and thoughts of those around her, — had she so soon become only *it*?

The priest's face softened as he looked at the young man; and whatever his suspicions had been before, his expression now betrayed that he no longer doubted the innocence he had so lately accused. But he had a purpose to serve, when he said sternly, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "You are a good actor, Monsieur le Comte; you are a good actor, but you cannot deceive me."

"O Heaven! is it possible that you can believe me guilty of such a crime," cried Claude, as he turned from the priest, and sprang up the steep path impetuously. "Come with me into the presence of the Archdeacon, and there accuse me if you dare. I tell you I loved her. I have loved her always as a sister; dear little Aimée, she made my life happy. You must be mad even to think that I could injure her."

They had now reached the top of the path by which they had descended, and the spot where Aimée had so suddenly disappeared.

"Look," cried Claude, as he strained his eyes in the distance, — "look yonder on the shore path to St. Ouen; near that rock is there not a moving form which has just emerged from its shadow, and is it not the figure of a woman?"

"I see nothing," said the priest, following his gaze, "but a fisher-lad creeping away toward the town."

"What is more likely," continued Claude, earnestly, "than that she in her passion dashed down the path, and rushed away to St. Ouen? She will return when she becomes calmer. Yes, I feel she is safe; I am sure we shall see her before the evening is over."

This sudden beam of hope was extinguished by the priest, who replied, firmly and solemnly, "Young man, do not waste your words in the effort to

deceive me. You know the poor girl will never return. Even now her unresisting body is floating toward the sea with the ebbing tide."

Claude made no reply, but turned, his soul filled with indignation and grief, and hurried through the Allée des Soupîrs toward the château, followed by Père Benoit.

The Archdeacon, with bent head and folded arms, was calmly pacing the pavement of the portico, when Claude, pale and excited, rushed into his presence, a few steps in advance of the equally excited and pallid priest.

Fabien paused in his walk, and raised his head haughtily to receive the perturbed intruders. But his expression of reserve changed instantly to the deepest astonishment and horror when Claude cried out, "*O mon père!* I fear Aimée has fallen over the cliff, into the river, and is drowned."

"*Ciel!*" exclaimed the Archdeacon, forgetting his dignity. "What do you say? Aimée fallen into the river! Mother of God! Where were you, that you did not save her?"

"Monseigneur, permit me to speak," interrupted Père Benoit, stepping humbly forward. "This unhappy young man tells a sad truth. Mademoiselle Aimée has suddenly disappeared over the cliff into the river. I heard her reproaches and sobs; I heard her cry for help; and I heard him accuse himself of having caused her death. Monseigneur, I must speak the truth to you. I believe M. le Comte has murdered the defenceless girl."

"Liar!" shouted Claude, springing at the throat of the priest; but before he reached his victim the strong arm of the Archdeacon was interposed, and his clear, metallic voice smote the ears of Père Benoit like the clash of a sabre. "Are you mad, that you waste time in accusing Claude de Clermont of so foul a crime?" Claude, for the first time in his life, felt like blessing his guardian. "*Imbécile!* do you not know that your idle words may bring terrible suffering upon this young man, and a fearful punishment upon yourself? Leave your insane suspicions unexpressed, and act, instead of talking absurdities. Send a man to St. Ouen;

another down the river, to Grand Couronne. The tide is ebbing," he said, with sad significance; "let some boatmen leave Bouille as quickly as possible, dragging from there to this point; and send messengers on the swiftest horses, up and down on both sides of the river."

"I will ride to Bouille, myself," cried Claude, "for I must do something; inaction would drive me mad; and I will not return until I have found some traces of her."

In a few moments every servant about the château knew that Mademoiselle Aimée had disappeared in a sudden and dreadful manner; and every one was ready to volunteer his services in search of her, for, in spite of her wayward and passionate nature, she had endeared herself to all; and all, in thinking of her, remembered some little act of generous kindness and unselfishness toward them.

The servants shook their heads ominously, while they hurried from room to room, summoned momentarily by the imperative bell of the Archdeacon. Various conjectures and rumors passed from one to the other, and dark hints against the young Count were already whispered in retired corners, for the Archdeacon's valet had overheard the accusation of Père Benoit.

Among all the domestics at Clermont there was only one who had entire confidence in the innocence of his master; for the feeble superstitious minds of hirelings and ignorants are so formed and held in subjection by the superior strength of a powerful intellect, that in almost every case, by a sort of magnetic influence, they become thoroughly subordinate to its opinion. Although the Archdeacon had stoutly defended Claude from the accusation of Père Benoit, yet from sundry expressions he had let fall the servants were convinced that it was only an act of generosity on the part of Monseigneur, and a desire to shield his ward from a suspicion so horrible. Therefore, as we have said, there was only one who, in spite of Fabien's influence, had entire belief in Claude's innocence; and that was his valet, Tristan, who concealed beneath a deformed and sickly body a

mind of rare discrimination and intelligence. This poor young man was some years older than Claude, and his father had been valet until his death to the former Count de Clermont. Since Fabien's reign commenced at the château, gradually and with evidently good reasons most of the old retainers had been dismissed, and new ones had been selected by him to fill their places. This poor sickly boy would have doubtless shared the fate of the others, if the Archdeacon, judging from his vague and inane expression, had not believed him to be half idiotic and half stupid, and therefore harmless. Owing to this conviction and the earnest entreaties of Claude, who had a deep affection for him, he was allowed to remain. He was a most singular-looking creature, having a great head covered with coarse shaggy hair, a pale, hollow face, great eyes much too far apart, with something of the pitiful, imploring expression of a dumb animal. Beside he was hunchbacked, and all of one side was shorter than the other; from that cause his gait was a grotesque limp, and every movement a sort of double intention. To strangers he was simply repulsive. Céleste, as gentle as she was, had often felt like running away from him, even when he brought her messages from Claude, and the servants at the château made him a butt for all their pranks and wickednesses. Poor soul! he never complained to his master, but bore their buffets with a patience and gentleness that was truly touching. His love for Aimée was only second to his love for Claude; for the brave, high-spirited girl had been his champion in more than one encounter with the Archdeacon, in which the latter had always come off worsted; and it was woe unutterable to an unlucky trickster if she detected him at his cruel pastime, for her indignation and scorn came upon him like a whirlwind. The only instance in which Claude had ever been known to assert his authority was to protect his unfortunate favorite from the aggressive treatment of Fabien and his minions. He had seen those patient eyes watching him from childhood with a fidelity as beautiful as it is rare, and he had become so accustomed to his uncouth

form, his halting gait, and his haggard face, that if any one had said so him, "Tristan is hideous," he would have replied truthfully, "To me he is not even ugly."

On this night, while the servants were discussing their young master, the hunchback stood silent and apart, his short and his long arm folded, his head, as usual, lopped on the lower shoulder, and his great eyes fixed with a melancholy surprise on the knot of gossips. No one seemed to notice him, until a maid with a kinder heart than the others exclaimed, as she glanced toward him, "Look, the hunchback is weeping." It was true, the great tears were slowly rolling down the thin cheeks, and yet he seemed unconscious that he wept until a shout of derision made him suddenly aware of it. Then he quickly wiped away the tears with the back of his long lean hand, and turning silently he hobbled away with one reproachful look at his tormentors.

Before a half-hour had passed the last messenger had ridden off on his gloomy errand, the sounds of hurrying feet and excited voices ceased, and silence reigned over the house.

In the study sat the Archdeacon and Père Benoit; neither had spoken for some time. Fabien's face was buried in his hands; outwardly he seemed calm, but the convulsive pressure of his strong fingers into his forehead, and the shiver that now and then shook him, betrayed a terrible emotion that he with difficulty suppressed. The priest's face was haggard and stony, his sunken eyes were fixed on the face of the clock as it told the slow hours, his chest rose and fell with his labored breathing, and the great drops of sweat gathered and rolled down his hollow cheeks, while from time to time he wrung his hands in anguish and moaned, "Oh! oh! oh!"

When the bell in the turret of the chapel sounded the hour of midnight, it seemed to arouse the Archdeacon from his stupor, for he raised his head and fixed his red swollen eyes on the face of Père Benoit, saying in a low voice, "Midnight, and no tidings yet. *Mon Dieu!* how slowly time drags when one waits in agony. God grant that I

may know the worst soon; this suspense is insupportable."

"You will never know more than you know now," said Père Benoit; "long before they commenced their search, her body had floated with the ebbing tide far below Bouille."

"Stop your ominous croaking," cried Fabien, angrily; "how can you know whether she will be found or not? She may even now be living. You do not know the girl as well as I do. In a sudden access of passion, she is capable of doing anything to alarm those who love her; perhaps to-morrow she will repent and return."

"She will never return," replied the priest, solemnly.

The Archdeacon's heart sank, for he remembered the last interview in the library, and the strange manner of Aimée, which showed she was laboring under no ordinary excitement.

"Tell me all you know of this, and what reasons you have for your suspicions," he said at length.

Then the priest recounted minutely the scene between Claude and Aimée as far as he had heard; for although he was hidden in a hedge near them, every word had not reached his ear, and, owing to the intervening trees, he had seen nothing. When he repeated the passionate words the girl had addressed to her companion, Fabien trembled visibly, but he did not interrupt the narrator until he said, "How can you doubt that M. le Comte caused her death?"

Fabien folded his arms on the table, and leaning forward he looked with a strange expression into the face of the priest and said, "Indirectly, perhaps."

"Indirectly," repeated Père Benoit sharply. "Is it then any less a murder?"

"There is no doubt," continued the Archdeacon, without noticing the question, — "there is no doubt in my mind as to his having trifled with the poor child, and then driven her to desperation by his professed love for Mademoiselle Monthelon. But the accusation you make is a grave one, and unless it can be proved had better never be advanced. Hints do no harm, but an open avowal of your opinion may lead

to serious results. I for many reasons must defend the Count of Clermont from this charge; he is my ward, my pupil, and the world would not think well of me if I should abandon him in the hour of trouble. No, whatever comes of this, I must defend him. It is true I have sworn to be instrumental in visiting the sins of the father upon the child. I have sworn to be revenged for a greater wrong than any you have suffered, and yet openly I must do nothing; but you need have no scruples, only be judicious."

"*Je comprends*," replied the priest, while something like exultation sparkled in his heavy eyes; "now is our time to crush the viper."

"The Devil sometimes gives opportunities to saints. This dreadful event may be the means of our doing something for the Church," said the Archdeacon with bitter irony, for he did not think it necessary to wear his mask closely in the presence of one who knew too well what it concealed.

"I care not for the Church, if I can but accomplish my revenge at last," said Père Benoit fiercely. "If I could but see a Count of Clermont condemned as a criminal, whether guilty or innocent, only condemned and punished, my aim would be completed, and I should feel that I had not plotted and suffered in vain."

"You may not live to see him condemned by the laws of his country; there is no proof, and there never will be, I fear, but even less is enough for our purpose," replied Fabien calmly; "his disgrace and ruin can be accomplished easily, by taking advantage of this sad event to further our plans."

The hours wore on, the clock tolled one, two, three; still these two men, under the shadow of night, and under the shadow of an awful calamity, plotted the ruin of the unhappy young man who, with weary body, aching heart, and burning brain, hastened back to Clermont to relieve their prolonged vigil.

The dawn trembling to daylight forced itself into the study, putting to shame the sickly flame of the lamp, that only half illuminated the weird surroundings and the sinister faces of the two priests, when Claude, followed

by a troop of pale, anxious servants, entered the room.

Both men sprang simultaneously to their feet, their questions in their eyes, for their blanched lips refused to utter a word.

"This is all we have found," gasped Claude, as he came forward and laid upon the table the scarlet scarf, now drenched and soiled, that Aimée had worn around her neck. "This is all. We found it two miles below, attached to a piece of drift-wood in the middle of the river." Then his strength and calmness giving way, he sank into a chair and burst into sobs.

## PART ELEVENTH.

### THE PLOT MATURES.

FROM the moment on that terrible night when Claude returned with the scarlet scarf that Aimée had worn the last time she was seen, suspicion became confirmation in the minds of all. None now doubted that she had thrown herself, or had fallen accidentally, or had been pushed from the precipice into the Seine. Some were of one opinion, some of another, but the greater part, no slower than the rest of humanity to believe the worst of their fellow-creatures, entertained the latter. So it is not difficult to conceive that, as Claude was last seen in her company, he was the one accused by others, as well as by Père Benoit. For many days after she disappeared the servants of Clermont and the boatmen on the river continued their search for the body of the unfortunate girl. But whether it had drifted down with the ebbing tide, and so was lost in the depths of the unexplored sea, or whether it had lodged among the *débris* in the bottom of the river, none could tell, and none could ever know until God in his justice revealed it.

During the time the search was continued, the Archdeacon seemed possessed with a spirit of restlessness. Day and night he wandered about, up and down the river, over the park, and through the Allée des Soupirs, to the

cliff where she was last seen; there he would stand for hours leaning over the precipice, gazing down into the depths of the river, as though he could see far below the tangled rubbish and slimy stones that lined its bed. When night obscured all objects save the light from the lanterns of the boatmen, gleaming here and there mysteriously on the river's dark surface, as they continued their melancholy task, he would return haggard and silent to the château and enter his study alone. Sometimes Claude, wishing for a word of comfort, would seek him there late in the night; but the suppressed sound of sobs and moans would arrest him on the threshold, and send him back shivering to his room.

Père Benoit seemed to have deserted them, for, the morning after the first night of the search, he had left the château, and had not since reappeared, although Tristan told his young master that he had seen the priest in the town, surrounded by a crowd of common people to whom he was recounting the mysterious disappearance of Aimée, with many dark threats against Claude, who, he hinted, was her seducer and murderer.

"O, he is mad!" cried Claude with the deepest indignation, when Tristan had concluded his story.

"Yes, that may be, Monsieur le Comte," replied the hunchback, with anxiety in his voice; "I always thought there was something strange in the manner of Père Benoit; in fact, none of us think him anything but an impostor who has deceived the kind heart of Monseigneur the Archdeacon. But impostor or mad, whichever he may be, he should not be allowed to spread such a shameful story through the town."

"What difference?" said Claude, carelessly, although he looked distressed. "No one will believe the words of a lunatic. The people must know me incapable of such a crime."

The faithful servant hesitated a little, seeing his young master's troubled face, on which there was such a shadow of sorrow that it pained him to tell him all he had heard.

"Go on," said Claude, noticing his reluctance. "Did they appear to believe him?"

"Yes, monsieur, the *canaille* always

believe the worst. Shouts and cries of indignation arose from the whole crowd, and they declared that, although you were a count, you should be punished in the same way as was Pierre Garnet, who last year killed his mistress in a fit of jealousy. Do you remember the terrible manner in which they put him to death?"

Claude turned pale; yes, he remembered too well how they dragged the poor wretch from his hiding-place and, after inflicting every possible torture upon him, hung him to a branch of a tree, from which they did not allow the body to be taken until it was a sight too loathsome to behold.

"O my God! you do not tell me they spoke of such a deed," cried the unhappy young man. "Am I not then wretched enough, that this horror must be added to my other suffering?"

"I tried to speak to the crowd, monsieur; I tried to tell them that you were innocent, and that the priest was mad; but they would not listen to me, they called me a hunchbacked knave, said I was in league with you, and began to pelt me with stones, sticks, and garbage of all sorts, until I was obliged to take refuge in the shop of Mathieu the tailor."

"Kind soul!" said Claude, looking at Tristan with pitying affection. "You must not endanger yourself again to defend me. Have you told the Archdeacon of this?"

"No, monsieur, I have not told him, but I think he knows of it from his valet, who was with me at the time, and he said that I was a booby to interfere with the mob, as they nearly always had the right on their side. O monsieur, the valet André is a traitor to you, and false to Monseigneur the Archdeacon! for I am sure he and the priest joined with the mob to cry you down."

"It is worse than I thought," sighed the poor young man, "when even the servants of my own household turn against me. I will go to Father Fabien directly, and ask him if some measures cannot be taken to silence this madman."

Claude had felt his heart drawn toward the Archdeacon ever since the night he had defended him so warmly from the accusation of Père Benoit, and



so he now sought his presence with the conviction that he was truly his friend, and would still continue to protect him from the persecution of his enemies. Fabien listened to him, but seemed to think the matter demanded very little attention. "It is servants' gossip," he said, "and the best way to silence it is to take no notice of it." Still his manner did not reassure Claude. There was something of suspicion and doubt in the Archdeacon's regard that chilled him and made him tremble more than Tristan's story had done.

"O Heaven!" he thought, "if he too should believe me guilty and abandon me, the fate of poor Pierre Garnet may indeed be mine." Determined to know the worst at once, he summoned all his resolution and courage to his aid, and raising his head proudly, while the light of truth and innocence beamed from his clear eyes, he said in a firm but very gentle voice, "Father Fabien, have you entire confidence in me, and do you believe me incapable of the crime they accuse me of?"

The Archdeacon returned Claude's steady gaze with one of well-simulated sorrow, and replied sadly, "My poor boy, I pity you! God knows I pity you! and I will never desert you. Your father, on his death-bed, left you to me as a most solemn trust, and I will be faithful to that trust. Whatever I may believe respecting this dreadful calamity will remain close locked in my own heart, and none shall ever know it. Before the world I shall defend you, and strive to prove your innocence, although I fear you are guilty. But as I have pledged myself, I will never desert you."

Claude clasped his hands to his head and uttered a sharp cry: "This is terrible! And Céleste, does she also believe me guilty?"

"She does, and her heart is wellnigh broken."

"I will see her, if it costs me my life, and declare my innocence to her; and then, if she believes me guilty, I shall doubt the justice of God."

"Rash young man!" said Fabien coldly, "she will not see you, and you cannot force yourself into her presence."

"I will see her, and nothing shall pre-

vent me," cried Claude, as he rushed, half frenzied, from the room.

When he reached the door of the Château Monthelon, he was met by the *portier*, who looked at him with stupid astonishment, retreating as Claude advanced, like one who feared to be infected by a plague. "Give this to your mistress directly," he said, holding out a card on which he had written a few words, imploring Céleste to grant him an interview, that he might convince her of his innocence. The man did not offer to take it, but folded his arms and shook his head, saying impertinently, — he who had been all obsequiousness before, — "I was ordered not to admit Monsieur, neither to take any messages from him to Mademoiselle."

"Did your mistress give you those orders herself?" asked Claude, with a sinking heart.

"No, monsieur. Monseigneur the Archdeacon gives me my orders on all important matters; beside, Mademoiselle is too ill to see any one."

"Ill!" he repeated after the servant, — "ill, too ill to leave her room?"

"No, monsieur, Mademoiselle walks about the corridors a half-hour each day, and when the weather is fine she takes a short turn with Fanchette in the summer garden; but she is very weak and low, poor young lady!"

Claude sighed heavily as he lingered, wishing to ask many questions about Céleste, and what hour she was in the habit of taking her daily exercise; but he did not mean the servant should know he had noticed his remark about the "turn in the summer garden," so he only said, "I am sorry, Jacques, your mistress is so poorly. You need not say to her that I have been here. I will wait until she is better."

Jacques let him out a little more respectfully than he had let him in; for the calm and unconscious bearing of the young man somewhat disarmed the suspicion of the servant, who could not believe that a count who had committed a crime that places one on a level with the lowest could still appear with the superior demeanor of a noble and a gentleman.

"It is very strange," said the old man to the other servants, after he had

related to them his interview with the suspected, — "it is very strange that such a good and kind-looking young man as Monsieur le Comte should kill a girl he always seemed so fond of as he did of Mademoiselle Aimée. If he is guilty, why don't he take himself off while he has time? It seems like innocence, staying here and braving justice. Still there is a mystery, and I am certain that Monseigneur suspects him, although he says nothing."

"*Vieux sot!* How do you know Monseigneur suspects him, if he says nothing?" inquired a pert chambermaid, who was inclined to take the part of the handsome young Count. "I know what I would do if I was Mademoiselle Céleste and M. le Comte was my lover. I would see him" — this with a strong emphasis on the "would," a sharp little nod, and a significant snap of her fingers in the direction of Clermont — "in spite of Monseigneur's commands and the old priest's lies; they are hypocrites, both of them, and not half so good as the young man they slander, and you are no better, *et voilà tout!*"

This energetic tirade finished, Nanon tossed her pretty head defiantly, dove her hands into the little pockets of her tiny apron, and turning her back on old Jacques, who entertained the warmest admiration for her, left the room amid a buzz of astonishment.

"I believe he is innocent," said Jacques, with conviction, as he pursed up his mouth and shrugged his shoulders, making a significant grimace in the direction of Nanon. "I think she is right; and I will go and tell her so, for I don't like the little witch to be angry with me." So, crossing his arms under the tails of his green coat, he walked off after the indignant maid.

Claude loitered down the avenue that led to the summer garden where Mademoiselle Monthelon was in the habit of walking with Fanchette. He knew it was a favorite spot, and, if she left the château, she would certainly come there to enjoy the beauty and fragrance of the flowers, now in their most luxuriant bloom. There was a little arbor covered with clematis and Fontenay roses, where they had often hidden during their childish games, and where, not

many days before, he had whispered to Céleste the story that is always new, and that never becomes tame from repetition. How many times Aimée's clear laugh had discovered her to him, after he had searched throughout the grounds in vain, and her white hands and sparkling eyes had flashed through the curtain of leaves an eager welcome. Now the place was silent and deserted; a solitary bird twittered, he thought, mournfully; and the withered rose-leaves were scattered everywhere. In that moment he thought more of the departed Aimée than of the living Céleste; and sinking into a seat, he said, between his sobs, "*O ma bien chérie!* You will come here no more. I shall never again look upon your dear face. You are gone from my life forever. Alas! I feel the truth in all its bitterness. I would give half of my future to see you sitting here as I have seen you so many times; but no desire nor sacrifice can bring you back to me, you are gone as suddenly as a rainbow fades from the heavens, or the sunlight from the waves of the sea. There is no trace of you here. I cannot see your face in the heart of the rose, nor hear your voice in the murmuring of its leaves. The sunlight mocks me, for it will not drive away the shadow that rests upon me. Neither will it reveal the mystery of your death. Light and darkness are alike, for all is changed suddenly, — so suddenly that I am blinded and stupefied by the shock. Aimée dead, and Céleste worse than dead, if she believes me guilty of the crime imputed to me. What greater misfortunes can come upon me?"

He arose, and paced back and forth for some time, trying to compose and arrange his thoughts; but he could understand nothing clearly, only that his need to see Céleste was imperative. "I feel I must see her or die," he said to himself. "I must speak with her, and God grant that she may listen to me and believe me! I shall remain here until she comes; it does not matter how long, but here I remain until I have spoken with her." He threw himself again upon the rustic seat. Weakened by his emotions and anxiety, his head fell upon his breast, and he sank

into a sort of stupor, in which his life seemed to pass before him: first a panorama of placid scenes, with blue skies, pastoral valleys, and sunny slopes; then all changed, and to these gentle pictures succeeded lurid and wind-tossed clouds, swollen streams, and volcanic heights. Aimée seemed to pass before him with passion and anguish imprinted on every feature; and then again, haggard, and drenched with the sea, a wave cast her at his feet. Céleste, pallid and worn with sorrow, appeared to wring her hands and implore him to leave her; while Fabien and Père Benoit thundered in his ears, "These are your victims." His soul was in a tumult of agony, and his sick fancy distorted and exaggerated his misfortune until it seemed as though madness or death must soon end it.

Nothing wounds us like injustice from those we love. We feel that they should believe us incapable of wrong, even if the darkest suspicion rests upon us. We are slow to allow that they have shared our lives and thoughts, our closest companionship, in vain; that we have opened out to them the tablets of our heart, which has been but a blank if they have not understood the characters thereon better than those to whom we have closed them.

To Claude it was the most insupportable grief of all, that Céleste should believe him guilty. He thought of the words of the priest as the words of a madman, of the Archdeacon's suspicion only as the injustice of dislike and enmity; but Céleste, she who had given him her love, and promised to share his life, how could she condemn him unheard? The more he pondered over these terrible complications, the more certain he felt that there was some plot in progress to separate them, and that his guardian and Père Benoit were at the bottom of it. "If I could but circumvent them," he thought, "if I were but of age and free from the hateful control of the Archdeacon, I might find justice; but as it is I am entangled in a net from which I cannot free myself. O, why did my father leave me in the power of such a dangerous man!"

So absorbed was Claude in his painful thoughts, that he had forgotten where

he was and the object for which he was there, until a rustling of the leaves and a sweet plaintive voice aroused him.

"Fanchette, are not the roses falling early this year?"

Many of us can feel the simple pathos of the question, for there are years in most lives when the roses seem to fall early. But they smote the heart of Claude with a sudden pain, and the hot tears started to his eyes as he parted the vines and looked out on the path down which they came.

Céleste in purest white, and her lovely face and hands as white as her dress, leaned upon the strong arm of Fanchette, while her soft eyes rested sadly on the fallen rose-leaves that strewed the path.

"I thought his love would have outlasted the roses," she said as she gathered with her transparent hand a fair bud and looked at it sorrowfully; "but it died first, Fanchette, it died first."

"O my sweet Lily! cannot you feel that my love is not dead?" sighed Claude, wiping away the tears that rolled over his face, and striving to calm his emotion before he addressed her.

"Let us rest in the arbor for a few moments; I am so tired, dear Fanchette," said the plaintive voice again.

Claude's heart beat almost audibly as their shadows, lengthened by the setting sun, entered before them. His eyes fell on that of Céleste and followed it along the floor to the hem of her white robe, and up the graceful figure until they rested, full of love, on her sweet face.

When she saw him she stopped on the threshold as suddenly as one arrested by some vision of horror, her eyes dilated with fear, and her hands extended as though to ward off his approach.

"Céleste, dearest Céleste," he cried, springing toward her, "for the love of God, listen to me."

For only one instant he saw her white, terrified face, her outstretched hands; then she uttered a piercing cry of fear and anguish, and, turning, fled from him as though she were pursued by a fiend.

He did not attempt to follow her.

Falling back into a seat like one smitten with palsy, he gasped, "My God, my God! It is true, she too believes me guilty. Have pity on me, and save me from myself!"

## PART TWELFTH.

### JUSTICE MAKES A DEMAND.

It was night before Claude aroused himself from the heavy despair that fell upon him when he knew Céleste no longer loved him. The time that had intervened was a dull blank; his head ached, his heart throbbed to suffocation, and his eyes were weighted with unshed tears. Every place was alike to him now, still he felt he must make an effort to return to the château, at least he wished for the privacy of his own room, where he could shut out all but his sorrow. He arose, trembling like an old man, and tottered down the avenue in the direction of the gate that opened into the park of Clermont. The clock in the chapel tower struck the hour of nine. Was it possible so long a time had passed in a stupor that after all was scarcely suffering but rather unconsciousness from the wound he had received? He felt a dull conviction that when he returned to his normal condition the hours would leave more painful traces, and the moments would be marked with still deeper regrets. He turned his gaze upward; the serene face of the full moon seemed to look un pityingly upon him, her white light revealing to the thousand eyes of night his haggard countenance and unsteady gait. Nature reposed in peace, unmindful of the tempest that shook his soul; there was no sympathy for him either on earth or in the heavens. For the first time the short distance from the summer garden at Monthon to his own park seemed long; he was surprised that it had not seemed so before, when he had crossed it with the eager heart and impatient desire of happy love. Then his feet were winged with hope; now he staggered under the burden of a great grief, a burden that presses as heavily in youth as in age, because we have not learned to endure, and our hearts have

not become callous by the hard rubs of time. The pitiless strokes of misfortune had fallen with terrible force upon him, but he did not feel the sharpness of the lash because of the numbness produced by the blows. Mercifully God has made this provision; to save us from sudden madness he blunts our sensibilities and leaves us time to recover our strength before we feel the keenest edge of the spear. Even in the moments of his half-stupor this truth dawned upon the mind of Claude, and he repeated to himself, "I shall suffer more to-morrow than to-day, and all my future will be utterly desolate. What shall I do in the long years to come? Can life be endured without hope? Can one live when he has lost all? or are we like saplings that can be torn up, planted anew, and still flourish?" His undisciplined, immature nature did not look beyond at the noble possibilities the future still had for him. He was no philosopher, no stoic, only a warm-hearted boy, who had been until now as wax in the hands of a cunning moulder. But the rocks must be smitten before the waters can flow, the earth rent asunder before her treasures are found, the worthless tree bent, pruned, and grafted before it can bear good fruit. And, after all, the test of a kingly nature is its capability of wearing a crown of sorrow for its own perfecting.

There was an element in the character of Claude that none had discovered, because the circumstances to develop it had never occurred. But now the moment had come when the indolent, gentle soul must sink under its accumulated misfortune, or call into being the latent power within itself. Great needs sometimes produce almost superhuman strength, and in his case this was eminently true.

There was a narrow shaded avenue that led from the gate across the park and garden to the château. The Archdeacon always preferred this walk when he made his visits to Monthon, because it was shorter, more retired, and more free from observation than any other. Sometimes he walked there for hours alone, and it was there he frequently met Père Benoit for private consultations, especially when they did

not wish to be seen in each other's company. For very obvious reasons the priest could not continue his visits to the château, after his apparent disagreement with the Archdeacon in regard to Claude; so when they had anything important to communicate to each other, they met by appointment in this walk.

When Claude wearily opened the gate and his indifferent eyes scanned the avenue, its length of shade broken by flickering moonbeams that fell through the tangled branches, how great was his surprise to see, a few feet in advance of him, two persons in earnest but subdued conversation. As he approached nearer he recognized in one the Archdeacon, and at the same moment his low but firm voice fell distinctly on his ear: "Do not carry your revenge too far, he will demand justice; nothing can be proved, he will be acquitted, and your labor will be lost."

The reply of the other Claude did not hear distinctly, yet he was assured that the voice was that of Père Benoit, although he wore the slouched hat and coarse blouse of a peasant. Fabien, as if startled by Claude's footsteps, glanced around, and, seeing they were observed, said a few hasty words to his companion; then they separated and glided like dark shadows into opposite paths.

"I have discovered them plotting," thought Claude, almost indifferently. "And the priest disguised; what can it mean? But it does not matter; let them do their worst, everything is alike to me now."

He reached, without any further adventure, the silence of his room, and throwing himself on a sofa relapsed again into sad thought. A hurried tap on the door aroused him, and he said almost savagely, "Who comes here to disturb me?" Then he added in a more gentle tone, as the door opened, "O, it is you, Tristan; come in."

The hunchback stumbled across the floor, and, falling on his knees, took his master's hand and pressed it to his heart, to show him how heavily it throbbed, while he said in eager, excited tones, "I have run all the way from the town. Feel how my heart beats, and it

is for you, only for you, it throbs. It never stirred for another. It was dead and silent until you spoke to it. It loves you and it will save you. They all believe you guilty, all, even the Archdeacon. The people in the town, set on by Père Benoit, are thirsting for vengeance. They will come here to-night and tear you from your bed and murder you before my eyes. I have been in the town, I have appeared to join with them, and I have learned their plans. They have been to the Maire and demanded your arrest, and he has refused them, because, he says, there is no evidence that a murder has been committed, or even that the girl is dead. But that did not calm them. They believe she is drowned, and that you threw her over the precipice to be rid of her, that you might marry Mademoiselle Montheleon. And they are determined to have your life. They will be here to-night. They may come any moment, and then it will be impossible to save you. Fly now, while there is time, and take me with you, monsieur. You will need me, you cannot do without me." This he added with the simplicity of a child who believes itself necessary to those who love it, while he raised his eyes in earnest entreaty to his master's face.

Claude had started from his recumbent position when Tristan began to speak, but he showed neither anxiety nor fear as he laid his hand on the hunchback's head, and said calmly, "My poor boy, you alarm yourself needlessly. The people will not come here; they are excited and threaten what they will not dare to do; and even if they should I am prepared for them. Neither the fear of death nor the sting of injustice has power to make me forget for a moment a calamity that has fallen upon me heavier and more terrible than either. Indifference robs the most painful death of terror; and when we desire it we care not how it comes, so that it comes and conducts us to peace. My poor friend, do not weep," added Claude, after a moment's silence, broken only by the sobs of Tristan. "Your affection soothes a little my aching heart. I am thankful that one has remained faithful to me. I shall not fly like a coward. If torture and death

come, I am innocent, and I shall meet it with a serene heart. Stay by me, my boy, until the last, and I will show you that a Count of Clermont is not afraid to die."

Tristan clasped his master's hand, and laid his tear-wet face against it, and Claude bent his head until his cheek rested on the shoulder of his faithful servant. For a few moments they remained silent, then the hunchback started up, and a sudden terror came into his eyes as he cried, "They are coming. I hear them. I hear their shouts and cries. They are even now within the park. O my master, fly, for the love of God! fly, while there is time!"

"No," replied Claude firmly, but with blanched face, "I am innocent, and I shall remain here."

His room was in the right wing of the château, and as he spoke he threw open the door and hurried down a corridor that led to a gallery overlooking the main entrance.

It was true they had come, as Tristan had predicted. The broad avenue before the entrance of the court was filled with a turbulent, drunken mob of men, women, and children, shouting and screaming every opprobrious term of their vulgar vocabulary. "Where is the young ruffian, the coward, the seducer, the assassin? Where is he? Bring him out, or we will drag him out, the miserable poltroon!"

"Down with the nobility!" cried the shrill voice of an old woman. "Because he is a noble, he thinks to make a fortress of his château, and drive us off with his dogs of lackeys."

"He is no better than Pierre Garnet," shouted a hoarse voice. "We strung him up to a tree, and we will serve Monsieur le Comte the same. What could be better than one of his own trees for a gallows, and his own park for his place of execution?"

"Hang him over the precipice, head downward, on the spot where he pushed the poor girl off," piped out a wizened old wretch.

"Yes, yes, the cliff, the cliff, that is the place for him!"

"Bring him out, bring him out!" yelled a chorus of voices in every tone of the gamut.

At the approach of the mob every door and window had been closed and barred, and every light had suddenly disappeared. Along the whole length the façade of the château now presented the dark and forbidding front of a prison. When they saw this, and that there were no other means of effecting an entrance than by force, they rushed furiously forward, shouting, "Down with the doors! Down with the barricades!"

"We will tear the young whelp from his den. We will show the nobles that the people can take justice into their own hands."

"Out with him! Down with the doors! He is there, he entered not an hour ago."

"Ruffian! Assassin! Coward! He will not show his face. We must break down the doors and drag him out," cried the leader, suddenly turning round on the advancing mob, and showing a pair of haggard, bloodshot eyes under a slouched hat.

"*Allons, mes enfants.* Down with the doors."

"*Nom de Dieu!* where is your courage? Down with the doors, I tell you," shouted the leader again.

"Yes, down with the doors!" echoed the chorus of demons, as they rushed upon the massive *porte* with stones and clubs.

At that moment a young voice above them, clear and thrilling as a trumpet, shouted: "Here I am, my friends, spare the door. I will come down to you, and give myself into your hands. I am innocent, and I am not afraid."

The voice acted like magic. Every eye looked upward, and every hand with its weapon fell as though it were powerless. There was an appeal in the slight, youthful figure, the pale, beautiful face and heroic attitude, that might have touched the better nature of some among the furious mob, if their reason had not been entirely under the influence of strong drink, and that most unreasonable of all passions, revenge. As it was, only for a moment they looked upward, silent from surprise. Then their leader cried out, with a voice that aroused the worst desires in their hearts, "Cowards! You are afraid of a boy! Stand back, all of you, and I will enter

alone. I will avenge the poor girl he has so foully murdered. He is a noble, and you fear to touch him. Cowards! Slaves! Stand back, and may the daughters of every father among you meet with the same fate as the unfortunate he ruined."

When the speaker's white lips closed on the last word, there arose a yell from the crowd, and simultaneously a shower of stones, sticks, and dirt hid the white face on the balcony from the assailants.

Before the cloud of projectiles had fallen, a strong hand grasped Claude almost savagely, and threw him within the corridor, closing the door and keeping it closed with one firm hand, while he held the other extended as if in benediction over the crowd below. It was the Archdeacon; his face was calm, but his eyes gleamed like fire, and drops of sweat stood on his forehead. "My children! my children!" he cried in a voice of strong entreaty, "listen to me. Calm yourselves, and listen to me. Do not commit a crime that will stain your souls forever. What right have you to take vengeance into your own hands? The unhappy young man has never wronged you nor injured you individually, and that he has committed the crime you accuse him of is in no manner proven. If he is guilty, leave him to the laws of your country and the mercy of God. Go to your homes like peaceable citizens, and learn there that it is more noble to forgive than to avenge."

What good effect the words of Fabien might have had on the mob we cannot determine, for at the moment when all were debating interiorly whether this was an access of Christian generosity and tenderness on the part of the good Archdeacon, or a desire to shield his ward, whose innocence he did not assert, there was a great noise at the door against which they were pressing, a drawing of bolts, a falling of bars, and the ponderous *porte* was dashed back on its hinges by an impatient hand. There, on his own threshold, face to face with the haggard leader and his bloodthirsty followers, stood Claude de Clermont, calm and fearless, armed only with courage and innocence. It was an act that has found no record in the history of heroic

deeds, and yet the white-faced moon that hung over Clermont has seldom witnessed a more resolute and dauntless courage than his as he stood in the presence of a terrible death. Before him gleaming eyes, cruel faces, and eager hands, behind him the silent deserted court, above him the priest imploring them to pity and mercy. He raised his eyes to God in fervent supplication for himself, for Céleste. In that supreme moment his thoughts turned to her, and he wondered how she would listen to the story of his terrible fate.

When Claude thus suddenly and unexpectedly appeared before the turbulent mob, they stood silent and made no effort to reach him, now he was within their very reach. They had clamored for him, they had demanded him, and now he had given himself into their hands, yet they did not seize him. There was something in his face that repelled their brutality, and no one dared to be the first to touch him. The leader now seemed more backward than the others, for he withdrew some paces, and fixed his eyes on the face of Claude, while the crowd awaited the result of his inspection.

Suddenly a fiendish glare came into his eyes, and as a tiger springs upon his prey the man sprang at the throat of his victim.

In the brief moment of consciousness that followed, Claude recognized under the slouched hat the haggard face of Père Benoit. Then his sight grew dim, his breath came in gasps, and he fell heavily on the stone pavement of the court, with the priest's hands still clutching his throat, and his wild eyes glaring hate into his.

When the leader of the mob sprang at Claude, the Archdeacon saw that something of greater importance had occurred below than the speech he was delivering above, and divining that the rash young man had placed himself again in jeopardy, he rushed down the stairs toward the entrance of the court, followed by the terrified servants.

The bloodthirsty ruffians, eager to be in at the death, pressed forward into the small quadrangle, where the priest was struggling with his victim, unconscious of the sound of horse's feet clat-

## PART THIRTEENTH.

## CRUSHING A LILY.

tering up the avenue, caused by the opportune arrival of fifty mounted gendarmes, followed by the breathless Tristan, who had run, tumbled, and rolled all the way to the Caserne and back, arriving at the same time with the officers.

Never were famished and entrapped wolves captured more easily than the surprised mob, who were surrounded without a chance of escape or defence. In the consternation they forgot their victim, all excepting the murderer, who was intent on his work of vengeance, which he would have accomplished in a moment more, had not a well-directed blow, from one of the ruffian's clubs, in the hands of Tristan, felled him to the ground.

Then followed a strange scene. While the poor hunchback, almost exhausted from his efforts, raised and carried away the unconscious form of his master, the Archdeacon glided from behind a pillar, and, taking up the lifeless body of Père Benoit as though it had been a child, he carried it through a small side door into the chapel.

When the officers reached the prison with their prisoners, they found the leader was not among them, and every effort to discover him was useless.

An hour before the dawn of the next day a carriage rolled out of the north gate of Clermont and turned toward the sea. In it reclined the half-unconscious Claude, his head resting on the shoulder of Tristan, and his cold hands clasped to the faithful heart that would live henceforth only for the beloved life he had saved.

When the servant had wished to carry his master to his room, Fabien had objected, saying that Claude's future safety depended on his immediate flight. So, weak, powerless, and resistless, he was hurried away from his own inheritance, leaving a usurper in his place.

Long after, when the Archdeacon sat alone in his study at Clermont, its sombre gloom unlightened, its dreary silence unbroken, he thought of the fresh young voices that were gone forever, and drank with tears the bitter draught that so often follows the intoxicating cup of gratified desire and ambition.

"How is my daughter this morning?" The voice of the Archdeacon was modulated to the most exact tone of tender interest, as he took the slender feverish hand of his ward in his, and pressed a paternal kiss upon her white forehead. It was the morning after her mother's burial, and some months after Claude's sudden departure from Clermont. Céleste was dressed in deep mourning, and looked paler and more lily-like than ever. When Fabien entered she was lying on a sofa, a pillow under her head, and a tiger-skin over her feet, while Fanchette sat by her side knitting as usual, only stopping occasionally to wet her mistress's handkerchief with eau-de-cologne, or to give her a grape from a delicious bunch of Muscatels that lay on a silver dish near her. She made an effort to rise, but the Archdeacon waved her gently back to her recumbent position, while he took Fanchette's vacant seat.

"Did you rest better last night?" he continued in the same bland voice, "or were you troubled again with unpleasant dreams?"

"I tell Mademoiselle her bad dreams are caused by the fever that comes on every night," interrupted Fanchette, as she left the room.

"Without doubt," replied the Archdeacon, laying his finger on the poor girl's wrist. "There is but little fever now, your pulse is almost regular."

"It passed away with my wretched dreams, and when morning comes I am so weak and cold." While she spoke she raised her eyes, unnaturally large, with a wistful look into the inscrutable face of Fabien. "Have you heard anything from him yet?" she said tremblingly, after a little silence, while she picked with nervous fingers the crape of her black gown.

"Nothing, my daughter, since some time ago, when his effects were sent after him to Rennes."

"Oh!" she sighed disappointedly, "I hoped you would bring me some news this morning."

"Is it not another proof of his unworthiness that he has never written



to you since his flight, to endeavor to clear himself from the crime imputed to him? My child, you think too often of one who has wronged you deeply, and allow your affections to dwell on a sinner, instead of fixing them on Christ, who suffered that you might have peace."

"O my father!" moaned the poor girl, "I am so bewildered, so torn to pieces with conflicting thoughts. Sometimes I love him as I did at first, and believe him innocent. Again, I fear him and feel confident that he is guilty. His face haunts me persistently. In my sleep I see him as I saw him that day in the summer garden, pale and suffering, or again he is struggling with the mob, wounded, bleeding, dying. If I could but know he was alive and safe. I fear he is dead, or suffering alone, and my heart is breaking because I still love him." Here she burst into sobs and wept convulsively for some time, repeating over and over, "O, if I could but forget his imploring face!"

"My daughter, this grief is unworthy of you. Have you no pride, no energy, to shake off these morbid fancies, which are but an attack of nervousness brought on by too close attention to your dear mother? Think more of her and less of this unfortunate young man, who has plunged us all into sorrow."

"I cannot mourn for my mother," replied the girl, the tears drying on her feverish cheek. "She has suffered so much and so long that death must have been most welcome to her. No, I cannot weep for her; she is happy with God; would that I were with her! I am so tired of life. *O mon père!* I am so tired." And she looked appealingly at the Archdeacon, as though she thought he might direct her into some easier and more pleasant path than the one she had struggled through during the last few months of sorrow.

Poor Céleste! there was nothing from which she could gather one ray of hope or consolation. Since the day when she had seen Claude and Aimée with hands clasped bending over the same book life had changed to her, all had become distorted and unnatural; one scene of deception and sorrow had followed another, until she scarcely knew what

to believe or what to doubt. For in her trouble what was more reasonable than that she should listen to and confide in her guardian, her confessor, the holy man she had revered and worshipped as only a little less than a saint, who always met her with such gentle sympathy and encouragement? In the beginning he had insinuated his falsehoods with such subtle craftiness that he had blinded and bewildered the poor child until she was incapable of judging for herself, even if all had been truthfully represented by another.

In recounting to her the last scene, when Claude was attacked by the mob, the Archdeacon had carefully omitted telling her of her lover's heroic conduct. It would have been a consolation for her to have known that he met his assailants bravely, and it would have shaken her not very firm belief in his guilt. But Fabien had represented him as a cowardly criminal, seeking safety in flight, and even his unfortunate silence was construed by the plotter into another proof of his culpability.

When Céleste so pathetically expressed her weariness of life, the only emotion it awoke in the mind of the Archdeacon was one of satisfaction. She had now reached the point in her life's journey to which he had directed her with the deepest interest and the most unceasing care. The Church opened her sheltering arms to receive the weary child who physically and morally was ready to fall into them. It was not the fair feeble girl it coveted, but her wealth, that with her frail life was sure to flow into its golden river.

The appealing look Céleste directed to her spiritual father furnished a question which he was most anxious to answer. It was as though she had asked, "Where shall I flee to find peace?" And gently bending over her he fixed his magnetic eyes upon her, and said, softly, "The Church, my daughter, the holy Church offers you a refuge from the sorrows of life. Turn to her; seek repose within her walls. Her doors are open to receive you; and believe me, my child, the only true peace is found with those who enter and shut out the world forever."

"Is it true, *mon père*, that I should

find calm and forgetfulness in a convent?" inquired Céleste, with apathy. "If I thought so, although I have never felt such an existence to be my vocation, yet, so weary am I of the world, that I should like to try to find peace there."

"Can you doubt the futility of earthly happiness? You have had all, wealth, youth, and love, and they have only brought you sorrow."

"It is true," she said, musingly, — "it is true; my youth and wealth could not keep his love, and there is nothing else in life I value. Why should I not hide my ruined, crushed heart from the world forever?" A slight shiver passed over her as she said "forever." "And then," she added, with childlike simplicity, "I always thought a convent such a cold, hungry place. But may I have Fanchette with me, and a fire in winter? And I should not like to be obliged to do many penances."

The Archdeacon assured her that every request should be granted that did not interfere with the rules of the order; while he, with gentle sophistry, led her to fix her wavering heart on the Convent of Notre Dame as a place of refuge for her weary body and mind only a little less desirable than paradise. And before he left her he clearly extorted a promise from her, that, as soon as her health was sufficiently established to enable her to make the change, she would commence her novitiate.

When Fanchette entered, after the Archdeacon left, Céleste threw herself on the faithful bosom of her only friend, saying between her convulsive sobs, "O Fanchette, I have promised, I have promised, but already I am sorry. I know my heart will break sooner here, where I can weep unrestrained; there it will be a long, slow life, that will feed on suppressed emotion and stifled passion."

"What have you promised? Where are you going, *chérie*?" cried Fanchette, looking at her with amazement.

"To the Convent of Notre Dame. I have promised Père Fabien to commence my novitiate as soon as I am a little better."

"To a convent!" gasped Fanchette.

"O, my poor, deluded child, you will regret it until your death."

"Yes, Fanchette, I think I shall; but one regret more or less does not matter now. Perhaps our Blessed Mother will have pity on me, and grant me peace."

"Poor Lily, poor crushed Lily!" sobbed Fanchette, stroking the soft hair with one hand, while she wiped away the tears with the other.

In the audience-room, at the Convent of Notre Dame de Rouen, sat Fabien, conversing earnestly with the lady superior, a cunning, sharp-eyed Frenchwoman of more than sixty. There was a sleek affability in her manner, an amiable hypocrisy, if one may use the term, a sort of wheedling grace and suavity, that would have made her a finished coquette if she had not been an abbess. At her advanced age she still retained enough of power to make her a match for Fabien, if one could judge from his expression; for it plainly denoted that, having argued some point long and well, he had not gained much vantage-ground, although the lady abbess appeared to agree with every opinion he advanced.

"She has been accustomed to almost entire freedom of action from childhood; she is delicate and sensitive, and requires the most tender care. I feel the necessity of urging this matter. She has never been separated from Fanchette since her birth, and I fear she will not submit to it without rebelling." The Archdeacon said this with an emphasis that was not to be misunderstood.

"I regret," said the abbess, with a most persuasive smile and an upward inclination of her eyes, — "I regret to refuse Monseigneur any request, but the rules of our order will not permit the woman to enter on any other conditions than that of a novice."

"I fear, then, that this will disarrange all our plans. When you have studied her as I have, you will understand that only the most judicious treatment will bring about the result we wish for at the end of her novitiate. Take care that by severity you do not disgust her with a life she enters upon reluctantly."

"I understand perfectly, monseigneur," said the abbess, blandly, — "I understand perfectly. Mademoiselle Monthelon must be humored; indulged with little titbits; favored with an occasional relaxation in our discipline. Leave it to me; I have had great experience in such matters."

The Archdeacon bowed deferentially as he said, "I defer, then, to your superior wisdom."

"But about the settlement, the gift as you please to call it. Is she prepared to sign the papers to-day, monseigneur?"

"Quite prepared," replied the Archdeacon briskly; "she is indifferent about all worldly interests, and she leaves it entirely to me to name the sum."

"Be generous, then, monseigneur, — be generous, then," said the abbess with a seductive smile. "Our holy Church needs much for the good work."

The Archdeacon arose, and unfolding some papers that lay on a table near he looked them over a few moments silently. Then he touched a small silver bell and summoned a nun from an adjoining room.

"Conduct Mademoiselle Monthelon into our presence," said the abbess briefly.

A moment after, the door opened and Céleste entered between two nuns, who walked with eyes cast down, and their clasped hands concealed within the folds of their great sleeves.

Set off by these grim, gaunt figures the graceful girl looked still a lily, but a lily drenched with tears and crushed by pitiless hands. Her eyes were red with weeping, her long fair hair disordered, and her childish mouth quivering with suppressed sobs. She had wept herself into apathetic despair, after her forced separation from Fanchette, who, she learned at the very last moment, could not remain with her.

When she entered the presence of Fabien, she felt like reproaching him with his broken faith; but he came forward to meet her with so much kindness and such gentle interest that she forgave him and felt reassured.

"My daughter, are you ready to sign the deed of your gift to our holy Church?"

"Yes, my father," she replied in a low voice, without raising her eyes to the face of the abbess, whom she already instinctively disliked.

"Our Holy Mother will bless you, my child, for returning to her Church the treasures she has lent you. Give your heart to her as freely as you give of your wealth, and you will find exceeding peace on earth, and a crown of joy in heaven. Youth, beauty, and wealth are a sacrifice truly acceptable to our holy Church, but of how much more value is the weary bleeding heart you lay at the feet of our compassionate Mother. My child, your early renunciation of the follies of the world show that you have been chosen by our Lord as his bride. What inexpressible honor and happiness to be thus distinguished by his Divine favor."

Céleste stood during the short address of the abbess, with bent head and folded hands. Whether she heard and understood it was impossible to decide, for her face gave no sign of emotion even when the speaker clasped her clawlike hands in ecstasy, and turned up her eyes until only the whites were visible.

Fabien tapped the table with his pen, and seemed impatient to have the signature of Céleste rather than the remarks of the abbess.

"Do you wish to read the deed of gift, my daughter?" he inquired after the abbess and the two nuns had repeated a *Deo gratias*, and crossed themselves devoutly.

"No, my father, I have no wish to read it. The contents of the paper have no interest for me." She took the pen from the fingers of the Archdeacon, and with one sweep of her thin white hand signed away to the Convent of Notre Dame de Rouen a large portion of the wealth her father had toiled for years to accumulate. Then she turned silently, and making a reverence to the abbess and to the Archdeacon she left the room as she had entered, walking between the two nuns. At the door they were met by a tall, noble-looking girl, with blue eyes, brown hair, and the fresh complexion that denotes English blood, who laid her strong white hand on the shoulder of Céleste, and said in a

clear, frank voice, "I am Elizabeth Court-nay, and I am to occupy the same dormitory with you. The abbess wishes us to be friends. Shall it be so?"

The sorrow-stricken girl raised her sad eyes to the face that beamed with goodness, and reading there truth and

sympathy she silently put her hand in Elizabeth's extended palm, and the two went away into the shadow of the dimly lighted corridor together.

Thus quietly and sadly the two were united, to work out with each other the complex problem of life.

## BOOK THIRD.

### SARZEAU.

#### PART FIRST.

##### "THE SETTING OF A GREAT HOPE."

"The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun."

I do not know whether Claude de Clermont had ever read these beautiful words of our great poet in the introductory chapter of Hyperion, but certainly it was the same thought that filled his heart as he watched the sun drop into the sea. He was leaning upon a broken rock on the rugged shore of Morbihan, his feet braced against a pile of driftwood, and his hands hidden in the deep pockets of his rough coat. On the beach by his side lay his hat, with a gun and game-basket, guarded by a great shaggy dog, of a breed peculiar to Brittany. There was something in the scene and in the appearance of Claude that suggested loneliness and isolation. His neglected-looking hair was longer and less curling than that of the boy who brushed his glossy locks to please the Lily of Monthelon. A luxuriant dark beard covered the lower part of his face, and a heavy mustache with a melancholy droop shaded his mouth. His forehead was almost as white as when Aimée had compared it to a rose-leaf; but a few faint lines between the brows made it less smooth. His eyes were sunken, and seemed darker from the heavy shadows beneath them; and his straight nose had a little of the pinched look that all noses have whose owners have suffered, while the lines from the nostrils to the mouth

were a little deeper than they should have been in one so young. Outwardly, these were all the changes that five years had wrought in Claude de Clermont. Yet ten or even twenty years have passed over some and left fewer traces. There was strength and determination in his attitude, and calm resignation in his face. Even though his hopes had set as suddenly as the golden god had sunk into the sea, extinguishing light and joy in the glowing morning of life, yet his darkness was not despair, for out of it had dimly gleamed many stars of consolation. Is it not true that sometimes, alone and silent in the twilight that succeeds the setting of our sun, angels steal from the shadows and minister to us until, in the light of heaven, we forget the earth is dark?

The rugged, solitary shore, the rising wind, the darkening sea, reflecting the sad violet tints of the clouds that were gliding into distance like the funeral train of a buried king, and the mournful rhythm of the waves as they broke in ceaseless succession over the driftwood and tangled sea-weed that strewed the beach, were all in harmony with the spirit of Claude, who long ago had parted company with the joyous, irresponsible, almost effeminate nature that had seemed the inheritance of the boy at Clermont. Dishonored, and deserted by all save Tristan, his proud, sensitive heart sought no companionship with his equals in rank. Living a stern, solitary life, apart from the refinements and luxuries of the fashionable world,

he found in the ever-varying moods of nature a subject that never wearied or grew distasteful to him. Alone with God and his own soul, he studied the great teacher and consoler, and felt how insignificant and unstable are the joys of life, compared with the pleasure derived from contemplating the immovable hills, the firm mountains, the immensity of the overhanging heavens, the regular succession of the sun, moon, and stars, the infinity of space, and the profound depths of the ocean, with its fretting, heaving surface always subdued and restrained by the unchangeable laws of the great Controller. And these all taught him that the Divine Architect who perfected this grand and noble plan did not intend that man, his most excellent creation, should fritter away life in frivolity and vanity; that the sublimity of nature was not spread before him simply to gratify a taste, or minister to a passion, but to lead his soul onward and upward to the infinite and eternal perfection of the hereafter. He had learned early that happiness is not to be found in the outward surroundings nor in the petty pleasures of life, but within ourselves, developed and strengthened by a love of God and his glorious works.

There are some natures that strive to lull the pain of disappointment and regret with an opiate distilled from the dregs of sensual pleasure; to stifle its complainings with the clashing and jangling strife of their fellow-sufferers, madder and more restless than themselves. Alas for these poor souls! their stupor ends in a terrible nightmare, from which they awaken smitten and blasted. There are others who, because of some noble germ of strength and faith within themselves, rise superior to the strokes of misfortune. Looking Fate unflinchingly in the face, and meeting sorrow with heroic resignation, they lay hold of the firm rock, lifting their eyes upward to the summit whereon stands the Smiter. The foundation may shake under them, they may become weary of clinging, the sands may slip from beneath their feet, but still they hold fast to God.

If one had asked Claude to define his faith, to explain whence came the

calm and strength with which he met his misfortunes, perhaps he would not have said that they came from the Father of all good; for the young man, although educated by a guardian of souls, had received but very little religious instruction, and that had not been of a kind to awaken feelings of simple faith and trust in God. Therefore it is likely he would have replied, "I derive my peace and consolation from nature." Still, like many of us, unconsciously he worshipped God through his blessed creation. His thoughts, as he watched the light fade from the west beyond the lonely shore of Morbihan, expressed in words, were these: "The Sun dies in the sea, and Night drops her pall over his grave; the dews fall like tears; the wind sighs and moans; the Ocean heaves and frets, her bosom convulsed with sobs; the sea-birds wail out their grief, then fold their wings and droop into silence. All nature sorrows, but it is a calm, subdued sorrow; there is no rebellion, no opposing, no complaining. It is God's decree that his sun should set each day, and therefore all creation submits to be hidden in darkness. It is also God's decree that our suns should set, yet we are not patient; we murmur and moan, and weep hot, angry tears; we strike in impotent wrath against a wall of adamant, and cry out in our anguish that the darkness of our prison is too intense; we are maddened, crushed, wounded, and almost dead from our useless resistance; and yet we will not accept the lesson of submission taught us by nature. The brutes are wiser than we; they lie down and rest quietly until the night is passed; they know the day will dawn again, and do not we also? and yet we will not wait. It is five years, five long years, since my sun set, and still there is no promise of dawn." He raised his eyes upward to the arch of God over which were sown the diamonds of the night, and a gentle smile softened a little the stern sadness of his face as he said, "Why, already there are stars; even while we wait for morning, light beams upon us from heaven." Then, stooping, he took his hat from under the dog's paw, saying, "Come Ixus, poor Tristan will be tired of waiting for us."

The dog started up as though relieved from duty, and looking wistfully in his master's face he said, as plainly as a dog could say, "I am ready to go."

"Poor fellow," said Claude, patting him affectionately, "you are tired, and hungry, we have been away since early morning."

Ixus wagged his tail approvingly, and taking the almost empty game-basket in his mouth, he started off at a brisk trot, looking back now and then encouragingly at his master, who did not seem to share his impatience.

While Claude walks thoughtfully over the dreary road that leads from Morbihan to Sarzeau, we will give a brief sketch of the five years that have passed since the dreadful night when he left Clermont with only the poor hunchback for his companion. For several weeks after, he had lain ill, almost unto death, in a little uncomfortable inn at Rennes, where he had been cared for, day and night, by the faithful Tristan, who watched over him with the unwearied devotion of a mother. He had moaned and tossed with fever, and raved and struggled with delirium; acting over and over the dreadful scene with the mob; pleading with Céleste; deploring the unhappy fate of Aimée; expostulating with the Archdeacon, urging in the most earnest manner his innocence, while he heaped bitter words of indignation and contempt on his enemy, Père Benoit. The tender heart of the poor hunchback felt all his master's pain and distress; with the gentleness of a woman he pillowed Claude's head upon his breast, soothing him into calm, or held him with superhuman strength, when, raving with delirium, he would have injured himself in his imaginary conflicts with Père Benoit, receiving without complaint the blows dealt by the unconscious young man with a force that only insanity gives.

When the sufferer's strength was exhausted, and he was worn out by his violent emotions, Tristan would lull him into calm as a mother does a child, saying pityingly, while his tears fell on the wan face, "Poor child, poor child, why cannot thy miserable servant suffer instead of thee? Thy poor Tristan would

willingly give his worthless life to save thee from pain."

At length the feverish tide ebbed and flowed more slowly, and the exhausted spirit ceased to wrestle with its imaginary foes. Then followed long, weary days of convalescence, when Claude lay like an infant, too weak to be conscious of what had preceded the languor and indifference he now felt. Beyond his window he saw distant hills and a thread of the blue Vilaine winding among peaceful meadows, white floating clouds, and birds circling on idle wings, on which he gazed dreamily for hours. Sometimes he spoke to Tristan, calling him Céleste, or Aimée, believing himself to be at Clermont, lying under the pines, listening with drowsy ear to their mysterious murmurs, or gathering rose-buds for the girls in the summer garden at Monthelon. One morning he knew that health and strength were returning, because a clear recollection of his trouble came upon him, and his heart was full of the old pain.

"Bring me some paper and a pen, Tristan," he cried; "I must write to the Archdeacon."

The hunchback supported him while he laboriously wrote a few lines, which would have touched a heart alive to any feeling of pity, so mournfully appealing were they, so eloquent with physical weakness and mental suffering. He implored Fabien with earnest entreaty to send him some news of Céleste; to make some efforts to establish the innocence which he trusted his father's friend, his own patient teacher, his confessor and guardian from childhood, was now convinced of. He told him briefly of his illness, and his near approach to death, and how, for the sake of his honor and his love for Céleste, he would struggle back to life, and ended by entreating his assistance and blessing. After weeks of impatient waiting and restless expectation, an answer reached him, written in the coldest, tersest language. The Archdeacon passed over in silence his earnest inquiries in regard to Céleste's welfare, and ignored all claims upon his confidence and affection, but advised him not to return to Clermont, as the belief in his guilt was as strong as ever,

and that he was still in danger of personal violence; that until the body of Aimée was discovered there was no proof of her death on which to found a judicial examination, and that he must consider all relation with Mademoiselle Monthelon permanently ended. It was her unalterable decision as well as her wish that M. le Comte de Clermont should not disturb her peace of mind by writing to her, as she was fully convinced of his guilt, and therefore looked upon him with horror. Tears of anguish dimmed the eyes of Claude, so that he could scarcely read the formal announcement at the end, that his personal effects would follow the letter, and that all orders would be received, and all remittances sent, through his banker, M. Lefond, No. 3 Rue des Bons Enfants, Rouen.

"And so," he said bitterly as he folded the letter,—"and so Monseigneur cuts me off coldly and decisively from any further communication with him. This is the man to whom my dying father left me as a sacred trust; this plotting hypocrite, this double-faced usurper of the rights of guardianship, not only of the bodies but of the souls of men. He and Père Benoit have intrigued against me, for what end only God knows; they are both my enemies, and are leagued together to ruin me. And the melancholy fate of poor Aimée has put a chance into their hands to use against me. What does it all mean? I have never injured them, and yet they display a hate that seems like revenge for some terrible wrong. They have succeeded in blighting my life; they have separated me from Céleste; they have stained me with an odious crime; they have instigated a vile mob to drive me from my inheritance; and all is now left to the entire control of this man, who is my legal guardian. For two years more I must endure it, for two years more he will hold my rights, my fate, my property, all in his dishonest hands; and I have no redress, for it was my father who fettered me with such heavy chains. Ah, why had he not discernment enough to understand the character of the man to whom he intrusted the welfare of his child!"

Long and sadly Claude thought of the dreadful complications that surrounded him, and out of which he saw no issue. There was no one to whom he could apply for aid. The legal adviser and the old and tried friend of his father had died a few years before; and he well knew that there was not one administrator of justice in all Rouen who did not believe in the Archdeacon, so entirely had he won the confidence and esteem of the community.

"And so, Tristan," he said at last, "we are not to return to Clermont. Monseigneur has given me permission to remain away as long as I please. But you, Tristan, my dear boy, you must go to Monthelon for me; for until I am stronger I can do nothing, and I must get a letter to Mademoiselle Céleste, and there is no one else I can trust to carry it but you, and you must promise me to give it into her own hands. Do not try to get admitted into the château, but watch for her in the grounds, and if you see her for a moment alone give it to her, unobserved, if possible. Can I trust you, Tristan?"

"Yes, monsieur, you can trust me. If it is possible for me to see Mademoiselle Monthelon she will get the letter. But if I cannot see her?"

"Bring it back to me. It is no use to give it to any other person, for in that case I am convinced that she will never see it."

We are sorry to say that Tristan failed in his mission. After hanging about Monthelon for more than a week, he learned that Mademoiselle never left the house; her mother's increasing illness and her own feeble health kept her a prisoner. Still Tristan lingered, hoping he might be favored in some unexpected way, and unwilling to return to his master unsuccessful. One day when he sat under the south wall in the summer garden sunning himself, and indulging in the pleasant belief that the bright warm day would tempt the invalid out, Jacques suddenly appeared, leading the great watch-dog that was usually chained at the lodge. Touching his hat to Tristan with ironical politeness, and pointing to his dumb companion, he said impressively, "*Mon ami*, you have no wish to make the acquaintance of

Grenet's teeth, have you? They are strong and sharp, and they gnaw horribly. *Comprenez-vous?*"

Poor Tristan did not understand at first, but in a moment the truth flashed upon him; as he had no desire to be horribly gnawed, he cast a pitifully reproachful look at Jacques and hobbled away toward the gate as quickly as possible. The hunchback was no Don Quixote, and so he did not court adventure. He had a deformed, feeble body, but a large, tender, faithful heart, that would have served his master even to death, if his death could have made him happy, and withal some sound sense and caution that told him in such an encounter he would be worsted, and to no good; so he considered a hasty retreat the better part of valor.

On his way back to Rennes he trembled and wept like a child. He trembled to think of Grenet's sharp teeth and ferocious looks, for he was so sensitive that he fancied he felt his flesh quiver in the jaws of the horrid brute. And he wept to think of his dear master's disappointment, and his own failure in his first commission of importance. Then he thought of the cruelty of Jacques, and wondered why God gave such wicked men power, and such savage brutes sharp teeth to gnaw the innocent.

Claude was terribly disappointed and indignant at Tristan's unkind reception, but still not quite disheartened. After a little time, he wrote to Fanchette, and enclosed a letter for Céleste, imploring the woman to deliver it to her mistress. Not long after, it was returned, with a few lines from Fanchette, saying she dared not comply with his request, as she had received orders from the Archdeacon not to deliver any letters until he had seen them. The short note was concluded in such terms as to leave a little hope that the woman would not be invulnerable to a bribe. So he wrote again, promising her a large sum of money if she would deliver the letter. But this tempting offer came too late, for it came the day after Céleste had entered the Convent of Notre Dame. Fanchette, her heart torn by the cruel parting from her beloved mistress, wrote a long epistle in

reply; pouring out the vials of her wrath upon the scheming heads of the Archdeacon and Père Benoit, whom she styled ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. At last her eyes were open, but it was too late to save her beloved lady from her living death.

This was a terrible blow to Claude, entire ruin to his hopes; from that moment he felt that he had no aim in life, no desire to acquit himself before the world. Céleste was in reality the world he desired to convince; she was lost to him, and with her all humanity. Resignation and calm did not come to him at once. There were times when his strength failed him, and he wept, and moaned, and refused food, and fretted through the long nights, until Tristan thought he would die. Then there were pitiful heart-breaking scenes between the two, when the servant implored the master to live for him, and tried in his simple, innocent way to show him that life still had duties, if not joys. Claude would weep on his neck, and promise him to stand upright under the burden when he had gained a little strength with time. "Now," he would say, "I am weak, and it crushes me down; by and by, Tristan, I shall be a little stronger, and then I will show you that I can bear my misfortunes like a man." Gradually time blunted the keen edge of the spear that pierced his heart; then his wounds ceased to bleed, and the tears he shed cooled the fever of his brain. He grew calm and silent; and with this calm came an indifference, a lack of interest, a lassitude of the soul, which it was more difficult to shake off than it had been to subdue his complaining sorrow. He wandered about, careless and aimless; living in the most simple fashion, with no other companion than Tristan.

Nature effects her mental cures much in the same way as she does her physical; passing through the various gradations, from the crisis to full health. The mind has its period of convalescence the same as does the body; it may be longer and more tedious, but it ends in perfect restoration, after much patient endurance. It was a slow process with Claude; for after the apathetic calm came the restless desire



to accomplish almost impossibilities. For more than two years he lived in the chalets of the shepherds among the Pyrenees; exploring the departments of the Haute Garonne, Ariège, and Aude. He scaled the dangerous heights of Mont Perdu, and the hoary Maladetta. He wandered among the goat-herds on the dreary steepes of Las Serradas. He looked from Roland's Breach at the towers of Marboré; and listened to the roar of the waterfalls, and the crash of the avalanches among the peaks of the Vignemale. He felt a savage sort of enjoyment in standing far above the world, — humanity at his feet, the creatures who had so wronged him far beneath him, and God's heaven alone above him. There, suspended, as it were, between earth and sky, he held the closest communion with his own soul; the deepest, holiest feelings of his nature expanded like leaves bathed with the dews of heaven. The tangled threads of life seemed to unravel, and clear themselves from all confusion. And for the first time he understood the lofty intentions of his Creator. "Life was not given us only for self-gratification," he would say; "each one should try to aid those who need aid, and raise up those who have fallen. What a noble ambition to strive to elevate humanity to sublimer heights, to loftier moral summits. He who lives entirely for himself, lives in vain."

Then he was conscious that the first step up the weary mountain of abnegation must be over the grave of buried hate, revenge, passion, and regret. "I must conquer myself; I must feel only pity and tenderness for everything that breathes. I must give up the dainty refinements and delicacies of an epicurean life. I must not repose on the lap of luxury, while those I would help lie on bare stones. I must descend to them, or I cannot lift them up." He felt no compassion for those who sat in high places, and flourished in the sun of prosperity. His heart yearned only toward the humble creatures who wring out a scanty subsistence from labor and pain; those whom wrong and oppression lead in chains through the narrow brutalizing paths of vice; those whom no one offers to conduct in a broader,

higher way up to the light that dispels the shadows from the darkened soul. He knew that the greater part of his country, oppressed with the double despotism of Church and State, groaned under a bondage to which it submitted because it was powerless through ignorance and superstition. "Why may I not be the torch to illuminate their path, and lead them to knowledge and freedom?" was a question he often put to his own soul. And the ever-ready answer was, "Forget thyself. Remember only that thou art but an atom in God's creation, to be mingled with the great whole for its strength and perfection."

After these serious communings with himself on the mountain-top, Claude would descend to Tristan in the valley, his face so serene and beautiful that the hunchback often thought his master, having been so near to Heaven, had conversed with God.

During the five years of wandering amid the most rugged and sombre haunts of nature, Claude had accomplished little save self-conquest. He had subdued his restless, passionate heart, he had strengthened his weak, case-loving character, and he had discovered new resources within himself, and now, like a good general, who knows he has some reserves, he was prepared to begin the battle. For a few months he had been living in Sarzeau, a miserable little town on the peninsula of Rhuys, where he owned a barren estate with an old, dilapidated château that had long been considered uninhabitable. He had fixed his residence there because the wild and rugged scenery of Morbihan and the peninsulas of Quiberon and Rhuys was congenial to him. He liked the strength of the grim rocks, and the freedom of the wide sea. There was nothing in this stern, ascetic life to nurse self-indulgence and idleness; on the contrary, there was much to encourage constant occupation and profound study. The marvellous monuments of a race long since departed, the stones of Carnac and of the islands of the Morbihan, furnished him with a never-failing source of interest. He tried to discover, by close and careful investigation, whether they were memorials of

military power or of religious rites. To him the determination was in a measure significant of the strength of his country. Then the inhabitants of these rude islands and sterile shores, although miserably poor and utterly ignorant, were so honest, kind-hearted, and intelligent, that he felt it to be the very place in which to commence his experimental trial of doing something for others. "These simple, hardy souls," he reasoned, "are the men who, educated and elevated, will make the future strength of the country. The pleasure-loving, effeminate Parisian is like the froth that rises to the surface of a full glass; and these strong drudges are the stamina that support it."

There was scarce a rude peasant or a sun-browned fisherman in all the department of Morbihan who did not bless the Virgin every day for sending them the kind-hearted young Count and his gentle servant. Claude, desiring to make Tristan happy, allowed him to dispense the alms he so freely provided, and the poor people looked upon him, in spite of his unprepossessing person, as an angel of charity.

Claude's majority had come and passed without any communication from the Archdeacon, unless a long letter from his man of affairs could be considered such. This letter announced in the stiffest and most formal terms that M. le Comte de Clermont having reached his majority, the guardianship of the Archdeacon terminated according to the will of his father, the late Count of Clermont. That his lordship had delivered into his hands all the books, deeds, and documents relating to the estate of Clermont. That his lordship had withdrawn his residence from Clermont and left the château in the charge of a reliable steward. That on account of the failure of sundry investments, that at the time when they were made were deemed judicious by the Archdeacon, the revenues of the estate were considerably diminished; and that his lordship had thought it advisable to dispose of some outlying lands in order to cancel mortgages on the whole; that the château and the estate around it were intact, and that all the affairs had been arranged in the most advantageous

manner; but if M. le Comte wished for a more detailed statement of investments and securities, he would be happy to be honored with his commands, etc., etc.

In spite of the general character of this letter, Claude understood that by some process his inheritance had greatly diminished, instead of increasing, under the control of the Archdeacon, and that he was not nearly as rich as he had supposed. What had become of the large estate his father had left him? However, at that time he was so engrossed in matters of moral importance that he cared very little about entering into details of a financial character; and as his income was amply sufficient for his simple wants and charitable expenditures, he deferred an investigation that might have revealed some transactions not strictly honest on the part of his guardian.

He had heard nothing from Céleste since the letter of Fanchette, that informed him of her sacrifice. He had come to think of her as we think of one long dead, and to mourn for her as we mourn for those whom we believe to be saints in Heaven; neither had he continued his correspondence with Fanchette, for his letter in reply to her passionate outburst against the Archdeacon and his accomplice, Père Benoit, was never answered; and so all intercourse had ceased between him and those who had filled such an important place in his life at Clermont. Sarzeau and his stern, cold existence seemed a boundary line between the poetry and romance of his past and the austere reality of his future.

## PART SECOND.

### CHATEAU OF SARZEAU.

WHEN Claude reached the dilapidated gate of the ruinous pile that the simple peasantry dignified with the name of château, it had long been dark, and Ixus showed such unmistakable signs of weariness, that his master, who relieved him of the weight of the game-basket, really pitied him. A somewhat

imperative pull at the iron chain brought a wizened old man with a little brass lamp in his hand, which shed a feeble light over his white beard, red cap, and blue shirt. As he opened the gate, after fumbling a long time over the useless lock, Ixus rushed in between his bent and trembling legs, almost upsetting him by his impetuosity, and quite interrupting the unintelligible string of questions he was addressing to Claude in a feeble, querulous voice.

"Never mind, my good Janot, Ixus is a rude brute to enter so unceremoniously," replied Claude, kindly interrupting the old man, who always grumbled when he was disturbed to open the gate. "I know I am late, very late, but I won't complain if the *potage* is ruined. Give me the lamp and I will lead the way."

"But Nanette," he muttered as he hobbled after his master, "poor Nanette; she never sleeps well if her *potage* is ruined."

They crossed the court; in the centre of the broken pavement was a mutilated fountain. The chubby Cupids, from whose united lips the pure water had once issued, had long before lost their legs and arms, and now the thin stream that trickled down their battered cheeks seemed like tears they were shedding over their unhappy fate. On the tail of the dolphin that supported the maimed loves hung a great copper kettle which caught the scanty shower until it filled and ran over in a gentle spray upon the heads of celery and lettuce that floated in the moss-covered basin. The corners of the quadrangle were filled with all sorts of rubbish, — broken gardening implements, old barrels and baskets, piles of brush-wood, furze, and dried sea-weed, — among which, on sunny days, a stately cock with a brood of submissive hens deigned to scratch, much to the disgust of a fat black pig who usually took his siesta there. Along one side of the court was an open corridor that led into a large deserted room that had once been the reception-hall of some of the nobles of Sarzeau. There were the broken and much-abused remains of several fine pieces of statuary; some old armor was

fastened on the walls, and a piece of faded tapestry hung in rags between the stone mullioned windows. A great feeding-trough, filled with grain, lay before the antique fireplace, which was stuffed with every kind of trash, and several heavy oak benches, with elaborately carved backs, were loaded with bags of hemp, sacks of vegetables, and old clothes, piled indiscriminately together. From the far end, through a door, gleamed a ray of light, and the savory smell of *potage* greeted them as they crossed the dreary hall.

"Poor Nanette!" muttered the old man again, as they entered what had once been the library, but was now the kitchen. A brisk-looking little woman, who did not seem nearly as old as her husband, stood before a clean pine table making a salad. She was dressed in the blue skirt, laced bodice, high cap, and wooden shoes of the peasants of Brittany.

"Well, my dear monsieur, I am glad you are come," she said with a cheery bright smile that lightened up the dingy room more than the feeble flame of her lamp; "I am afraid my chicken is dried to a crust, and my *oseille* boiled to gruel; and if you are as hungry as Ixus, I have not enough decently cooked for you to eat." The poor brute stood with his wet mouth on the edge of the table, looking into Nanette's face wistfully, while he wagged his tail in a way that expressed the keenest appetite.

Claude patted the dog on the head, and said, good-humoredly, "Poor Ixus has not enough deception to disguise what he feels, and I have, Nanette, — that is all the difference. Serve up your dinner as soon as you please, and we shall eat it whether it is good or bad, for with walking and with fasting we have had a hard day."

"And yet your game-basket is nearly empty, monsieur," said old Janot, contemptuously, as he threw a few small birds on the table. "Monsieur le Comte, your father did not come back from hunting without game. He was the best shot I ever saw, though he was not much of a walker."

"I am a great dreamer, Janot, which is the reason I don't kill more birds," replied Claude, apologetically. "I some-

times forget to fire even when game comes in my way."

"No, no, monseigneur, it is not because you are a dreamer, it is because you get too much interested in the rocks about here," returned the old man, grimly.

Claude did not reply, but smiled indulgently, as he laid his gun on some hooks in the wall, and turned to enter an inner room. In the middle of the floor, on a bit of rug, sat Tristan, a small lamp beside him, an open book on his lap, and his head bent forward on his breast, fast asleep. Claude looked at him for a few moments, his face full of loving compassion. His poor bowed head with its shock of neglected hair, his deformed shoulders, and long, thin hands folded over the book, filled the young man's heart with pity. "Patient, suffering creature," he thought, "shut out forever from the love and admiration of humanity, he forgets his misfortunes in peaceful sleep, the blessed opiate that God gives us to soothe our pain." Then he laid his hand on the hunchback's head and said gently, "Tristan, Tristan, couldst thou not keep awake until I came?"

Tristan started up bewildered, but seeing his master's kind face bending over him, his look of confusion changed to shame and penitence, and he hung his head while he muttered his excuses. "O monsieur! I went into the court so many times, and once I walked a long way on the road to Morbihan, but I did not meet you, and I was tired and lonesome, so I sat down to study my lesson. I did intend to hear the bell, and to let you in; but it was so still here without you and Ixus, that, before I knew it, I lost myself."

"Never mind, my boy," said Claude, kindly, "I am glad you slept; I like you to rest when you are tired. I will not stay away so late again, for Janot has scolded me, and Nanette says the dinner is spoiled; now make me comfortable for the evening."

Tristan, fully awake, and more active than usual because he felt that he had been a little neglectful, drew off his master's coat and boots, and replaced them with a dressing-gown and slippers, and then assisted Nanette to serve the dinner.

After the simple meal was finished, Claude lit a cigar, and went out on a balcony overlooking the garden, to meditate and smoke; while Nanette cleared the table, and Tristan lit the candles, piled fresh wood on the fire, and made the only habitable room in the old château as cheerful as possible.

In his middle age, and after city pleasures had become somewhat tame, the deceased Count of Clermont had conceived the idea that this almost worthless and neglected property might yield him some amusement, if not profit. So, for a few weeks in each year, he came down from Paris with a number of friends, cooks, and grooms, to shoot and fish among the islands and inlets of the Morbihan. Several rooms had been redeemed from dust and decay, and made comfortable with the cast-off furniture of Château Clermont, which at that time had been renovated for the reception of Claude's mother, then a bride. The room that the young Count now occupied had been fitted up with more pretension than the others, as a *salle à manger*; and because of the hangings, pictures, and rare cabinet of tarsia work, had been preserved with care by old Janot and his wife, who had been servants to the late Count, as a sort of show-room, for the simple peasants and curious strangers who visited Sarzeau. During all the years that had intervened between the Count's death and his son's majority, no one had disturbed the possession of the old couple, who lived as they best could off of the scanty produce of the little garden, the almost barren rocks, and the small coin they now and then received from the inquisitive who came to look at the château; which, after all, was but little more than a tumble-down country-house, with no historical association to give it interest. Gradually all the rooms had been dismantled, and shut up to dust and silence, save the two the old servants occupied. When Claude arrived, he had been obliged to purchase simple furniture enough to arrange two sleeping-rooms, one for himself, and one for Tristan; these, with his *salle à manger*, constituted his apartment. The dining-room was large and lofty, with a fine frescoed ceiling and heavy

carved cornice. Worn and faded Gobelin tapestry decorated the walls; a large mirror in a Renaissance frame covered the space between the high, narrow windows, the upper part of which was composed of curious stained glass, in small diamond panes, while the lower part was evidently of a more recent date. Several large and one or two rather good pictures of the old French school hung over the doors and windows, without any regard to light or arrangement. But the most curious and interesting objects in the room were a Louis XIV. fireplace and an exquisitely inlaid cabinet. This costly piece of furniture had attracted Claude's attention; and he had asked Nanette the history of it. All she could tell him about it was that it had been brought with the other things from the Château de Clermont. The chairs had once been richly gilded, but time had tarnished their glitter and faded the delicate tints of the tapestry that covered them. Two uninviting sofas stood, one on each side of the chimney, their hard arms offering no temptation to the weary. Tristan had tried to make the room a little more cheerful by various devices. He had spread his master's tiger-skin wrap before the hearth; with a bright Scotch plaid he had transformed some pillows into cushions for the sofa, decorated the mantle with ferns and shells, and filled one of Nanette's blue jugs with flowers for the centre. A bright wood-fire burned in the chimney, and Ixus lay stretched at full length before it. Two common candles, in Nanette's brass candlesticks, flared and sputtered on a small table, drawn up by the sofa, on which were Claude's writing-desk and favorite books.

When Tristan had arranged everything for the evening, agreeable to his own taste, he stepped out on the balcony where Claude was smoking and musing, his eyes fixed on the starlit heavens, and his thoughts following his gaze into that infinite space where the Creator has strewn his most beautiful gems to soften the shadow that broods over the brow of night.

As the servant approached he heard his master say, as if he were addressing the nebulous clouds that floated above

him, "O, if you could but tell me she was there in peace forever, saved from sorrow and regret!" Tristan felt it his imperative duty to interrupt such sentimental reflections, so he laid his hand on the arm of the dreamer and said, "Monsieur Claude, the candles are lit and the fire is burning nicely. Will you not come in? I am afraid you will take cold, it is so chilly here."

Claude withdrew his gaze reluctantly from the stars, and fixed it on Tristan, saying, without the slightest impatience, "I understand your anxiety, you *drôle*; you mean to say that you are eager to hear the last chapter of *Nathan le Sage*. Ah, Tristan! you veil your modest desires with such a delicate tissue of affection that one can perceive them under their transparent covering. And you are an awful tyrant, in spite of your gentle ways, for you always wheedle me into doing just as you wish. Don't look so distressed, *mon ami*, I am only teasing. You are quite right to interrupt my regretful meditations. We will go in and finish the book before your bright fire." And laying his arm tenderly around the deformed shoulder of his companion, the two entered the room together.

Claude threw himself on the sofa piled with pillows, and the hunchback dropped upon the tiger-skin at his feet.

"Why don't you sit on a chair, Tristan?" said Claude, looking at him, curiously.

"Because a chair hurts my back, and then my proper place is at your feet."

"*Cher sot!* why, you are fit to sit in the presence of a king!"

"No, monsieur, no, I am only a poor unfortunate whom your kindness has saved."

"You have not read to me to-day, Tristan. Where is your book?"

"Here it is, monsieur," drawing it from under the pillow of the sofa, and carefully opening it at the mark, — "here it is, but would you not rather read *Nathan*? I can wait until to-morrow, although" — with a little desire in his voice — "I should so like you to hear this before I forget it. I have studied it so much to-day that I think I can read it quite well."

"Begin, *Je suis tout à toi, mon ami*."

The book was a work of Hégésippe Moreau, and Tristan's favorite chapter was *Le Chant d'Ixus*. Because he liked it he had given the not very felicitous name to the great dog of Brittany. He had studied this song for months, nearly ever since Claude had conceived the idea of teaching him to read, and now he was certain he could go through it without mistakes. Laying the open book on his knees, and bending over it until his nose almost touched the page, he began slowly and hesitatingly, his joy and eagerness almost suffocating him. "Ouvrez, — Je suis — Ixus, le pauvre — gui de chêne — qu'un coup — de vent ferait mourir." Gaining confidence as he went on, he read with great correctness the exquisite little fantasy to the end. When he had finished it he clasped his hands in ecstasy, and raising his eyes brimming with tears to Claude's kind face, he said: "*Grand Dieu!* Is it not beautiful to know how to read? O monsieur, you have opened paradise to me! Now I understand everything; and one never forgets, does he?" This he said with such a sudden change from exultation to the most pitiful anxiety, that Claude could not refrain from laughing as he replied, "No, my dear boy, one never forgets what he has once learned thoroughly. There are many things it is well to remember, but there are others it is better to forget."

"I know that, monsieur."

"How should you? There is nothing in your life you would wish to forget, — is there, Tristan?"

"O yes, monsieur, there are many things," replied the hunchback, bending his head over the book, while the tears pattered on the page. "I wish I could forget all the ridicule, insults, and blows I have received. I wish I could forget that I am not like others; that I am more hideous than a beast; that all but the few who know me look at me with loathing; that the world has neither love nor pity for such unfortunates as I; and I wish the past was not always before me. The dreadful scene of the last night at Clermont haunts me sleeping and waking. I suffer to remember the wrong and cruelty you have endured innocently; and more

than all, I wish I could forget the sweet voice of Mademoiselle Aimée. I hear it always in the wind and in the sea. When a bird flies above me with a clear song, I start and tremble, for I remember her laugh, and it seems to echo in my ears. O monsieur! she was an angel to me, and I loved her. I loved her so that when she was lost something seemed to die within me that will never live again. She is dead, and yet I see her always. Her eyes, her white teeth, her bright smile, all, all are painted on my heart, and the picture will never fade."

"Ah, Tristan! she haunts me also. For five years she has seemed to surround me with an invisible presence, to keep alive the anguish of regret and remorse. I loved her as a sister, and yet unwillingly and ignorantly I drove her to despair. I mourn for her. I deplore her fate always. When she died, joy died with her. They are both dead, those two dear faces are lost forever to my sight; one is hidden in the depths of the sea, and the other in a living grave. Alas that I have survived to say it!"

Tristan pressed his master's hand with silent sympathy.

For a few moments there was no sound in the room save the heavy breathing of Ixus and the sputtering of the flames in the chimney. Then Claude laid his hand on the bowed head of the hunchback, and said firmly but gently, "My boy, we must talk of this no more. It unnerves us and makes us weak to no purpose. It is God who has done all, and what he does is well done, therefore we have nothing to say against it. Let us both strive to forget the past and live for the future. We need not be idle, Tristan, we have much to do."

"Yes, monsieur, there is much to do. Even in this little town there are many poor and suffering creatures. I heard something to-day that tore my heart. A wretched woman, nearly ninety, told me she had never in all her life had once enough to eat. *O mon Dieu!* only think of being always hungry for ninety years." And Tristan wrung his hands, and rocked himself back and forth in real distress at the thought of such protracted starvation.

"Is it possible!" cried Claude with interest,—"is it possible that any one can live ninety years in such misery? Find her to-morrow, Tristan, and give her enough to eat for once."

"I had given away all I had before I saw her, but I brought her home to Nanette, and she fed her with what she had to spare; and when she had eaten all, her eyes still looked as eager as a hungry dog's."

"Poor soul! she had starved so long," said Claude, compassionately.

"Monsieur, I want to ask a favor of you; may I?"

"Certainly, what is it? Do you wish to establish a soup-house, or a hospital, or what? come, tell me," laughed Claude, amused at the poor fellow's blended expression of eagerness and timidity.

"O monsieur, don't mock me!" implored Tristan, as he folded his long arms around his knees and drew himself up into a bunch, changing his position to one more comfortable before he began his important request. "It is this: Now that I have learned to read, and know what a blessing it is, I want to teach some of these poor children who lie about in the sun all day with the pigs; there are more than twenty of them. May I bring them here into the great hall, and teach them for a few hours each day?"

"That you may, my good soul," replied Claude, heartily, "and I will help you. To-morrow, if we can find a carpenter, we will have the benches mended, and a blackboard made, so that you can teach them in the most comfortable way."

"O, how good you are!" cried Tristan, kissing his master's hand with lively gratitude; "now I will go to bed and dream of it, and to-morrow I shall awake happy."

After Tristan retired, taking Ixus, who always slept by his bed, Claude arose and walked briskly up and down the room several times, that he might shake off the drowsiness which his weariness made difficult to resist. Then he opened the window and stood for a few moments on the balcony. Now he did not raise his eyes to the stars, but rather let them fall on the silent town beneath him. Most of the poor toilers were at

rest. Here and there a dim light shone for a moment, and then went out, and darkness dropped the last fold of her heavy veil over the deserted streets.

The sinful, the ignorant, the hungry, all share alike the common blessing of sleep, he thought as he turned to his lighted room. Now he seemed fresh and energetic, for he arranged his desk, and taking a number of heavy volumes from the shelves of the old cabinet, he laid them on the table for reference. They were mostly the works of Montalembert, De Tocqueville, Thiers, and Rémusat, on religion, politics, and literature. Then he drew up one of the stiff chairs to the table, and, seating himself, began to write rapidly, now and then pausing to refer to his books. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were clear and intelligent; there were no signs of languor and weariness in his face now. When at length the candles flared out in their sockets and the feeble light of the lamp waned, he laid down his pen and looked at his watch. It was long past midnight, and he had written an eloquent chapter on modern reform.

At that time a number of contributions to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* attracted universal attention by their strength, truth, and conciseness, as well as the profound thought, delicate humor, and tender pathos that distinguished them.

The world did not know that they were brought into being in a solitary ruin on the rugged shore of Morbihan, strengthened by the free wind and wide sea, ennobled by self-denial and sacrifice, sweetened by a tender memory, and saddened by a life-long regret.

### PART THIRD.

#### LA CROIX VERTE.

"I TELL YOU, M. Jacquelon, he is a heretic in disguise, and the hunchback is a sly knave who will try to make converts of your children."

"Pardon, M. le Curé, the hunchback never speaks to the little ones of any religion only that of our Blessed Lady."

"How can you tell? you are not

there to hear him, and the little innocents can't see the Devil when he is covered with the fleece of a sheep. I tell you, M. Jacquelon, no good can come from such an innovation. What more do the children of the parish need than their Catechism on Sunday, and their week-day lessons from Mère Roche?"

"Ah, M. le Curé, that is all very well for those who get Catechism on Sunday, and Mère Roche through the week; but it is not every father in Sarzeau who has five francs to pay each month to Mère Roche, and it is not every child that has a decent frock to wear to Catechism on Sunday. It is only the dirty little wretches that are starved that the pigs may thrive; and who never touch water unless they fall into it accidentally, and who never saw a comb in their lives, and never slept on anything better than straw,—it is only such as these that the poor hunchback Tristan gathers up like a drove of stray pigs, and leads off to the great hall, where he feeds them first, and then teaches them to read afterwards. And they say that M. le Comte assists him."

"*Mon Dieu! M. le Comte assists him!*"

"Yes, M. le Curé, old Janot told it to my Pierre, so you see it is not so bad, after all. Of course, they are neither my children, nor your — Pardon, M. le Curé, nor the children of M. Cabot, nor the children of M. le Propriétaire de la Croix Verte."

"What is that you are saying, M. Jacquelon?" And the Propriétaire de la Croix Verte, wiping his hands vigorously on a very dirty towel, advanced toward the two who were conducting the above spirited conversation, seated at a small pine table in the dining-room, bar-room, kitchen, reception-room, all in one, of La Croix Verte.

The place as well as the occupants was a study for an artist. A long low room, with smoke-browned rafters, abundantly festooned with cobwebs, and decorated with strings of onions, dried herbs, sausages, and long-necked squash. Four small windows, the broken panes patched with paper and cloth, and the whole nearly opaque with dirt and flies, partially admitted the golden rays of a June sunset. At the far end was a *cheminée de cuisine*, its square holes filled

with brightly burning charcoal, and surrounded with copper pots and pans. Before it stood a fat, florid woman, with her blue frock pinned up over her *jupon*, so as to display a pair of stout ankles arrayed in red stockings and wooden shoes. She was frying liver, varying the occupation by now and then tapping with her greasy knife the tow-head of a dirty urchin. This was Madame la Propriétaire de la Croix Verte. Along each side of the walls that made the length of the room were two rows of pine tables, stained and greasy. When a guest of any importance wished to dine, a coarse cloth was put into requisition, but ordinarily they were used bare, unless the litter of beer-mugs, cheese-rinds, and sausage-skins, mixed with greasy, torn cards and much-abused dominos, could be said to cover them. Across the corner, near the *cheminée de cuisine*, was placed a long table which served for a counter. It was surmounted with a red desk, on which lay a torn and dirty account-book, a well-thumbed almanac, a dusty inkstand, and some very bad pens. The seat of honor behind the desk, a three-legged stool, was usually occupied by M. le Propriétaire, when he was not engaged in dispensing beer from a cask in the corner, or absinthe from some very suspicious-looking bottles on a shelf fastened to the wall. A dozen or more fat pigeons that had been hatched in the charcoal bin under the *cheminée de cuisine* waddled about upon the dirty tiles and disputed for the crumbs with several children, cats, and dogs.

On the afternoon of which we write there was an unusual number of guests at La Croix Verte. Nearly every table was filled with a rough but good-natured quartette of peasants and fishermen, for it was the *fête* of St. Peter and St. Paul, and most of them were breaking their fast the first time for the day. Some were partaking of the savory fried liver which the smiling landlady dispensed, hot and tender, seasoning it with a few complimentary words to each; while others, who were not able to afford the luxury of liver, adapted themselves to their limited circumstances, and laughed and joked over their brown loaf, sausage, and beer,



without envy or hatred toward those who fared better. A few, whose empty pockets did not allow their owners to regale themselves even on the choice beer and sausage of La Croix Verte, turned their backs resolutely on the feasters and fixed their attention on a noisy group of *ecarté* players, who now and then moistened their hoarse throats with sips of absinthe or *café noir*. At a table near the door sat M. le Curé and M. Jacquelon, the doctor, engaged in the animated conversation related above.

M. le Curé of Sarzeau was one of those peculiarly beastly looking men whom it seems as if the Creator had in irony endowed with speech. His face was in shape like a pear, the smaller point representing the forehead; little cunning gray eyes protruded, lobster-like, from under a flat, low brow; while a pug nose and large mouth with hanging underlip, revealing two rows of irregular decayed teeth, made the physiognomy of M. le Curé anything but prepossessing. This singular face surmounted a figure about as symmetrical as a toad's, clothed in a rusty cassock, the front and sleeves well polished with an accumulation of dirt, snuff, and grease; being rather short and well fringed, it revealed a pair of immense feet covered with coarse shoes, which slipped up and down when he walked, exposing large holes in both heels of his coarse black stockings. It was difficult to tell whether he wore the usual linen band around his throat, as his hanging cheeks concealed the place where it should have been seen, making him look as though his head was set on his shoulders without a neck. From this not exaggerated description of the personal appearance of M. le Curé, one must not suppose that he looked poverty stricken. On the contrary, every wrinkle of his face and every fold of his greasy robe over his aldermanic proportions gave evidence of good cheer, meat in plenty, with a not too rigorous attention to fasts, and good wine when he found it necessary to obey the advice of St. Paul, which was very often. There were a few among the miserable inhabitants of Sarzeau who were not so steeped in poverty as to be afraid

to express their opinion, and they, among other things, dared to hint that the life of M. le Curé was not one of stern self-sacrifice, that a love of good living, and even a little meat on fasts, were not the only venial sins he had to lay before the Great Absolver. However, we will not repeat the gossip of Sarzeau. It is enough for our purpose to say, that M. le Curé was just the man to oppose any innovation or effort to enlighten the poor flock that he led in the paths of ignorance and want. That very afternoon he had walked over to the Convent of St. Gildas de Rhuys, and there, after taking a glass of wine with the lady superior, he had laid his grievances before her. Of course she sympathized with him, and agreed with him that M. le Comte de Clermont and his hunchbacked servant could only be emissaries of Satan, sent to lead astray the feeble flock of M. le Curé.

The priest was a dependant on the old Convent of St. Gildas, and so he never dared to censure the ladies in charge; but now, feeling that he had serious cause for complaint, after several hems and hahs, he hesitatingly observed "that these innovations were the result of their opening the time-honored Convent of St. Gildas for boarders during the bathing-season; thereby introducing strangers into the until then quiet and retired town of Sarzeau."

The lady superior did not at all like this reflection on her management, which she considered extremely clever and judicious. As the impoverished treasury of St. Gildas was much in need of replenishing, she had thought of nothing more legitimate than that of offering a few ladies, during the bathing-season, a convenient home, which the dirty town of Sarzeau could not afford them, for which she received an ample compensation, that rendered her poor nuns more comfortable during the long, rigorous months of the winter that sweeps so fiercely over the dreary peninsula of Rhuys. In consideration of the necessity, and her wisdom in utilizing the empty rooms of the old convent, she believed she merited the greatest praise of M. le Curé, in-

stead of his unjust censure. Therefore it was with no very gentle voice that she replied, "Pardon, M. le Curé, but we are all apt to believe others to be the cause of our troubles instead of ourselves. Now, it seems to me, that if you had kept a closer watch over your flock, it would not have strayed away, and fallen into the jaws of the wolves. Guide and protect those who are given into your charge as well as I do those who are given to me, and you will find that they will not be led away by strangers to strange doctrines."

After this wholesome advice, the superior dismissed M. le Curé very coldly, and he walked back to Sarzeau in a towering passion. Entering La Croix Verte for his evening dish of gossip, washed down with absinthe, he encountered his natural adversary, M. Jacquelon; and then ensued the conversation which was interrupted by M. le Propriétaire, who demanded of M. Jacquelon what he was saying.

"We were speaking of the school that M. le Comte has established in the great hall of the château," replied M. Jacquelon, with much deference; for all the town, including M. le Curé, M. le Docteur, and M. le Avocat, were deferential to M. le Propriétaire de la Croix Verte, who held a despotic sway over his greasy kingdom. No one could afford to quarrel with him, and thereby lose the only amusement the dreary little town offered,—that of sipping absinthe and coffee, and gossiping over cards and dominos in the bar-room of La Croix Verte.

M. Jacquelon and M. le Propriétaire were the best of friends, thereby illustrating the adage that "contrasts are pleasing," for no two human beings were ever created more dissimilar. M. le Propriétaire was tall and stout, with a neck like an ox, a broad, good-natured face, all pink save a little tuft of very black hair on his chin; wide-open black eyes, and strong, white teeth. He usually wore a pair of greasy trousers, that once had been white, a blue shirt, with the sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, displaying a pair of brawny arms, dark with Esau's covering; and around his throat he displayed a scarlet kerchief, tied in a loose knot. In recalling my

impression of M. le Docteur of Sarzeau, as he once appeared before me, I can think of nothing he so much resembled as an unfledged gosling. His great bald head, with a little fringe of yellow hair, low forehead, beak-like nose, and retreating chin, were connected to his body by the smallest, longest neck ever seen; which seemed to be stiffened, to support his head, by white folds of starched cloth bound tightly around in a way that suggested strangulation. His shoulders were narrow and sloping, his arms and legs short, and his very long body was rotund at the base. A yellow-green coat, buttoned close, covered his upper proportions, and reddish-yellow breeches completed his resemblance to the above-named fowl.

The greatest pleasure that cheered the laborious life of M. le Propriétaire was to listen to a verbal combat between M. le Curé and M. Jacquelon. So on this evening, as the conversation warmed, he approached, not so much to put the question he had asked, as to overhear the discussion. When M. Jacquelon informed him of its subject, he merely nodded his head, displaying all his white teeth in a good-natured smile, as he said, "Go on, go on, my friends, and I will listen." So he planted himself before them, his feet wide apart, and his folded arms covered with a dirty napkin, spread out as if to dry; while he bent his head forward, and fixed his eyes on the two with the satisfied expression of one who expects a rich treat.

For a long time the war of words raged between M. Jacquelon and M. le Curé, uninterrupted by M. le Propriétaire, until he, seeing that the priest was overwhelming the liberal opinions of the little doctor with an immense volley of rather contradictory theological arguments, he stepped in to the rescue of his friend, and declared boldly that he approved of the step M. le Comte had taken toward the civilization of the little savages of Sarzeau.

"*Parbleu!*" he cried, bringing the great fist down on the table with a force that made the Curé and the doctor jump nearly from their seats, "I wish M. le Comte would ask for my children, he should have them."

M. le Curé wiped his damp forehead with his soiled blue handkerchief, took slowly a pinch of snuff, passing the box to M. le Propriétaire to show him that he entertained no hard feelings on account of a difference of opinion, and then said with a little deprecating tremor in his voice, "You forget, monsieur, — you forget that your first duty to your children is to have them well instructed in the religion of Mother Church, and you forget that your words are a reflection on me. Have I then so neglected my sacred office as Curé of Sarzeau, that you find it necessary to give the lambs of my flock to a strange shepherd? I have no doubt that M. le Comte de Clermont is a Christian gentleman, but I believe the hunchback is a knave, deformed in punishment for some crime, and therefore dangerous to the spiritual welfare of my people."

What reply M. le Propriétaire would have made to this I cannot say, for at that moment a general movement denoted that some one of distinction was entering.

"M. le Comte de Clermont, M. le Comte," passed from mouth to mouth in a suppressed whisper, as Claude, followed by Tristan, darkened the low door.

It was the first time Claude had ever appeared in the bar-room of La Croix Verte, and therefore the visit of so distinguished a guest caused no little commotion. The landlady unpinning her frock and whipped on a clean apron. The landlord rolled down his sleeves, tightened the knot of his red kerchief, gave a little upward twitch to his trousers, and throwing a clean napkin over his arm, appeared all smiles and complacency before his new guests; while M. le Curé was seen to stoop as much as his corpulency would allow him, to tuck his worn stockings into the heels of his shoes, after which delicate deception he stood up, and holding his dusty hat over the dirtiest spot on the front of his cassock, he made a succession of little reverences, half bows and half courtesies; and M. Jacquelon, craning up his long neck, and bending his ungainly little body almost to a right angle, walked forward with stiffened legs, after the fashion of West End grooms (it had been

hinted that M. le Docteur had been formerly a groom to a Paris physician, and in that way had gained his medical knowledge), his short arms extended with the palms up, as though he had something rare to display to M. le Comte.

Claude advanced into the room with a grave but kind smile, bowed to M. le Propriétaire and his wife, and then walked straight up to M. le Curé and offered him his hand.

The priest looked astonished, then gratified, at such a mark of respect, and giving his chubby hand a little dab on the skirt of his robe, to wipe off the snuff, he eagerly relinquished it to the friendly grasp of Claude.

"Will M. le Comte please to be seated?" said the landlord, whisking the dust off a chair with his napkin, and placing it at the table between the Curé and the doctor.

Claude bowed his thanks, took the seat, and drew up another beside him for Tristan, at which they all looked surprised, and some whispered, "M. le Comte is an original, he allows his servant to sit in his presence."

"Will M. le Comte be served with anything our poor house affords?" said M. le Propriétaire obsequiously, laying a well-thumbed wine-card on the table.

Claude ordered a bottle of Château Margeaux, to which he helped the priest and the doctor plentifully, although he scarcely drank himself.

When the good wine had raised the spirits of the somewhat abashed Curé, and had loosened the tongue of M. Jacquelon, Claude cleverly and with the most conciliatory language introduced the subject that had been under discussion when he entered. He had learned through Tristan of the priest's opposition, and as he did not wish to cause dissension in the peaceful town of Sarzeau, he saw at once that his best chance of success lay in securing the approval and co-operation of M. le Curé. So it was for this object that he visited La Croix Verte, and, finding the reception more friendly than he had anticipated, he felt encouraged to proceed with his negotiation.

"I hope I have not infringed on any of your privileges, M. le Curé," he said

gently, "in my effort to better a little the position of the poor and ignorant about Sarzeau. Although I have not until now had the pleasure of your acquaintance, I felt sure that one who had the welfare of all humanity at heart would sanction whatever I might do in the right direction, and your kind reception now shows me that I have not been mistaken."

M. le Propriétaire, who stood behind Claude's chair, winked at M. Jacquelon, and laid his right forefinger over his left, to indicate that Claude had got the best of M. le Curé, who, after having taken several pinches of snuff to fortify himself for a reply, was vigorously rubbing his nose and polishing it off with his soiled handkerchief rolled into a hard ball. While he was thinking of what he should say that would not disagree with his former remarks and compromise his dignity, M. Jacquelon, drawing his stiff cravat a little higher, leaned forward and said distinctly, "Pardon, M. le Comte, but I was just telling M. le Curé that he was altogether wrong to condemn your motives before he understood them. And in regard to your religion, I took the liberty of assuring him that you were a good Catholic, as was also monsieur," with a little nod at Tristan, whom he was at a loss whether to address as a superior, inferior, or equal.

The priest looked disconcerted at the inopportune veracity of the doctor's speech, and his heavy face flushed as he stammered out, "O M. le Comte, one hears the truth so perverted! I — I assure you I suppose, — I mean, I was led to think that you, monsieur, and your young man, were interfering with the religious teaching of my children, in fact that you were trying to sow the seeds of strange doctrines in their tender hearts."

"O, I understand perfectly!" said Claude, calmly. "If you had known that I desired only the welfare of the people, your interest would have been with me, would it not?"

The Curé confusedly fingered his glass and replied, "Certainly, certainly."

"I try to be a good Catholic," continued Claude, "and I do not believe our holy religion need hinder or prohibit

the inculcation of noble and liberal opinions; but I do not wish to interfere in any way with doctrines. I leave them to those better taught in theology. You must know, *mon père*, that our country has need of strong, self-reliant men, those whose judgment is based upon their own knowledge, a knowledge they must be able to gather for themselves from the history of the past and the events of the present. The first step toward that end is to teach them to read and then to furnish them with books and journals, that their minds may be opened to ideas of emancipation, that they may understand true freedom to be the freedom of one's self and one's opinions."

By this time a number of the card-players had left their tables, and gathered around the debaters, and when Claude finished his short but earnest speech they all applauded it heartily.

M. le Curé looked discomfited, while M. Jacquelon's broad mouth was generously stretched in a grin of satisfaction.

Claude raised his eyes to the coarse but honest faces of the men gathered around him, and seeing in the expression of many the pathetic history of a life's disappointment and failure, his heart went out to them in silent sympathy and pity, mingled with an earnest desire to lift the veil of ignorance and superstition that enshrouded them. "O my God!" he thought, "why can they not have a chance to become something more than beasts?" Then he glanced at the heavy, besotted face of the priest, and felt most forcibly the bitter contradiction, the wrong and deception, there was somewhere in the political and religious economy of the nation.

"Go on, M. le Comte, go on," cried the Propriétaire, throwing his arms out behind him to clear a little more space around the table, — "go on, we all like to hear the truth."

"You mean," cried the Curé, forgetting himself in his anxiety to keep the moral bandage over the eyes of his people, — "you mean that you all like some new excitement, anything that gives you a reason for breaking the laws of God. Schisms, dissensions, rebellions, are all against his divine teaching, and

the liberty, that with the mass means license, can lead to no good."

"Pardon, *mon père*, you mistake me," said Claude, "I do not advocate the liberty that means license. I advocate a liberty that leads to self-government, founded on a knowledge of one's self and of the higher needs of humanity, and that liberty and that self-government can only be brought about by educating both the head and the heart. First we must understand ourselves, then we must strive to understand others. While studying the inexhaustible page of the human heart, we discover its needs and are led to minister to them. Society based upon a mutual desire to teach and to be taught would soon become less arrogant, less egotistical, and less despotic. Therefore I say, teach every man, woman, and child to read, and give them books freely. The natural good will assert itself, grow and develop into strong, noble characters, separating itself from the weak and ignoble, and with time and patience the reform will adjust itself to the new régime. This can only be done by enlightening humanity, and giving it knowledge with its daily bread; for why should the body be surfeited while the soul starves?"

"You are right, you are right. God bless you, M. le Comte," exclaimed several, pressing forward eagerly. "We are ignorant, it is true, but it is not from choice. We wish to learn to read, but we have neither time nor money."

"My friends," cried Claude, standing up and facing the crowd who were pressing around him, — "my friends, what I can do for you I will do gladly and cheerfully. You labor through the day, but your evenings are free, are they not?"

"Yes, yes, yes," in eager, excited tones.

"Then come to the hall of the château, every night if you like, and I will teach you how to read, and supply you with books when you have learned. You will be better for it, all of you. You will make better men, better husbands, better fathers. Will you come?"

"We will, we will," they all shouted.

The Curé looked uneasy, but seeing Claude had all the strength on his side he was obliged to appear to concede;

so muttering "*Tempori parendum*" to himself, he said aloud with as good grace as possible, "My children, this is very noble and generous of M. le Comte. I hope you will improve to the utmost such an excellent opportunity; and let me entreat you to think also of your spiritual interests, and not to neglect my teaching."

There was not one among the honest men who replied to the Curé's hypocritical advice, but received it silently, with winks, nods, and grimaces of contempt behind his back.

"*Sapristi!*" muttered a great, red-nosed fisherman, "there is more good stuff in the little finger of M. le Comte than in all the fat paunch of M. le Curé, who thinks more of his greasy *potage*, *absinthe*, and *ecarté*, than he does of all our souls put together."

"Ah, my Gratien, if you could but grow up to be a noble man like M. le Comte!" said the landlady to her eldest hope, as she fished a bit of liver out of the fat she had let burn while listening to Claude's earnest words. "You shall go to the château and learn everything, and then perhaps one day you will become as great a scholar as M. le Docteur. *Eh, mon enfant!*" And she tapped the wide-eyed boy lovingly with her dripping fork, as she turned to take up another piece of the meat that lay on a table near.

At first the good-natured face of M. le Propriétaire clouded as he thought of the custom he might lose from Claude's proposal; but soon a philanthropic desire for the good of his townsmen overcame every selfish thought, and he joined as heartily as the others in applauding the noble offer of M. le Comte.

Of course, M. Jacquelon, being a professional man, prided himself on a liberal education, and therefore was not slow in sustaining the opinions he had advanced before Claude entered.

In this amicable way matters adjusted themselves, much to the gratification of the young regenerator, who had not dared to hope for so easy a conquest.

It was a happy moment for Tristan. He was delighted to see such a demonstration of approval from the people who a few days before had looked upon

them with distrust and suspicion. Silently he turned his great eyes, filled with tears of joy, to the face of his master, who smiled and nodded intelligently, for they understood each other without words.

"Now, my good friends," said Claude, "let us all sup together as a pledge of good feeling and common interest. — M. le Propriétaire, place the best you have upon the table, the best meats, and the best wine, and you and your good wife sit with us."

For an hour after there was such a clattering of glasses, knives, and plates, such bursts of good-natured laughter, such unaffected mirth, as was seldom heard at La Croix Verte.

The supper was nearly over, and Claude, with Tristan, had risen to retire, when a dusty travelling-carriage, with tired horses and sunburnt driver, drew up before the door, and two men alighted. At the first glance it was easy to perceive that they were persons of no common pretensions. The eldest, who was fifty-five or sixty, had a tall, soldierly figure, a handsome, expressive face, thick, curling gray hair, and piercing black eyes. The other, who was less than thirty, was slight and fair, with melancholy blue eyes, a girlish mouth, shaded by a thin, flaxen mustache, and extremely small feet and hands. Their nationality was very soon determined; for both simultaneously exclaimed in English, "Good heavens! what a place! Where are we to sleep to-night?" Then turning to the Propriétaire, the eldest said in perfect Parisian French, "My good man, have you a comfortable apartment for us?"

"Certainly, certainly; will monsieur please to follow me. I have an elegant suite above, which is entirely at the disposal of monsieur, if he will kindly do me the favor to accept it," said M. le Propriétaire, with professional insincerity; leading the way, as he spoke, to a dirty flight of stairs at the far end of the room.

As they passed, without glancing in his direction, Claude heard the younger man say, "I wish those stupid old nuns at St. Gildas were a little less monastic. One would think they believed all men Don Juan's disciples, by the way they

hurried us off after they secured the ladies. It would have been jolly to have taken up our abode in the old abbey."

The remainder of the remark Claude did not hear; for as they mounted the staircase after the landlord he shook hands with the doctor and the Curé, inviting them to dine with him the next day, and bowing kindly to his new friends, he went out into the soft June night, with an unaccountable feeling of sorrow and dissatisfaction in his heart; even though he had achieved a conquest over the Curé, and had gained the esteem and good-will of the people of the town, he felt discouraged and oppressed, for something in the voices or faces of the strangers had awakened emotions he could not banish.

## PART FOURTH.

### ALMOST A DEFEAT.

THE next morning after the supper at La Croix Verte Claude arose with a dull headache, and with the dissatisfied feeling of the night before. Tristan looked anxiously at his pale face and heavy eyes, when he brought him his coffee, and suggested a smart walk in the clear morning air.

"You are right, *mon ami*, it is just what I need, and it will put me in better condition at once. A flutter of Mother Nature's pure breath over a feverish forehead cools it quicker than a compress of Farina's best eau-de-cologne. I will start at once and be back to breakfast with a splendid appetite. And while I am off to the shore, you must go into town and find Jérôme the carpenter. There must be some more benches put up and some rough tables provided for my poor students to sit at. O Tristan, my good soul! can you tell me what has become of my last night's enthusiasm? I regret already my philanthropic undertaking. My heart is heavy, my head dull, and I am a coward, for I shrink from a duty that I boasted to myself I had strength enough to perform. Pray for me, my boy, that I may not fall just when I

have most need to stand. Adieu until breakfast."

When Claude left the gate of the château, he turned his face toward St. Gildas, and walking through the suburbs of the town came out on to the barren and rocky shore, from whose highest summit rise the towers that surround the old abbey immortalized as the retreat of Abélard. It had always possessed a deep interest for him, because it had been the grave of a great disappointment and a cruel sorrow. But this morning as he looked at the turrets outlined against the clear sky, and gilded with June sunlight, a strange feeling drew his heart with his eyes to one of the narrow upper windows, from which leaned a fresh pure face. It was a face he had never seen before, a very lovely face, yet it did not attract him as did a white hand that lay caressingly on the brown braids encircling the head like a coronet. The hand belonged to some one within the room, whose face and figure he did not see; still he felt as though the slender fingers had pressed upon his heart and stilled its beating.

The eyes of the girl were fixed earnestly on the shore below the convent, and Claude, following the direction of her gaze, saw there, leisurely walking along the beach, the two strangers who the night before had arrived at La Croix Verte. He caught a glimpse of the white hand waving a welcome, which was returned by the gentlemen. And he saw the lovely face turned upward to the owner of the fair hand, with an eager entreaty that seemed to say, "They are coming, let us go to meet them."

Claude turned away toward Sarzeau with a feeling of loneliness and isolation which he thought would never again revive within his heart. The fresh breeze, the clear sunlight, the sportive waves that rippled upon the sand and then retreated with bewitching grace, the gentle twitter of the birds that built their nests in the grim rocks, the many familiar voices of nature, awoke no responsive thrill within his sad soul, neither had they power to soothe his feverish restlessness. To avoid the strangers who were advancing

toward him he climbed up the rocky steep to the Castle of Sucinio, and stood there a long time contemplating the great round towers, built in feudal times by the Red Duke of Brittany, while he thought mournfully of the impotence of man, the insignificance of his hopes, fears, and disappointments. "They pass away," he said sadly, — "they pass away, and the spot that gave birth to one generation stands to witness the dissolution and decay of many successive ones. How small a handful of dust must now remain of the haughty Red Duke! And the bones of the brave Constable de Richemont, who first saw the light here, fill but a little space in his proud tomb. And yet these walls stand, and time as it passes leaves but few traces upon them. The stranger goes by and looks up at the ivy on the battlements, waving a welcome to him in the place of the fair hands that greeted the returning warrior more than six hundred years ago."

Was life more tragic once than it is now? Did the heroic souls who struggled over the sands of Quiberon only to be driven back into the sea by the indomitable Hoche suffer any keener pain at their failure than did Claude on this morning when he looked again on the disappointment of his life? Did the brave Sombreuil, who with desperate courage drew up his little band for the last conflict, make any firmer resolves, any stronger determination to conquer his enemy, than did Claude to overcome and subdue his regrets and desires? I think not. And yet the world calls them heroes, and weeps over their sad fate, but it has no tears, no pity, for one who is vanquished in a combat with the passions.

When Claude, returning, reached the gate of the château, he felt more depressed and disheartened than he did on setting out. Even the intention of doing something for the improvement and happiness of others brought him no comfort, for he now thought of the labor of the coming evening as of a task foolishly imposed upon himself in a moment of excitement, through a sudden access of generosity. Entering the court he saw old Janot sitting on a stone by the fountain, picking over *oseille* for the

dinner he had stupidly invited the Curé and M. Jacquelon to partake of.

When the old man saw his master, he looked up and said in his thin, complaining voice, "Too many changes, too many changes, M. le Comte. We are too old, my Nanette and me, to attend to all these things. If M. le Curé of Sarzeau and M. le Docteur must be invited to dinner, monsieur must find another cook, my Nanette is too old. This is a fine change to turn the great hall into a school for the *canaille*. Who is to open the gate to let them in and out? I am too old and too lame to do it, M. le Comte."

"Don't fret, my good man, don't fret, you need not do it; Tristan will find another man," replied Claude sharply, for the old servant's complaints annoyed him like the repeated prick of a pin in tender flesh; yet it was so little to lose his temper for that he felt angry at himself, and thought, "Bah! what a beast I am to speak harshly to that poor old wretch, who has long ago forgotten what he knew before I was born, and who has lived here so many years in undisturbed possession that he believes himself the owner. I should despise myself for being disturbed by the fancies of a child, and he is a child with a burden of more than eighty years pressing upon him." With this severe self-reproach, he tried to speak more pleasantly to Nanette, who met him at the door, telling him breakfast was waiting him. A French breakfast is at midday.

"Ah, monsieur, you are always gay!" she said, as he entered. "Well, at your age one can be gay and happy both, but when one is old he can be happy, but never gay. Poor old man," glancing fondly at Janot, "poor old dear, he is so cross this morning because I told him he could not see the decayed leaves in the *oseille*. He thinks he is young, monsieur. You know it is hard to remember that one's life is all behind one; so I humor his fancies, I let him go over it, monsieur, I let him go over it to please him, but I do it all after him. The fowls are all dressed, — fine fat ones too. Tristan went to market this morning and picked out the best, but he paid a half-sou too much the pound, and without breaking the legs to

see if they were tender. Only think, monsieur, of one buying chickens without breaking the legs. The poor hunchback has a very kind heart, monsieur, a very kind heart, but he is as stupid as a turtle. You know, monsieur, M. le Curé likes a good dinner, and he shall have one, for Nanette knows how to cook to-day as well as she did when M. le Comte *votre père* came down from Paris, with his friends, to shoot sea-birds. That was a long while ago, and Paris is a long way off; but still there is M. le Comte come to cheer up the old château with his pleasant face. Ah, monsieur! in youth we are always gay, but perhaps we are happy only in old age." And so she chattered on very disconnectedly, but with some nice touches of truth, as she followed Claude to the breakfast-table.

A few moments after the breakfast had commenced, Tristan entered hurriedly, eager with important communications. He had found the carpenter, who would come at once to make the benches and arrange the tables, so that all should be ready for the evening. Then he had met a little boy with a basket of fine, fresh strawberries, and he had bought them for dessert; and he had found a number of lamps in the town that would do nicely to light up the hall; and he had heard that the strangers at La Croix Verte were two English lords, whose ladies were at St. Gildas for bathing, while they were to remain at the inn because the nuns would not receive them into the convent, although they had offered more gold than had been seen in the old abbey for years.

All this Claude listened to patiently; and he even tried to interest himself in the petty details of the dinner and the arrangements of the table, which Nanette declared would look *bourgeoise* with common delf and no silver. "Such a thing," she said, "would never have been thought of, monsieur, in the time of M. le Comte *votre père*, for a noble to invite people to dine with him at his château with no proper *ménage* for serving them." For some reason, the incongruities of his life seemed more apparent on this day than ever before. He regretted that he had gone to La Croix Verte the previous evening, for



he did not feel equal to the task he had taken upon him. What had become of all his earnest resolutions, his enthusiastic professions of interest? He had felt an impulse to a generous act, and before he had fairly begun the work he was already weary of it. Starting up from the sofa on which he had thrown himself dejectedly, he said, in a stern, loud voice, "I am an ungrateful beast; a feeble, pining, miserable wretch; a dolt, a coward. I have neither strength nor courage. Good God! I did not believe that a glimpse of a white hand, the sight of refined faces, and the sound of a cultivated voice, could make such havoc with my resolutions. I have lived so long with vulgar but honest souls that I thought such puerilities had no power to touch me. I thought I had stilled the cries of my heart for another and more gentle life. I thought Nature and her untaught children could make me forget the station I was born to, the home from which I was thrust by deception and injustice; but it has all returned to me with double power. I am consumed with the old longing to sit once more in my elegant rooms, to look again upon pictures and statues, to sleep under silken curtains, to step upon tapestry, to be clothed in purple and fine linen, to look over acres of cultivated and decorated grounds, to wander among exotics that woo false breezes and raise their lips for the caresses of a strange sun, to fare sumptuously every day at a table loaded with delicacies and glowing with color and light, to listen to music from stringed instruments, swept by white hands; in short,—in short to taste of enervating luxury and gilded idleness. And these desires are the result of five years of privation and sacrifice, five years of hardening and chilling? Alas! then I have suffered for nothing, if I am to be heated and melted by the first breath of elegance wafted hither by these effeminate pleasure-seekers. O my barren and rugged shores! O Nature, my stern, but truthful monitor, do not desert and deceive me; give me back the calm and strength I have drawn from thee!" He heard the gentle, pleasant voice of Tristan below,

talking with the carpenter, who had come. "They, simple souls, are interested and happy in their humble occupation. I will not remain here lashing myself with idle reproaches, while I have the power to act. I too will work, and kill with labor these delicate repinings." So he went down, and Jérôme looked on with astonishment while M. le Comte lifted, sawed, and planed, as though he had been born a mechanic, with the necessity of earning his daily bread.

All the afternoon Claude worked with a will; and when it was time to receive his guests, everything was completed in the great hall, and the lamps placed ready to light.

The dinner passed off admirably. The Curé ate and drank himself into a stupidity greater, if possible, than his normal condition; while the good wine served to loosen the doctor's tongue, so that he became ridiculously loquacious, rattling on in a way that amused, if it did not instruct.

Before the June sun was fairly set, and while Claude and his guests still lingered over the wine, Tristan entered to say that more than twenty men were come, who were waiting in the hall.

When M. le Comte entered, followed by the Curé and the doctor, all arose, and, bowing respectfully, took off their hats, which they did not replace,—a mark of reverence rare among these men, who seldom uncovered save in the house of God. They were clean, though rough, uncombed, and unshaven; still they looked intelligent, and determined to accomplish what they had undertaken.

Among the number were a few who understood the most simple rudiments; these Claude took under his more especial instruction, leaving the others to Tristan, who gathered them around the blackboard, on which Claude had written the alphabet in large characters.

There was something in the scene that suggested with power the contradiction founded in life. A visible blending of the shadowy past with the common and practical present. Aged and decaying grandeur stooping to touch the strong hand of young poverty. Genius and profound knowledge side

by side, with the ignorance and simplicity of childhood.

The great arched hall, with its faded tapestry, and richly carved cornice, and the narrow deep mullioned windows, showing strips of blue-black sky studded with stars, made a fine background for the figures gathered around the wide-mouthed fireplace, filled with a smouldering pile of driftwood and dried furze; for even in summer the evenings are exceedingly chilly on the peninsula of Rhuys. The rude tables and benches were drawn around the chimney, on one side of which sat Claude, surrounded by a group of interested listeners, to whom he was relating some events in the past history of his country. There was not one among them who had not heard of the heroic struggles of La Vendée, and the defeat of the brave General Sombreuil on the sands of Quiberon. They also knew that the department of Morbihan had produced heroes, for the name of Cadoudal, the leader of the Chouans, had been familiar to them from their cradles. And they had imbibed with their milk the hate of their ancestors for the Republican generals, Hoche and Humbert, having all at some time made a pilgrimage to the Champ des Martyrs, on the banks of the Auray, where were shot the unfortunate Emigrés and Royalists who composed the ill-fated expedition of Quiberon. Still they had received all these stories of the struggles of the past as the ignorant receive tradition, without inquiring into the succession of events that led to such tragic results. Now they listened open-mouthed and absorbed to Claude's brief but lucid history of the condition of the country at that time, of the terrible conflict between the people and the court, of the degeneration, luxury, and vice of the monarchy, of the stern, self-denying, and heroic, but cruel and severe rule of the Republic, from each of which he gathered some simple but forcible moral to apply to the present.

Tristan, with his deformed body raised to its utmost height, his head erect, and his haggard face spiritualized and almost beautified by his earnest desire to make his anxious pupils understand the difference between *c* and *g*, wielded his pointer with the grace of a fashionable

director, while he called out each letter in a voice that would have done credit to an orator. The men were all eager, interested, and good-natured. When one made a mistake, another with a better memory, delighted with his new acquirement, prompted him readily, while the clever individual who repeated the whole alphabet correctly was applauded with the utmost warmth, at which noise, the Curé, who slumbered peacefully in the corner, awoke with a sudden snort, and looked around wildly, as he muttered, "Venite, exultemus Domino," for he thought he had fallen asleep, as it was his habit to do during the performance of mass.

M. le Docteur, in the best possible humor, sat on the right hand of Claude, who frequently referred to him for a corroboration of certain historical statements, which tickled his vanity, and caused him to pour out his knowledge so freely, that the simple people, not understanding its spurious quality, looked upon him as an oracle of wisdom.

Old Janot and Nanette had come in with Claude's permission, and sat hand in hand near the door, the old man grumbling now and then in a scarce audible voice, while the woman's sharp eyes followed every movement and word with the utmost interest.

When the lessons were finished, much to the satisfaction of all, Tristan produced from a large basket, bread, cheese, and wine, which, with the assistance of Nanette, he placed upon the tables. The men seemed even more grateful for the simple supper than they had been for their intellectual feast, and all did ample justice to it, laughing like good-natured children at a not very brilliant *bon-mot* of the doctor, made at the expense of the Curé, who was now wide awake.

"My good Tristan," said Claude in a low tone, while he clasped the hunchback's hand in his, "you think of everything to make others happy. This morning I came very near throwing up the whole matter. In fact, I was on the brink of a disgraceful defeat, the result of my own weakness and selfishness, but strength mercifully came at the right moment, and you, with your



gentle care and kindness, have changed my discomfiture to a beautiful triumph, for I have seldom felt stronger and happier than at this moment. It is a reward for many trials to see these simple souls so contented with their new undertaking. We must provide this little supper for them every night. Some of them have a long walk, and they must not go to their beds hungry."

Tristan smiled his approval, and went on dispensing his loaves, a worthy disciple of his blessed Master.

When the last man had been lighted out, and the Curé and the doctor had been dismissed in the most friendly manner, the gate closed and barred, and Tristan sent to bed with many affectionate good-nights, Claude lighted a cigar, and went out on to the balcony in the most exultant state of mind. The weak desires of the morning were gone, and his soul was full of noble and generous intentions. The rugged shore, the furze-clad rocks, and the poverty-stricken town, with its few ignorant, degraded inhabitants, seemed to him a kingdom; and his ruined desolate château seemed a royal palace, filled with the pride of wealth and glory. "Here are strong, good hearts, with great possibilities; they are worth thousands of fawning courtiers. I have won them, they are mine, and I will live for them, and raise them to a higher level. This old place shall be rebuilt and refurnished, and here I will found a school and a library, a free fountain where all may come to drink knowledge. Poor Sarzéau! you shall not always be despised; the birthplace of Lesage shall not sink into insignificance." Then his thoughts recurred to the struggle of the morning, and he said, with a feeling of satisfaction that it was over, "Almost a defeat, almost a defeat."

## PART FIFTH.

### CRUEL AS DEATH.

FOR some days Claude had been intending to make an excursion to Lockmariaker and Gâvr Innes, in order to

take some sketches and notes of these wonderful tumuli, Mané Lud and Mané Ar Groach. On the morning after his first effort of regeneration he arose with a clear head and buoyant heart, took a hearty breakfast and his sketch-book, and started on his excursion. When he passed out through the great hall he found Tristan already engaged with his ragged herd, who surrounded him with the most affectionate familiarity, while he explained to them the puzzling combination of letters to form words that expressed the most common things. As Claude came down the steps, singing *Après la bataille*, with a light voice and smiling face, Tristan left his seat, saying, "Ah, monsieur, you are happy this morning, your face is full of sunshine. I will pray that it may last forever."

"And I, too, will pray, Tristan. Adieu until night," he replied, as he threw a handful of small coin among the children, laughing, as he went out, to see them scramble for it.

"What new trouble is coming?" said Tristan, looking after him as he crossed the court. "I would rather not see him too happy, he is always sorrowful afterward. I hope he will return as gay as he goes out." The poor fellow's wish was in vain, for his master did not return as gay as he went out.

When Claude reached the gate, Janot opened it slowly, saying, "Ah, M. le Comte, you are as bright as a young gallant this morning, but remember, monsieur, that a clear sunrise often makes a cloudy evening."

"I know it, you old raven, without being reminded of it," returned Claude, good-naturedly. "You act upon my spirits like fog from the Bay of Biscay. When the sun shines, don't cloud it with your gloomy prophecies. Wait until night comes." And with these suggestive words he closed the gate and walked away with a light step. Four miles of rough road brought him to the Butte de Tumiac, where he entered the small chamber and examined with curiosity the strange Celtic monuments. It was a dim, weird place, and brought to his mind the many supernatural tales of his childhood, told by his nurse, who was a native of Auray. Somewhat

chilled and depressed he passed out through the narrow, dark passage into the sunlight, and found old Joseph, the boatman, waiting to row him over to Lockmariaker. It was a glorious morning, and as the boat cut the shining water, throwing from her bow little clouds of foam that broke into a dozen tiny rainbows ere they fell, Claude's spirit shook off the dreary influence of the gloomy chamber haunted with the shadows of vanished barbarians, and he enjoyed thoroughly the beauty of the scene. He had always looked upon the broken shore as dreary and gray, but now it seemed softened by the sunlight and the translucent air into a thousand tender tints. The rough, heath-topped cliffs gleamed like amethyst framed in agate of every hue. The sands of the shore ran golden to the blue of the sea; the jutting rocks threw soft shadows over the tiny islands that lay like scattered jewels at the feet of a king; the sea-birds, startled from their nests in the rocks, wheeled and floated, dipping the tips of their white wings in the foam dashed from the oars of the rower, while they replied to their mates in clear, shrill tones that did homage to the beauty of nature as eloquently as does the voice of man.

"I rowed a party over yesterday," said Joseph, when he had made about half the distance between the Butte de Tumiac and Lockmariaker, "and here I was obliged to rest on my oars for the view, which they all pronounced best from this point, and I believe it is so; for before us is the Morbihan, Gâvr Innes, the estuary of the Auray, and Lockmariaker. Look behind, if you please, monsieur, and you can see the bay and peninsulas of Quiberon and Rhuy, with the old abbey of St. Gildas at the summit of the cliff. I think this is the only spot where all these points can be seen at once."

"It is fine," said Claude, standing up and looking off in the direction of St. Gildas. "As many times as I have crossed, I never before noticed the perfection of this view."

"One of the ladies spoke of it first. There are two, and both are young and pretty. They are at the abbey, and the

gentlemen are in the town at La Croix Verte. Have you seen them, M. le Comte?"

"Yes," replied Claude, "I saw them the night they arrived. One is old and the other is young; are they father and son?"

"I don't know, monsieur," returned the old boatman, with a puzzled expression, "I could not make out the relationship; although I am sure one of the ladies is the wife of one of the gentlemen, yet I could not tell which she belonged to. O monsieur! she is beautiful, with such hair and eyes, and a face like an angel. This boat never carried anything so precious before."

Claude laughed at the old man's enthusiastic admiration of the fair stranger, and said, "Such a lovely passenger may bring you good fortune, Joseph, at least I hope it may."

"And I hope so too, monsieur, but it is the good fortune to row her across again that is the most I ask for." And with this pleasant wish Joseph bent to his oars and shot ahead rapidly, soon running his little bark up to the rough pier south of Lockmariaker.

Walking over the smooth beach, still moist where the tide had left it bare, Claude found himself looking at the many tracks on the sand, and wondering whose feet had made them, and where were then the beings who had left their footsteps behind them, only to be effaced by the returning tide. And then his thoughts reverted to the stranger with lovely hair and a face that old Joseph likened to an angel's. "She passed over this same spot yesterday," he said, "but here is no impress of a Paris boot; how absurd! how should there be, when the tide has ebbed and flowed twice since then? Of course if she is young and lovely she is fashionable and frivolous. It must have been her hand which I saw at the window of St. Gildas. I wish I could have seen her face; ah well, it might have been less fair than her hand." Then like the sudden change of a kaleidoscope there came before his mental vision a slight, girlish figure in a nun's gown and serge veil, her yellow hair hidden under folds of white linen, her slim hands crossed over a crucifix. The contrast between that sad, quiet

form and the active, joyous girl who the day before had walked over the shining beach with the fresh wind blowing her dress and hair, made his heart ache, until it seemed again as though cruel fingers had pressed upon it. "O Céleste! Céleste!" he thought, "if we two were but sitting on this breezy shore watching together the tide flow out, leaving the shining sands at our feet, or if we two were but sleeping together in the quiet breast of yonder sunlit isle, our bodies forever at rest, and our souls in peace with God! But thou art worse than dead to me, thou art entombed forever from my sight, and I am here alone to regret thee." Dashing away the tears that trembled on his lashes, he turned from the shore and took the direction toward the Montagne de la Fée. After exploring the stone chambers, and copying some of the hieroglyphics, which no one has ever yet deciphered, he examined with the minutest care the mysterious monuments, which have so puzzled the learned in trying to determine whether they were erected by Roman or Celt, or whether they were memorials of religious rites or military power. When he had wearied himself to no purpose over these inexplicable traces of a vanished race and a lost language, he entered the Mané Lud, whose stone chamber is covered with characters still more perplexing than any other. There he sat down on a flat stone and mentally reviewed all he had read and heard on the subject, striving to glean some hint from the history and traditions of the past, to find in the curious inscriptions some resemblance to Cufic or Egyptian hieroglyphics; but it was in vain, he could not trace the slightest analogy either in form or arrangement. Weary, confused, and discouraged, he walked back to the shore, and was rowed over to Gávr Innes. It was now long after midday, and the heavens had clouded over while he had been dreaming away the sunshine in the gloomy chamber of Mané Lud.

When the boat grated on the beach of Gávr Innes, Joseph said, "You will please not be long at the tumulus, monsieur, for the wind is rising and setting out from the shore, and if it

should continue to increase I shall have a hard fight to reach La Butte."

Claude did not intend to remain long when he entered the stone gallery, but the time passed more rapidly than he thought, in the new interest he found here, so totally different from that of Mané Lud. The twenty-seven pillars, covered with singular sculptured devices of serpents and battle-axes, represented the warlike weapons or religious emblems of a more savage race than either early Roman or Celt. When he left the spot, which he did reluctantly, the wind had increased to almost a gale, the sun was hidden by a veil of dense clouds, and the waves drove furiously against the shore.

Joseph groaned more than once over his one oar, for Claude had taken the other to assist in the hard fight to reach La Butte, and their united strength was fairly exhausted when they glided safely into the little haven among the rocks.

Instead of taking the direct road to Sarzeau, Claude determined to walk along the beach to a boat-house behind a high promontory that offered a shelter where he could sit and watch the great waves dash upon the rough shore. He liked the sea best when it was lashed into fury by the angry wind. He felt a weird sort of pleasure in the shriek of the tempest, in the roar of the thunder, and the vivid flash of the lightning as it cut the heavens into yawning chasms and made flaming tracks upon the crested waves. The spasms of nature found a responsive throe within his own soul, which had writhed and struggled as fiercely as did the waves of the sea to overleap their bounds. But the same Voice that hushes nature into calm had also stilled his rebellious heart and taught it submission.

The storm was increasing, the wind came in short, angry gusts, dying away into momentary calm, and then with renewed strength driving over the leaden sea, and dashing the foam-dressed waves high upon the invulnerable rocks. It was terrible rounding the promontory, and more than once Claude was obliged to turn his back to the sea, for the spray blinded him and the roar of the

tempest deafened him. But the resistance of wind and wave could not turn him from his purpose, for fate held him by the hand and led him resolutely toward his destiny. So he toiled on until the point was turned and he came into a little haven of calm.

It was a long stretch of beach, where were usually two or three boats drawn up beyond the line of the tide, but now there was not one, and a rude boat-house sheltered under a great cliff, with high walls of rock on each side.

Claude's first feeling was one of relief, his second one of surprise, for at the farther side of the inlet, near the sea, stood two women. Their faces were turned from him. One was tall and strong, wrapped in a dark mantle, with a veil of brown serge blowing back from her hat. The other was slighter, and her dress was of pale blue, over which was gathered a shawl of scarlet and white. The only veil she wore was her yellow hair, that streamed far behind her, torn from its fastenings by the wind. Her head was bowed in her hands, and she seemed to be weeping bitterly; while her companion, with her arm around her, was looking steadfastly out on the sea. Claude followed her gaze, and there, struggling with the terrible waves, some distance from the shore, he saw a tiny boat in which were two men, who were either exhausted or unacquainted with their oars; for the little thing danced and whirled like a cork, sometimes lost to sight, and then reappearing on the top of a crested wave, only to vanish the next moment into a terrible chasm that threatened to engulf it.

Claude saw it but for an instant, but in that instant he knew that unless aid reached them they must perish; and he also understood the danger in attempting to save them. Nevertheless he said firmly, "I will try, and God will help me." Then he turned toward the women, who had not seen him, for the first impulse of his tender heart was to comfort and reassure them before he started on his perilous undertaking. They heard his footsteps, and both turned toward him, startled and surprised. He saw but one; for in that moment all else of heaven and earth

was blotted out, and she seemed to stand alone, enveloped in dull, gray clouds. "Céleste, Céleste!" he cried, in a voice that seemed to ring out like a bell above the roaring of the sea, as he sprang toward her with outstretched arms. Then the cloud seemed to enclose her like a wall, as she drew back from him with something of the expression of fear and anguish that had stamped her face that day, five years before, when they parted in the rose-garden at Monthelon.

There are moments that leave their impress upon our whole lives,—moments that seem to wrench reason from us at one grasp; that stifle, bewilder, and blind us. We call the sensation faintness, but it is a taste of death, a drop of poison that works in our veins long after, and finally chills the crimson flood. We know by the coldness, pallor, and stony expression of many around us, that they have been touched with death, although they may not die until long after.

Claude dashed his hand over his face, and murmured, "My God! Am I dying? I cannot see." Then with a superhuman strength he struggled back to himself, and said with painful calmness, "Céleste, listen to me for one moment, and do not look at me with fear; indeed, you have no cause to fear me."

"O Claude! I do not fear you," she cried,— "I do not fear you. I have wronged you deeply. Can you forgive me for my cruelty and injustice? Can you forgive me, and save him?" pointing to the boat. "My husband is there struggling with death. Can you save him?"

"Your husband, *your* husband," he repeated slowly, but with a voice of rising wrath as he drew back from her, still keeping his eyes, filled with passion, fixed upon her pallid face. "No! no!" burst from his white lips at last, with a force that made them tremble,— "no, no, I will not save him. Leave me before I curse you; false and faithless thing, you have ruined my life, and now you implore me to save your husband. No, no; he might die a thousand deaths and I would not stretch out my hand to save him from one."

"O Claude, Claude, pity me!" she entreated. "O Elizabeth!" she cried, turning to the girl, who still watched the boat with an intense gaze, "it is Claude, Claude de Clermont, who so cruelly reproaches me. We were children together; we loved each other; but you know all; I told you all long ago. Once I would not have prayed in vain for his aid, but now he has no pity for me. Elizabeth, speak to him. I deserve his anger, but you have never doubted and despised him, and turned from him when he was suffering, as I once did. Elizabeth, speak to him, he will listen to you."

The girl turned toward Claude, who stood with his eyes fixed on the sands at his feet, like one stupefied by a sudden blow. Something in the tones of pitiful entreaty touched him, for he looked up as she said, "O monsieur, my father is in the boat, he is all I have on earth. Will you try to save him?"

"Your father and her husband. If I save one, I must save both."

"Yes," she repeated, "if you save one, you must save both."

"It is as cruel as death," he cried, wringing his hands, and raising his eyes to the angry heavens, — "it is as cruel as death; but what matters for one pang more? O my God, I look to thee; do not abandon me in this moment of agony. Give me strength to save her husband or to die with him; for if I survive him, the memory of his death will rest forever upon my soul." A vivid flash of lightning illuminated his pallid face, and wrapped him for an instant in flame. It seemed as though God had touched him, so suddenly did the passion die out of his heart, leaving a profound calm that was almost joy. In that supreme moment he did not hear the roar of the thunder, the shriek of the wind, nor the dash of the waves, for an unbroken silence seemed to infold him like a white cloud, and his heart was melted into infinite pity. He looked at Céleste as she stood before him, drenched with the spray, her face white with anguish, her eyes swollen with weeping, and her long, fair hair blown pitilessly by the wind, and a new conviction filled his soul with remorse, for he felt how she

too must have suffered, — suffered through him and for him; and he had cruelly reproached her, and caused her still more pain. Five years before, she had fled from him in terror, deaf to the entreaties of his heart, she had fled from him to bury herself, as he believed, forever, in a living tomb; and he had since then looked upon her as dead to him and the world. Now she stood before him on this lonely shore of Quiberon, entreating him to save her husband. And he, through divine strength could say from the very depths of his being, "My life is his and yours, use it as you will."

With sublime self-renunciation and deep compassion filling his heart, he turned toward Céleste, and holding out his hand he said gently, "Céleste, forgive me for my cruel words; I was mad with passion or I could not have reproached you. I love you at this moment better than I have ever loved you before. Remember, I say *better*; for now I love you with no thought of self. I will save your husband, or I will die with him."

She seized his hand and covered it with tears and kisses, sobbing, "O Claude, Claude, forgive me!"

"One only thing, Céleste, before I go to what may be death. Do you believe me innocent of the crime you once thought I had committed?"

"I have long believed you innocent. Forgive me, I loved you then, I love you always; but I was deceived by another, and blinded by my childish grief. I entreat your forgiveness." And, overcome by her emotion, she buried her face in her hands, and burst into sobs.

"It is enough," he said with a smile that was almost happy. "Now I can face danger with a strong heart."

Elizabeth stood with her arms around her weeping companion, but her eyes were fixed on the boat with an expression of terrible anguish. "It will be impossible to reach them in this dreadful sea. You will lose your life, and you will not save theirs. God help us! what shall we do?" she cried, wringing her hands and weeping with Céleste.

"I will make the attempt. Pray for me that I may not fail," said Claude, throwing aside his coat and hat. "If I

can reach the boat, I can save them." He took the hand of Céleste, and pressed it reverently to his lips, raised his eyes to heaven and made the sign of the cross, saying, "Pray for me, Céleste, pray for me." Then rushing down the beach he plunged into the midst of a retreating wave, and was carried at one dash far out toward the boat. He saw with the clearness that is sometimes given us in times of extreme need, that his only chance of reaching the boat depended upon taking advantage of such a moment, when the turbulent waves could aid him more than his own strength and experience. If he could but gain the boat, and get the oars into his own hands, he might save them by his skill in rowing, which was more necessary in such a sea than even courage and endurance.

The two unhappy women watched the wave carry him far out and toss him upon its summit as though he were but a feather; then they saw him struggling against the incoming billows that hid him entirely from their sight. They strained their eyes into the fast-gathering twilight, their anxiety divided between the solitary swimmer and the exhausted men in the unmanageable boat. Now again they saw Claude, borne upon the summit of the next receding wave, striking out boldly and fearlessly, while right before him rose up a solid wall of water that curled forward with a hissing roar, dashing over both boat and swimmer, and hiding them entirely from the sight of the terrified watchers.

"My God!" cried Elizabeth, with blanched cheeks, "I fear they are all lost."

"Oh, oh!" moaned Céleste, covering her face from the anger of the sea. "I have sent him to death."

"Mother of God! have mercy upon them!" implored both, as wave after wave broke at their feet.

For a few moments they strained their eyes in vain; then Elizabeth cried joyfully, "I see the boat, and it is nearer."

"And beyond, is not that Claude?" said Céleste. "Look, I pray, has he not passed the boat? Is not that his head beyond the foam of yonder large wave?"

Alas! it was true. An advancing

billow had brought the boat nearer the shore, but returning it took the swimmer with it, and the next dashed the little bark again far beyond Claude. Baffled, tossed, hurled here and there, it seemed as though both must perish.

Another moment of terrible suspense, another moment of despair, while they again lost sight of both, and then a retreating wave showed them the boat still further away, but Claude was within a few yards of it swimming vigorously. A cry of joy from Elizabeth, a sob of thanksgiving from Céleste, told that he had reached the little bark, and was being assisted into it by the eager hands of the almost hopeless men. Again it was lost to sight, to appear a moment after on the swell of a billow. Claude had the oars and was swaying back and forth with the long, dexterous strokes that brought it bounding above the waves straight and sure toward the shore. A moment after, with a roar and dash of the surf, the boat was thrown far upon the beach, and Claude, throwing down his oars, sprang, followed by the two strangers of La Croix Verte, almost into the arms of Elizabeth and Céleste.

The two women with a cry of joy threw themselves upon the breast of the eldest man, and sobbed, hiding their faces with their hands, while he clasped and caressed them both.

"His wife and his daughter," thought Claude, stooping to pick up his coat and hat. "In their joy they have no thoughts of me. It is well. Thank God, I have saved him and made her happy!" Then without another glance at the excited group he hurried around the promontory, and climbing up the rocks, dripping with water, exhausted with his struggle, and overpowered with conflicting emotions, he threw himself upon a furze-covered bank, and burying his face in his hands wept with the abandon and passion of a woman.

## PART SIXTH.

### THE GRATITUDE OF A POET.

WHEN Claude reached the gate of the château it was already dark, and the

men were assembled in the hall anxiously awaiting his arrival. After hastily changing his wet garments for some dry ones, he entered with his usual quiet manner and grave smile. But Tristan, who had looked deeper than the others into his master's heart, saw that he had not returned as he went out, and he also surmised that he had sung *Après la bataille* too soon, for there were evident traces of another and a more serious engagement than that of the preceding day. Still he was very calm and patient, declining firmly but gently Nanette's pressing invitation to partake of the supper which was waiting, and disregarding Tristan's anxious suggestions that he had better not remain in the hall, being too tired to talk with the men that night. He went through his voluntary duties with apparently the same interest as that of the night before, and there even seemed a deeper earnestness in his advice, an undertone of tenderness and sympathy in his encouragement, that touched the heart of every man among them with a reverence as deep as their affection was sincere. From the spear of anguish he had won the crown of their love; a simple crown, it is true, looking at it with earthly eyes; but who can tell what bright gems may appear when it is brought into the effulgent light of eternity?

When Tristan spread the simple repast, Claude excused himself and retired, with their hearty good-nights and kind wishes sounding gratefully in his ears. In his room Nanette had placed his supper, which he partook of sparingly; then he closed his door, extinguished his light, and, throwing himself upon his bed, communed with his own soul and was still.

The next morning when Claude arose there remained no trace of the tempest of the previous day; the air was clear, and crisp, the sky without a cloud, and the sea as blue and placid as though the rough breath of the wind had never swept it to rugged wrath, as though it had never betrayed its trust, never engulfed an unwilling victim, never unfolded within its beguiling bosom, a thousand hopes and joys. "Ah, Nature! thou hast thy moods of passion and an-

guish, as well as humanity," he exclaimed; for he remembered how he had gone forth in the morning with smiles and sunshine, and how he had returned at night with tears and clouds. "Can it be the same sea into which I plunged to conquer it or perish. It was a cruel struggle, but, thanks be to God, with the waves of death around me I was happier than ever before. O Céleste, my darling! in eternity thou wilt know how I have trampled upon my heart." He felt a strong desire to see again the scene of his suffering and his triumph, the spot where she had stood weeping and trembling before him, where she had said, "I love you always," and where he in return had laid the greatest treasure a man has to give, his life, at her feet. When he reached the little inlet, there was no trace of the tragic scene of the previous night, save the broken boat dashed high upon the shore, and near it a band of blue ribbon with a few yellow hairs fastened into the knot. "The wind tore it from her precious head to give to me," he cried, pressing it with strong passion to his lips. There was a subtle odor of violets about it; he remembered that it had always been her favorite perfume; and while he looked at it a thousand tender memories filled his heart, a thousand sweet longings stirred the very depths of his soul. His thoughts leaped the chasm of time and distance, and he believed himself to be again at Clermont, wandering through the laurel-shaded walks with the hand of Céleste clasped in his. He lived over again the brief days of their love, he felt the timid pressure of the first kiss, the soft eyes seemed to look into his with shy delight, the waves of her hair to blow across his cheek. Then a new emotion sprung to life within him; paternal yearnings strong and sweet, filled his soul; little children's hands seemed to tug at his heart-strings, and baby faces seemed to fill the air around him. Céleste married and perhaps a mother, — what an angel of maternity! For a moment he forgot that another, and not he, was her husband; and so lost was he in the tender reverie that he did not hear approaching footsteps until some one spoke his name; then, like a detected culprit, he hastily

concealed the ribbon, as he turned a glowing face upon the new-comer. It was the younger man of the two whom he had rowed to the shore the previous day, who, holding out his hand to Claude, said with a frank, pleasant smile, "Allow me, M. le Comte, to express this morning the gratitude that we should have given free utterance to last night if you had not deprived us of the pleasure by disappearing so mysteriously."

Claude took the proffered hand cordially; but said, gravely, "Do not waste gratitude on me; give it to a mightier than I, without whose aid I too should have perished." Then seeing his companion looked rather disconcerted at the seriousness of his reply, he added in a lighter tone, "You have, monsieur, a decided advantage over me, as I have not the honor of knowing your title."

"My name is simply Philip Raymond, and a most ridiculous misnomer it is, as I am neither fond of horses nor a powerful protector, still I am vain enough to think it is not quite unknown to you."

Claude, with no little confusion, politely assured him that he had the pleasure of hearing it then for the first time.

"Ah," he laughed, "another death-blow to my egotism. Then you have never read 'Sabrina' or 'Thamyris,' both of which have been translated into your language?"

Claude regretted to say that he never had.

"From that I presume, M. le Comte, that you are not acquainted with the recent literature of England, nor with the literary circles of Paris."

Claude assured him that he knew nothing of the modern literature of England, and that he had not been in Paris for some years. In fact, he was not familiar with the fashionable world, having lived for the last five years entirely among the mountains and on the sea-coasts with shepherds, peasants, and fishermen.

"*Vraiment!*" exclaimed Raymond, in very West End French, looking at Claude with wide-open eyes; "well, you are certainly an original. Let us sit here," pointing to a flat stone that offered a comfortable seat, "for I have a great deal to say, and I never can talk well

standing. I frankly avow that it is rather mortifying to my self-esteem to find that you don't know as much of me as I do of you. But how can I be so absurd as to expect a Frenchman, perched in an old château on the peninsula of Rhuy, to know about every English fellow who scribbles, and whose name is fashionable in the saloons of Paris? Now we have learned from Le Propriétaire de la Croix Verte, after describing the heroic stranger who swam off so boldly to save us from total destruction, that it could be no other than M. le Comte de Clermont, owner of the tumbledown château on the hill, who leaves a fine estate in Normandy to rove around Brittany, feeding and educating dirty children, fishermen, peasants, and in short all the *canaille* who cross his path."

Claude laughed heartily, relieved to know that neither of the ladies had spoken of the scene that passed before he swam off to the rescue, and that at least Raymond had never heard of his previous engagement to Céleste, nor of the tragedy of Château de Clermont, and said, laying his hand on the shoulder of his companion as a token of good-will, "Well, *mon ami*, is what you have heard of my eccentricities any reason for discontinuing an acquaintance begun under such heart-stirring circumstances?"

"Ah, no indeed, my brave fellow! you are a jewel that I have found here on the sands of this dreary shore, which I shall wear upon my heart forever. Or, in plain language, my gratitude and my admiration of your courage make me desire your friendship as the greatest of treasures."

Claude did not reply at once; he felt unaccountably drawn to this young man, who, he thought, must be in some way related to the husband of Céleste; through him he could learn much that he wished to know, and, beside, his frank and vivacious manner pleased him; yet he did not wish to encourage a friendship under false pretences, for he could not accept the confidence of any man without giving his own in return. Seeing his companion waited for some acquiescence on his part, he said, "Monsieur Raymond, I do not



admit that I have any claims upon your gratitude or admiration, and perhaps you may even think me unworthy your esteem when you know something of my history. I am exiled from my estate by the suspicion of a horrible crime, of which I am innocent, but I have no means of proving it. I can make no further explanation. Do you still wish for my friendship?"

"I do," replied the other, warmly, "without explanation or extenuation. I like you, and that is enough."

"Will you tell me," said Claude, a little nervously, "who your companion of yesterday is, and what relationship you bear to him?"

"None whatever but the relation of a family friendship. Sir Edward Courtney was a fellow-student with my father. He introduced me into Parisian society, and to his daughter Elizabeth, and I am in love with both, and both are ungrateful for not returning my affection. Society flatters me and abuses me at the same time. It calls me a boor, and yet it courts me. The grand ladies of the Faubourg St. Germain ask me to scribble verses in their albums, and make grimaces behind my back while I am doing it; and the leaders of the *demi monde* invite me to their little suppers, simply because I amuse them; for they know I have no money to squander on opera-boxes and bouquets. O monsieur! the world of Paris is a queer world, but it is Elizabeth, it is Elizabeth, that tries me beyond endurance. She heats me to a flame with her beauty and goodness, and then she chills me with her cold, calm, conventual ways. I knew her when I was a child, and I used to steal my grandmother's choicest roses to give her; she was a little tyrant then, and made me cry often with her caprices. Her mother died, and then her father, who has been all his life a loungeur about Paris, and who has squandered two or three fortunes, first his own, then his wife's, and lastly any one's else that he could lay his spendthrift hands upon, came and took her away to a French school. There she formed a strong attachment for the present Lady Courtney, who had been inveigled into the same convent with her—Notre Dame

de Rouen, I think it was—against her own inclination, through the wiles of her guardian, who is a bishop, or something of the sort, and who doubtless wished to get her fortune for the Church. The poor girl made a confidante of Elizabeth, who took her under her strong protection, and wrote such pitiful letters to her papa about her much-abused and lovely *protégée*, that Sir Edward was interested, and made a visit to his daughter for the first time, when he succeeded in getting a glimpse of the fair Céleste. Her beauty charmed him, and the remainder of her fortune, that had escaped the clutches of the Church, won him. When Elizabeth had finished her education, Mademoiselle Monthelon's two novitiate years were just ended; and refusing to take the veil she was allowed to depart, after making a handsome donation to the order. Her guardian, finding she was stubborn and would not be a nun, raised no objection to her marriage with Sir Edward Courtney, which took place two years ago."

"Poor girl," sighed Claude,—"poor girl."

"Yes, you may well say that, for *entre nous* he is a great rascal, and I hate him *à l'outrance*; but he was my father's friend, and I love Elizabeth, and so I let him live. He has spent every pound of his daughter's fortune, and now he is making ducks and drakes of the remainder of his wife's; and very soon both poor things will be left with nothing. I am a miserably careless fellow myself, with very little good in me, but there is still enough left to make me despise a man who robs a woman."

"Can nothing be done," inquired Claude, sadly, "to secure to her what remains?"

"Nothing; her father left all to her unconditionally, and she gives it to him. She is a child with no strength nor decision of character; and my glorious Elizabeth watches over her as though she were her daughter, instead of being her step-mother. There is something touching in their friendship for each other."

"She must be a noble character and a very angel of goodness," exclaimed

Claude with so much warmth that Raymond looked at him jealously, and then continued with some bitterness in his tone,—

"O yes, she is all goodness to every one but me; she is a slave to her father's tyranny and Lady Céleste's whims. But to me she is an icicle, and yet I love her better than life."

"Perhaps, with all her indifference, she loves you," suggested Claude; "but your careless principles may shock her, or her motives of prudence may prevent her from expressing what she feels."

"It may be, for it is true that I am a good-for-nothing, and there is little in me for a noble woman to love. Sometimes I think circumstances have made me what I am," he went on, reflectively gathering together a mound of sea-weed and shells with the point of his stick. "You must know that we are all the slaves of circumstances. Prosperity is a beguiling, and Fortune a fickle jade. I am a living proof of their inconstancy. When I began life my heart was pure and my way was just, I was a very child in confidence and truth. My dear old grandmother, God bless her soul, brought me up a thorough muff; my mother died at my birth; and my father, who was an only child, was soon after killed in an engagement in India, where he was at that time stationed; and I was sent home, a little bundle of linen and tears, to the dear old lady, who took me to her heart as though I had been an angel, and educated me as though I had been a girl. She and the rector, between them, taught me crochet, music, and drawing, with a little smattering of Greek and Latin. The rector was a sentimental spoon, and encouraged my dreamy proclivities. My grandmother feared the cold and the heat for me. I never mounted a horse, because I might be thrown. I never skated, because the ice might break under me. I never rowed, because I might be overturned and drowned; and yesterday's exploit shows how near such a prediction came to being true. I never fenced or boxed, because I might twist my arms out of their sockets. I never ran or jumped, because my ankles were weak. I never played at ball or

cricket, because my lungs were delicate. And I never touched a gun, because my father had been shot by one. In short, I did nothing but sit at my dear old lady's feet and weep with her over the despair of Werther and the sorrows of Alonzo and Melissa. At sixteen, I was a thoroughly good child, what the Spanish call a *Marcia Fernandez*, a girl-boy. Elizabeth was my only little playmate, and at eighteen I was desperately in love with her; then she was taken away to France, and for a time I was disconsolate, but soon after a sweet young creature came to stay at the rectory,—she was an angel ready-made for heaven, and only lent to earth to show us what companionship we shall have hereafter. I loved her with the reverence we feel for something holy. It was the romance of my life, and it opened the fountain of song within my heart. I wrote sweet, sentimental things, which my grandmother and the rector thought quite equal to anything Byron wrote in his youth, and which the London magazines thought worth—nothing. I cannot describe to you the joy, the rapture of the moment when I showed my first printed poem to my adored Grace. It was a sonnet to herself, in praise of her blue eyes and flaxen hair. It was weak, but it was sweet, and pleased my darling. O my God! that we should live to smile in contempt at the first pure stream of fancy, that we should live to prefer the red wine of later years, heated and unholy with passion and vice; but so it is, I sometimes laugh and weep at the same time over my early effusions. For another year I continued to send my delicate rose-leaves floating down the literary tide, to be gathered up by bread-and-butter misses and amorous theological students. Then the lilies of my fancy became tinged with purple. My heart was pierced, and the blood flowed forth, touching with a deeper hue the pale flowers of my life. One morning, it was the last day of the year, and the earth was folded in a shroud of snow, I went to the rectory and looked for the last time upon my Grace before the heavens shut her from my sight. She lay in her saintly robes, for I



swear those she wears in heaven are no purer, with softly closed eyes, and hands meekly clasped over a bunch of lilies upon her breast." Here his voice was broken with emotion, and tears dimmed his eyes. "The memory of that angel melts me to weeping even now," he said, after a few moment's silence. "Then the fountains of my heart were broken up, and I was deluged with my own passionate tears. The streams of fancy gushed forth with double force and sweetness; alas! now they are turbid and tainted. Under the influence of my first emotion, I wrote my first novel. It was a simple pastoral story, but it was written with the tears of my heart. I arose from my bed at night with throbbing pulses and feverish brain. My soul filled with the sorrow of my hero, I paced my lonely chamber and wept over the woes I portrayed. I wrote it with a single heart, a pure desire, a fervent love. It was the truest thing I ever did, and yet the world was blind to its truth. I found a publisher, and sent it forth with the prayers and hopes that a mother sends after her first-born. It attracted little attention, the critics handled it grudgingly, neither condemning nor approving, and its few readers were clergymen's daughters, governesses, and boarding-school misses. I do not know whether the publishers sold enough to compensate themselves, I only know that I received nothing. Yet I was not discouraged. I kept on with my fugitive verses, infusing into them a little more strength and color, until now and then came a faint breath of approval from the autocrats of the press. Then my dear old grandmother died, and left me her slender income. I sold the cottage where I had dreamed away my rose-leaf existence, and, followed by the blessings of the good spoon who had turned me out a weakling, I set my face toward London. There a new world opened before me. I plunged into a fountain of life that invigorated me. My soul was filled with ardor. I burned to see, to know, to experience all. I desired to taste of every emotion. I poured out the red wine of my life freely like water, and the parched sands drank it greedily.

I wrote passionately, but with enough of truth to keep me from popularity and wealth. For a year I whirled in the bewildering vortex of fashion and dissipation, and in that year I spent all; I was bankrupt in all but truth. I swore I would not prostitute my talent for filthy lucre; I scorned the tempting offers of sensational journalists and unscrupulous publishers; but at last, at last, there remained but this,—"making a cipher in the sand,"—"and I was too proud to beg, and loved life too well to starve, so I was obliged to defile and sell what God had given to me. My cheeks burning with shame, I strung together my first collection of false gems; I will admit that there were a few true ones among them, but only enough to make the paste more glaring. The world received them and went frantic over them. One morning, like Byron, I awoke and found myself famous. Honors flowed in upon me, I was the flattered pet of the *beau monde*. Titled ladies bowed to me, and showed their false teeth in dazzling smiles, and swore to the sweetest lies, declaring that my poems were divine, and avowed that if they were immoral the immoralities were so nicely veiled that they could not discover them. The *demi monde* lauded me, and applauded the courage with which I paraded my wanton fancies, protested that my ideas were deliciously fresh and original, and assured me of their warmest support. The critics pounced upon me like vultures upon their prey; there was something pungent, flagrant, and material for them to tear in pieces, for the delectation of their minions; they fought vigorously over the unworthy carcass, some denouncing, some defending, and all devouring eagerly the choicest morsels. The pulpit opened its batteries upon me, the high-toned and dainty, firing small and well-selected shot, while the coarser and more truthful thundered out volley after volley of indiscriminate projectiles; and indignant matrons styled my songs the howlings of a loosened demon that walked the pure earth to blight it. But all their fierce censure did not crush me. On the contrary, I became more popular. Straight upon this ex-

cited sea of public opinion I launched another novel, entitled 'Dragon's Teeth.' The publishers quarrelled over it, one outbidding the other like sporting-men at the sale of a fancy horse. The highest bidder became its godfather, and it was ushered into the literary world with paeans and shouts and flourish of trumpets, and received with all the demonstrations that should have honored the advent of a work of great genius, and yet I do not exaggerate when I say it was trash. It was worse, it was claptrap. It was manufactured sentiment. It cost neither thought nor emotion. I wrote it with dull head and unsteady hand, after a night of debauchery. It was composed of the vilest material, the most improbable scenes, decorated with the most glaring tinsel, and befouled with the falsest sophistry. Even the title had not the remotest connection with the tale. It was all sensational, all false; and yet, as I told you, it was received with eagerness, and sold with astonishing rapidity, establishing my reputation as an author of undoubted genius; and yet there were hours when I wept with shame over my debased talents, despising myself when I compared my gaudily decked deception with my first pure creation that the world had allowed to fall unacknowledged into a premature grave. Pardon me, perhaps I weary you with my long story?"

"Not at all," replied Claude. "Pray, go on; I am interested to know why you left such brilliant success in London, to live in Paris."

"Yes, certainly, that is the *dénouement* without which the miserable history is incomplete. I spent money faster than I earned it. You know the result, *facilis descensus Avernii*," he continued, looking contemplatively at the sand, whereon he was drawing, with the point of his stick, a tolerably good caricature of himself flying from a long-legged dun with a bundle of bills under his arm. "Now this explains it," he said, finishing it off with a flourishing scroll proceeding from his own mouth, on which he wrote in large letters, *inconvenienti*. "Do you understand? It is not convenient to be locked up, when one depends on his circulation for

his life, so I thought the Continent the best place for me. Here I live a sort of Bohemian existence; sometimes luxuriously, sometimes very simply; but always within the income I receive from my publishers. One thing I have sworn, and to that I intend to keep. It is to avoid debt as one would a pestilence. It has ruined me, and blighted me worse than the leprosy; for it has not only driven me from my people, but it has driven me from my country. If it were not for debt, I might return to England and settle down into a decent member of society; then perhaps Elizabeth would listen to me."

"I think," said Claude, earnestly, "you might settle down respectably even in France. Remain here awhile with me, and draw strength from these rugged shores and stern rocks. Here are subjects for romance of the most stirring kind. Chivalry and heroism have bloomed and flourished beautifully here. Take for a subject the early struggles of La Vendée, or the tragedy of Quiberon; from either you can gather material of the most noble character, examples of the most lofty courage and tender sacrifice. Remain here, and I will show you that there is a deeper peace and happiness to be found in such a life than one can experience in the gay and illusive world."

"You are kind," replied Raymond, gratefully, "but I have not a strong soul like you, nor a nature superior to the privations that such a life would entail; my early education has unfitted me for it."

"But it is not too late to counteract the enervating effects of your past life," returned Claude. "I was once a luxurious idler; for more than twenty years I lived a life of ease and refinement, and it has taken me a long time to kill the yearning for it again. For five years I have been trying to harden and strengthen my character by contact with the rudest creations of God. I have abjured the refinements of life until I am fitted to enjoy them without abusing them. By and by I may go back to them, but it will be with a different estimate of humanity and a deeper knowledge of myself."

Raymond arose, and looking at his

watch, said, "It is high noon. I did not think we had been here so long. I have opened my heart to you as a school-boy does to his mother. You have won my confidence by some power known only to yourself, and taken possession of my affections by storm. I must know more of you; you are an interesting study which I must pursue more extensively; therefore I shall remain here for a while. Perhaps I may be able to dig an epic out of the stones of Carnac and the Morbihan, or, better still, a romance from the Venus of Quinipily."

"I am delighted," replied Claude, with a warm smile, "that you have decided so quickly, and so agreeably to myself. Now allow me to offer you the poor hospitality of my old château, which perhaps is not worse than La Croix Verte."

"Thanks," returned Raymond, holding out his hand, "we will speak of that when Sir Edward leaves, which he assured me this morning would be very soon. Now I must return to him, for he proposed a visit of thanks to you, after I had come here to pay the boatman the value of his ruined craft, and he will fume like a boiling kettle if I keep him waiting. Shall we find you at the château a little later?"

Claude assured him that he should be there, and should be honored and happy to receive them. Then with a warm *au revoir* they parted.

## PART SEVENTH.

### YOU MUST NOT SEE HIM AGAIN.

WHEN Céleste and Elizabeth reached their room in the convent of St. Gildas, after the terrible scene on the beach, both were exhausted from the excitement, and both were disinclined to talk because of the various emotions that filled each heart.

Céleste had thrown herself on the bed, its canopy of heavy curtains making a deep shadow, into which she crept that her companion might not see she was weeping silently with her hands pressed over her face.

Elizabeth had pulled one of the stiff, uncomfortable chairs up to the fireplace, where smouldered a few bits of wood, and sat with her feet on the fender, looking steadily into the dull ashes and smoke. It was anything but a cheerful place. The wind wailed down the chimney, like the cries of restless, suffering spirits. Perhaps the uncomfortable souls of the sinful old monks who tried to poison the unhappy Abélard were abroad that night on the wings of the wind and the darkness. The rickety doors rattled dismally, and the loose windows clattered as though gaunt hands of invisible forms were striving in vain to undo the heavy fastenings. Céleste sighed from time to time, and looked wistfully toward Elizabeth. The noble English face was grave, resolute, and full of care, as it turned furtively, at intervals, toward the canopied bed, from whence proceeded the sighs that were almost sobs. At length she leaned forward and, taking up the bellows, gave two or three strong, decisive puffs which sent up a cloud of smoke and then a bright flame, while she watched it steadily, still holding the bellows in her hand. She was evidently battling with some conviction; tenderness, pity, determination, and sorrow all passed over her face in quick succession. She laid the bellows down suddenly, partly arose, and then sank into her chair again, glancing toward the bed. A moment after a quick, sharp sob told her that Céleste needed her. Springing to the side of the weeper, she clasped her in her arms, and drew the fair head to her bosom with the almost savage clasp of a mother who sees danger approaching a beloved child, and would ward it off.

"Don't weep, darling, don't, I pray; you are so tired and nervous already that any more excitement will make you positively ill. I know all about it, I have suffered it all with you."

"O Elizabeth! must I tell Sir Edward?" sobbed Céleste, clinging to her companion. "I never thought to see him again, much less to make such a confession; the fear and anguish of the moment wrung it from me. The sight of his suffering face brought back all my old love. O Elizabeth! what shall I do? shall I tell Sir Edward and beg

him to send me away from him forever?"

"I have thought it all over, darling," said Elizabeth, with the gravity of a judge deciding a case of the greatest moment, — "I have thought it all over, and I have decided that you need not tell papa. It can do no good now, but you must promise me one thing, Céleste, — will you?"

"Yes, yes, *chérie*, anything you wish."

"Well, you must promise, for papa's sake, that you will not see M. le Comte de Clermont again. You could not avoid this meeting, for you did not foresee it; but you must not meet him again."

"You are right, Elizabeth, I know I must not, although I would give much to explain all to him. May I write to him but once, dear, only once? Tell me that I may, and I shall be happier."

Elizabeth thought a long time with knitted brows and compressed lips, while Céleste still clung to her caressingly. At length she said, "Yes, I think you may write to him once; he has great claims upon our gratitude. It is true that you have wronged him deeply, for he has a noble soul, and you should assure him of your regret; in short, as you say, you should explain all to him. It may make him happier and more contented to give you up forever."

Céleste sobbed anew, hiding her face on Elizabeth's shoulder, while she murmured between her sobs, "Poor Claude! poor, unhappy Claude!"

"You must not think too much of him, and too little of your husband," said Elizabeth, with some severity in her voice. "Remember you are papa's wife now, and you must not indulge in sentimental weeping for another."

"O Elizabeth!" cried Céleste, looking up reproachfully, "do you think I forget my good husband in my pity for Claude? Am I wrong to pity him? Has he not suffered much through me?"

"I don't mean to be severe, darling," replied Elizabeth in a softened tone, "but I wish to do right. It is a hard thing for me to decide for you in such a matter as this, I have had so little experience of life; but still my heart speaks for you. I think I am not wrong in saying you may write to M. le Comte

once, just once; but I am sure I am right in saying you must not see him again. To-morrow morning I shall ask papa to take us away directly from this place. We have several reasons for wishing to leave. Sea-bathing does not suit you, and it is very dreary beside, and not any too comfortable in this old convent; and I am sure papa will like to go, he is so disgusted with the miserable inn and the dirty town. Shall I ask him to go after to-morrow?"

"If you wish," replied Céleste, still weeping bitterly.

Elizabeth looked at her with profound pity. She could read her friend's heart. She knew her conscience said go, but that her inclination cried stay. So the noble girl determined to save her the struggle and to decide for her. "Now, darling," she said, laying her back on the pillow and kissing her tenderly, "try to be calm. Pray to God, and he will give you peace and rest."

Céleste closed her eyes, folded her hands over her throbbing heart, and tried earnestly to fix her thoughts on the infinite love of Christ and the tender pity of his mother; but late into the night, under the moaning of the wind and the sighing of the sea, Elizabeth heard suppressed sobs that wrung her heart and filled her soul with sorrow. The next morning she walked into Sarzeau to speak to her father, while Céleste wrote to Claude.

When Philip Raymond reached La Croix Verte, after his long conversation with Claude, Sir Edward informed him of Elizabeth's visit, and of her request to leave St. Gildas the next day. "I am glad Lady Courtnay is tired of the place," said the gray-haired sybarite, "for I am heartily sick of this dirty hole, and the greasy food has so deranged my stomach that I shall never recover from its effects."

Philip thought of Elizabeth, and hesitated before announcing to Sir Edward his intention of remaining; after debating it interiorly for a moment, he concluded that for the present his case was hopeless, and there was nothing to be gained from her society but the pleasure of it, which was as well a danger of too serious a nature to be indulged in without paying a penalty

afterward. So he said, "I regret to lose your charming society, Sir Edward, but I have decided to remain here for a while in order to study geology, as I intend to write a poem on the 'Stones of Carnac.'"

"A sublime subject," replied Sir Edward, banteringly, "and one truly worthy your inventive brain. I hope your digestive organs are stronger than mine, or Pegasus, weighed down with heavy bread and greasy soup, may refuse to soar."

"I do not intend remaining to be poisoned by the *cuisine* of La Croix Verte. I have accepted an invitation from M. le Comte de Clermont to stay with him at his château."

"O-h!" said Sir Edward, slowly, "I understand, you have been alone to pour out your gratitude. Well, you are truly polite. I believe I proposed to accompany you when you made that visit, as I have quite as much reason to be grateful to him as you have."

"I beg your pardon. I have not been to the château. I walked down to the shore, at your request, to find the fisherman whose boat we appropriated for our pleasant experiment yesterday, and there I found M. le Comte, absorbed in contemplating — what do you think?"

"The ruined boat, I suppose."

"No; simply a band of blue ribbon, which he concealed as quickly and confusedly as though he had been caught committing a theft."

"A band of blue ribbon!" and Sir Edward shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, that explains his eccentricities. No doubt the falseness of some fair one and the chagrin of disappointed love have turned him mad."

"I am convinced that he has a strange history hidden under his calm and impenetrable face; some tragedy, some mystery, that I am determined to fathom."

"Very well, you may at your leisure, after I am gone; but for the present occupy yourself with thoughts of gratitude, and come with me to his tumble-down château to assist while I make my acknowledgments."

When they entered the great hall of the château, Sir Edward looked at Ray-

mond and made a grimace of surprise, as his eye fell on Tristan, surrounded with his beggarly little flock, and said, in English, following Nanette up the dingy stairs, "This is truly an interesting place, a sort of enchanted castle, with yonder old mummy for a gate-keeper, and this gnome with his horrid little imps for retainers. I am truly puzzled with all this, and thoroughly annoyed at being so deeply indebted to a person so surrounded with mystery. He must be mad, and I have a particular horror of mad people."

When they entered the presence of Claude, he came forward to meet them with such unaffected pleasure and elegant ease that whatever disagreeable impression Sir Edward had received at his entrance disappeared at once, and he felt nothing less than respect for the grave, courteous manner, the unmistakable nobility of the young man, who put aside with such gentle firmness the profuse thanks and acknowledgments of his visitors.

"I think," he said, "you overrate my effort. I did but a very simple duty, and only what either of you would have done under the same circumstances, and, beside, you might have reached the shore without my aid; therefore you are not certain that you owe me anything."

"We owe you our lives," said both, warmly. "We were exhausted, and unable to manage the boat."

"I am but an indifferent rower on smooth water," observed Sir Edward, "as I have practised but little since my Cambridge days, which you must perceive were a long while ago; and my friend Mr. Raymond is but a novice at the oars. The sea was as smooth as glass when its deceitful face tempted us to try our skill, and, leaving the ladies on the beach to await our return, we took possession of a boat which was fastened to a rock, and started out with the greatest confidence. But one can never tell how soon a tempest may overtake him."

"Nature has her moods as well as we," said Raymond. "We proved it yesterday, and I would not have believed so light a boat could have lived so long in such a sea."

"Its lightness was its salvation," returned Claude. "If it had been heavier it would have foundered." And then he adroitly changed the conversation to the subject of the monuments he had visited the day before.

After an hour's interesting discussion, they arose to take leave, and then Sir Edward announced his intention of departing the next day.

Claude turned visibly paler, and for a moment could scarcely reply to the adieus of his guests. But, making an effort to control his emotion, he repeated his invitation to Raymond, and wishing Sir Edward *bon voyage*, they parted with the most friendly feelings.

The baronet and Philip had left the château some distance behind them before either hazarded a remark, and then both exclaimed at the same moment, "He is a mystery."

For a long time after his visitors left him, Claude sat in deep thought, his hands clasped over the blue ribbon that lay upon his heart. He had conversed calmly, and with apparent friendship, for more than an hour, with the husband of Céleste, whom he had doubtless saved from death, and whose professions of gratitude had pierced his soul. This old profligate, old enough to be her father, had won her unfairly, had taken advantage of her helpless, sorrowful position to bind her to him, not for her love, but for the paltry remnant of her wealth. She had been a poor, weak child, left to the power of a designing and unscrupulous guardian, who had used her to accomplish his purpose of self-aggrandizement, and then had given her up to this unprincipled man, who was wasting what little the rapacious greed of the Church had spared her. Was she not still bound to him by every holy right? Did the deception and falsehood that gave her to another free her from him? She loved him still, he knew it, and he thanked God for it. Then did she not, in spite of the laws of man, belong to him? Terrible and sinful thoughts, unworthy of him and his destination, tortured him. He was not infallible, he was not beyond human weakness, and his soul was like a battlefield whereon contend two armies of equal power; he struggled against his

ignoble feelings, but he could not overcome them. For a little while he basely regretted that he had performed a noble act. He tried to reason in this way, but it was false and dangerous reasoning. "Perhaps," he said, "I have interfered with Providence. Perhaps I have stepped in at the moment when her fetters were about to fall, and riveted them anew. Poor, poor child, I have saved his worthless life to work out misery for her." He arose and paced the floor hurriedly. Great drops of sweat stood on his forehead, from which protruded the knotted veins, his lips worked convulsively, he was in an agony of distress. He was a murderer in his heart. He thought of this man dead, Céleste free, Céleste his. He worked himself up to a frenzy of remorse and desire. Poor soul! Where was the Divine strength that the day before had supported him, when he stood on the stormy shore and looked unflinchingly in the face of death? It was gone, overwhelmed, swept away by these billows of passion. I cannot despise him, neither can I condemn him, for he would have been a god if he had never felt the weakness of humanity; and I claim no such exemption for him, nor for any being who lives and breathes. There is much dross mixed with the purest ore, and the process of separation is neither brief nor gentle. We may fume and boil and fret against the white flame that surrounds us, but it burns on all the same and accomplishes our purification.

In the midst of this tumult of passion, Tristan entered softly, and laid a little white violet-scented note in his hand. The servant's gentle eyes spoke mutely his pity and sympathy as he glided away quietly, leaving Claude looking with dim eyes at this white messenger of peace. He knew it was Céleste's writing, and he felt as suddenly calmed as though an angel from God had spoken to him. Perhaps there did, through these pitiful words poured out from a suffering heart.

"Dear Claude, [she said,] Elizabeth has told me that I might write to you once, because she did not think it best that I should see you to tell you how

grateful I am to you for saving my good husband's life, and how I regret the wicked confession I made to you yesterday in my fear and surprise. I hope you have forgotten it, for it will be a greater sin for you to remember it, than it was for me to make it when I was half insane from excitement and anxiety.

"There are many things I must explain to you, then I am sure you will forgive me and pity me, and even think kindly of me as you once did in those days when we were children at Clermont.

"Since the day Father Fabien showed you to me, when you were sitting under the laurels, one day, with poor Aimée, my life has never been the same. I believed that you had deceived me, and that you loved her, but wished to marry with me solely for my wealth, or so I was influenced to think by the representations of my guardian. Then followed the dreadful calamity of Aimée's disappearance, and the suspicion of your guilt. It terrified me and maddened me, and for a time I felt that you were indeed culpable. The day I last saw you in the rose-garden at Monthelon you inspired me with horror. Pardon me, dear Claude, for so painful a confession, but it is best to show you how my heart was poisoned against you. I was ill, feeble, and almost insane from grief and disappointment, for I loved you so — then, I mean, before all this happened. But when I became calmer and stronger, your face haunted me with its suffering, and I regretted that I had left you without a word. O Claude, if I could but have seen you then, all might have been explained, and these many days of sorrow spared us! Then, just at the time when the conviction of your innocence began to dawn upon my mind, you fled from Clermont without a word of farewell. For many weeks I hoped, and waited in vain, for some tidings of you, but none came. When my poor mother died, I was indifferent to life, and looked upon a convent as a peaceful retreat where I might hide my sorrow from the world. My guardian urged me to such a step, and I complied. I had no power to resist his strong will, nor any friend to encourage me, until I knew Elizabeth. It was she who

supported me in my opposition when they were determined that I should take vows; but for her I should have yielded. When she left the convent I left with her, and became the wife of Sir Edward. I was so alone in the world, and so feared the influence of the Archdeacon when I should be separated from Elizabeth, and so dreaded a conventual life, that I accepted any protection which would insure me against such a possibility.

"After I had left the convent I found my dear old Fanchette ill, and suffering from poverty. She died in my arms. I heard from her the story of your noble conduct on the night when the mob attacked Clermont, and also of the letters you had written after you left. O Claude, my beloved friend! if I had received those letters, all might have been so different, and to-day I should not be alone writing these sad words with a breaking heart. They never reached me, the Archdeacon prevented it. It is to him and my own weak, credulous heart that I owe all my sorrow.

"Long before I had learned all from Fanchette, I felt that I had been deceived, and that you were innocent, and her *éclaircissements* confirmed the belief. But it was too late then. I was already the wife of another, and we were separated forever. I have tried to look upon it as the will of God, and to accept my fate with patience and calmness. I am grateful to my husband. He is good to me, and he saved me from a life I detested. I adore Elizabeth; she is an angel of strength and consolation. Do not look upon me as altogether miserable. I am, perhaps, happier than you think, and you know life at the best is not altogether satisfactory. My greatest sorrow, my most bitter sorrow, is the memory of my injustice to you. Dear Claude, you have a noble heart, you will understand and forgive me. I desired to see you that I might again implore you to forgive me with my own lips, and take my last farewell of you, but Elizabeth convinced me that it was better not to do so; for her sake, and with the approval of my own conscience, I write you this instead of speaking it. I could not leave you

forever without assuring you of my deep gratitude and esteem. Need I say more to explain all the emotions that fill my heart? I hear from all of your noble life, your efforts for the good of others, your devotion and self-sacrifice; and I am thankful that I can think of you again as I thought of you in those first days of confidence and hope. Do not mourn, dear heart, because we are parted on earth; look forward with me to another life, where severed affections will be reunited, and where we shall speak a new language of love and gratitude. We must not weep too much for happiness we have missed on earth, for we shall find it all reserved for us hereafter. Your poor Céleste, who has wandered from you for a while, shall return to you again, and place her shadowy hand in yours for eternity. Here, I shall pray for you, and hope for the time when I shall meet you again, beyond the tears and vain desires of life. Your name shall be the last upon my lips, as I shall be the first to welcome you to everlasting rest. [Here the letter was soiled with tears, and several words were carefully erased; and then it ended with] Adieu, adieu, I shall never forget to thank God that I have seen you again, and have been allowed to write you this. Adieu, dear Claude, again adieu.

"Ever your

"CÉLESTE."

When Claude had read and reread the letter, his face drenched with tears, he pressed it over and over to his lips on the spot where she had left the traces of her emotion, and said with a broken voice, "Poor darling, sweet, suffering angel, God knows how freely I forgive thee, how tenderly I love thee, and how faithfully I shall cherish thy memory until that day when thou shalt lay thy white hand in mine forever!" Then he folded it and laid it with the blue ribbon over his heart, that now beat tranquilly and gratefully, soothed by her gentle words which had come to him, a message of hope and peace.

The next day Sir Edward Courtney, with his wife and daughter, left Sarzean, and Philip Raymond came to stay with Claude at the château.

## PART EIGHTH.

### THE SECRET OF THE OLD CABINET.

THE summer passed tranquilly to Claude and Philip Raymond. The warmest friendship and the most perfect sympathy existed between them, in spite of their dissimilar characters, and they never wearied of each other's society, but spent most of their days together, examining and studying the stones of Morbihan and Carnac, hunting, rowing, fishing, and exploring every inlet and creek along the coast for miles. Raymond enjoyed the hardy, out-door exercise with the keen zest, the eagerness and light-heartedness, of a boy, declaring often to Claude that he had made a new man of him, and that in his society he had forgotten the charms of Parisian life and its enervating follies. It was as Claude had predicted. The strong, rugged scenes, the simplicity, truth, and freshness of his daily occupation, so free from the trammels and conventionalities of fashionable society, renewed within him something of the purity, enthusiasm, and confidence of his early youth. He wrote some hours each day, and he said he wrote vigorously and with feeling. From the white-haired peasants and fishermen he gathered much material for future work, — many romantic tales of La Vendée, as stirring as they were original; stories of heroism and self-immolation, almost godlike, during the horrors of the persecution, when the valleys were strewn with the dead, and the Loire ran red to the sea.

One evening while they sat together talking over the events of the day, Raymond said to Claude, "This afternoon, while I was at Auray, I met the oldest man in the Department of Morbihan; and he was like a book of ancient legends, which when one has commenced he is loath to leave until he has finished it. In his youth he was a witness of the terrible scenes that took place during the reign of terror in La Vendée, — the horrors of the *Noyades*, and the Republican Marriages. He told me a story so touching that he wept while telling it, and I could scarce refrain from weeping with him. It was this, as nearly as I can remember. In an old château on



the banks of the Loire there lived a fair young Countess with her proud and stern father, who kept her in a sort of captivity, guarded by an ancient woman whose only son was page to the Count. This youth was lowly born, but as beautiful as any hero of romance, and he loved the noble lady; and she, forgetting her station, stooped to listen with rapture to his ardent vows. The fair and golden morning of their love was early overshadowed by the relentless father, who, on discovering their amour, banished the lover from his castle, and married the maid to an old marquis. The youth, disgusted with the cruel despotism of the nobility, against whom he swore eternal vengeance, went to Paris and threw himself into the vortex of the first Revolution, then at its birth, and soon became an officer under Carrier, one of the most atrocious monsters of the time, the inventor of the *Mariages Républicains*, as this outrage of every human feeling was styled. During the wholesale massacre at Nantes, one morning when the doors of the Salorges were thrown open to deliver up their victims to their executioners, there was led forth a noble lady, who walked like a pale angel between the demons who guarded her. When the eyes of the captain who commanded the bloody band called the *Compagnie de Marat* fell upon the beautiful, calm face, he turned deadly pale and shuddered, covering his eyes with his hands. It was the Vendéan countess who stood face to face with the lover who had sworn eternal constancy to her in the old château on the sunny banks of the Loire. 'I do not fear death,' she said with a placid smile, 'I only ask to die with my father; bind me to him, and let our bodies float together out to the sea.'

"No, no, the noble with the peasant," shouted the ruffians, tearing her from the trembling embrace of her father, and dragging her toward a beastly, diseased creature whose loathsome form filled her with horror. 'Strip off the silken cover from the lily of France, and bind her to the foul weed, and fling both into the river to poison the fishes,' cried a monster, seizing the mantle she gathered over her fair bosom, while she looked around upon the crowd of faces

to see if there were pity or relenting in any. Suddenly her eyes lighted up, and a smile like a sunbeam flashed over her face, for she had met the same glance that had once bent over her in passionate love, — a glance that still had power to fill her soul with bliss.

"Before the brutal hands had torn the covering from her white shoulders, the blow of a sabre laid the wretch dead at her feet, and the captain of the *Compagnie de Marat* clasped her in his arms, and, rushing between the soldiers that lined the river's bank, plunged into 'La Baignoire Nationale,' and floated down the red tide heart to heart with the one he had loved so long and so hopelessly. Is not that a subject for a romance? Truly one might envy such a blissful death. After the bitter disappointment, the passionate desire, the weary waiting of such a life, the horror and anguish of such a moment, to be united, and united forever! To float away to eternity hand in hand, soul to soul! Do you think they feared death, or suffered in dying?"

"No," replied Claude, his eyes dim and sad with tears, — "no, they welcomed it gladly, as the open portal to a long peace, an everlasting union. He saved her from outrage and degradation, and he crowned his love with his own sacrifice. Perhaps that act atoned for much, and it may be that in the brief moment they tasted more of happiness than we ever drain from the slow drops that fill the diluted cup of earthly joy."

"On that subject I shall write a story which will touch the heart and make it weep," said Philip, rising; "now, while I feel the necessary *furor poeticus*, I will go to my room and pour it all out in words that burn. Adieu until to-morrow morning."

Some who read this may never have seen Philip Raymond's poem; but I have, for not many years ago, on a languid summer afternoon, I sat alone in the château of Sarzeau and read it with tears, in the very chamber where it was written.

When the winter winds began to rattle the casements, and blow cold and piercing over the barren peninsula of Rhuy, Raymond became uneasy and spoke of returning to Paris. He had

received a letter from Sir Edward Courtney, who had returned there with his wife and daughter, and Philip's heart still inclined toward Elizabeth. Claude did not oppose him, for he knew that Nature announces her own cures as well as her needs, and that a longer stay in the solitude of Sarzeau might result in disgust and *ennui*, and so spoil all the good that had been done. For himself he had much to do for the winter; he had already begun the repairs on the château, and had sent a list to Paris for his books, and his school had so extended itself that he needed more assistance than Tristan could give him. In the town of Auray he had found a young priest of no common attainments and of a pure unselfish life, who scarcely subsisted on a poverty-stricken curacy. Claude's offer to him of the charge of his library and school, with a very fair compensation, was eagerly accepted, and he became a most earnest worker in establishing an institution that was to be a lasting benefit to the humble town of Sarzeau.

Claude had discovered that a mutual good had arisen from the companionship of Raymond, who, fresh from the active world, had enlightened and enlarged his ideas, which had become rather clouded and limited during his seclusion from society. He was a regenerator at heart, and therefore could not long be contented with a narrow sphere of action. The needs of humanity, both moral and physical, which exist in a great metropolis, had strongly presented their claims to his attention, and awakened in his heart a desire to extend his labor and influence beyond the narrow limits of the little provincial town. Sometimes he said to Philip, "*Mon ami*, when I have completed my repairs, established my library and school, and find all in perfect working order, perhaps I may try if I am strong enough to bear the temptations and luxuries of Paris." So they parted with the pleasant hope of an early reunion. — Philip to return stronger and better to the fashion and folly he had left for a time, and Claude to continue calmly and patiently the good work he had begun.

Toward spring the repairs were completed, the books had arrived from Paris, the old hall was changed into a simple but substantial library, all the rooms were thoroughly renovated and furnished in a suitable manner, and a large apartment on the other side of the court had been fitted up as a school for children, while the scholars of a more advanced age met in the library.

Tristan's satisfaction knew no bounds, for he looked upon these great improvements as the result of his little experiment in education, and upon his master's generosity as something sublime. "God will reward him by making him honored and happy before his death," he would often say in confidence to the young priest, who also admired and revered M. le Comte.

Claude had gained a crown of love and esteem from the honest hearts of his poor subjects, which he valued more than the jewelled diadem of a monarch. It was a reward of such priceless worth that he sometimes forgot the spear from which he had won it, and rejoiced over the scars of the wounds that he had received during his combats. His victory over every heart had been complete. Even the Curé, since he had become a frequent guest at the château, had tried to appear in a dress more befitting the dignity of his office, had eaten and drunk less gluttonously in public, and had given closer attention to his sacred duties; while at La Croix Verte, M. le Comte was welcomed with the deference and respect that a king would have received had he deigned to step over the threshold, which was now certainly cleaner than it was the first time we crossed it, and the guests assembled there were less rude and boisterous. Instead of cards and dominoes with their coffee, one might see all the popular journals, and hear much earnest, intelligent conversation, over which M. Jacquelon usually presided with dignity, still maintaining his position as a great scholar.

During the time of the rehabilitation of the château, there occurred an event which colored all Claude's after years, — another link in that mysterious chain of circumstances which we blindly call



fate, another of those simplest of means which Providence sometimes employs to work out great designs or to reveal profound secrets. While renovating some of the time-injured furniture, the thought occurred to him that some repairs were necessary on the old cabinet which we have before referred to. He had employed a provincial artist, whose skill he rather doubted, and one day, while watching his bungling attempts to replace some of the tiny pieces of the tarsia on a panel, it suddenly flew open and revealed a small aperture which contained a package of yellow, dusty papers. Claude took them from their concealed niche with a strange feeling of awe and hesitancy. He was sure they contained some secret that it was better for him to learn alone, so he waited until the man had finished his work and departed; then he sat down in the gathering twilight, and, oppressed with a nameless fear, untied the faded ribbon that confined the package. The two most important papers were folded together and surrounded with a sealed band, which he broke with trembling fingers, for it seemed like touching the decayed bones of his ancestors. The first he opened and read. It was a certificate of the civil marriage between M. Claude Louis Linnés Vivien Valentin Comte de Clermont and Geneviève Marie Gautier, in the presence of the *officier de l'état civil* of the town of Châteauroux, capital of the Département de l'Indre. It was dated May 14, 18—, and witnessed by Pierre Creton and André Renaud, and bore the seal of the state. The second was a certificate of the religious marriage, performed in the church of St. Etienne of Bourg Dieu, by the Curé, Joseph Clisson. This bore the same date and the names of the same witnesses. He read them both over twice before he could fully understand them, and then he saw that they were the indisputable proofs of the marriage of his father with some other woman than his mother, for she was Countess Catherine de Clameran, sole survivor of an old impoverished family of Orleans, and this name was Geneviève Marie Gautier, who must have been a *bourgeoise*, and the date was sixteen years before his birth, and four-

teen years before the marriage of his mother. Then his father, in his early years, had married privately some obscure girl whom he had never acknowledged as his wife, and who had probably died without issue. He breathed more freely as he laid down the certificates and took up the package of letters. They were in his father's writing, which was very peculiar, and not easy to be mistaken for another's, and dated from Paris, Baden, Vichy, Ems, and other fashionable summer resorts of France, and addressed, some to Chateau Clermont, others to Paris, and two or three to Châteauroux. Claude read them breathlessly, and learned from their contents that Geneviève Marie Gautier was a beautiful singer then *la mode* in the fashionable society of Paris. She must have been as lovely as an angel, and as virtuous as she was lovely, if one could judge from the impassioned words inscribed upon these time-stained letters. Ah! if when we pen our glowing effusions we could tell to what end they were destined, what strange eyes would see them in all their meaningless mockery, long after we are dust, and long after circumstances have proved their insincerity, methinks we should contract our expansiveness, cool our ardor, and confine our redundancy to the simple, emphatic truth. When M. le Comte de Clermont, in the heyday of youth and passion, wrote those ardent professions of adoration, he did not intend them to be read by his son nearly fifty years afterward. No, they were only penned for "the most beautiful eyes" of sweet Geneviève Gautier, whose wonderful voice, bewitching grace, and purity of heart, made her the theme of every tongue. Those that bore the earliest date were tender, fervent, and pure, the outburst of a truthful heart, a deep devotion, and they must have been written before M. le Comte became a philosopher and a profligate. It was curious to note the change, following them from date to date: the first enthusiastic avowal of admiration, the first timid expressions of devotion, followed by the first earnest and apparently truthful professions of love, to which succeeded the passionate protestations of an adoration strengthened by her virtuous

refusal to reciprocate any but a pure affection; then the proposal of a marriage that should, for various reasons, be kept private for a time, the rapturous outburst of thanks in reply to the letter of compliance, and, after an interval of more than a year in the dates, another dated Paris, addressed to her at Clermont, where they had evidently been living always together during that time, for in this letter he calls her his wife, and declares he cannot support the separation from her, even for a week; then another, nearly a year later, expresses his joy at the birth of a son, and his intention of hastening to her from Baden, where he has been passing some months; then another interval, followed by cold, formal letters, in which allusion is made to reproaches that annoy, and chains that press heavily; a little later he advises her to return to Châteauroux, and afterward adds to this a more cruel and determined order to leave Clermont at once, refers to the burning of the office of registers at Châteauroux, which he says "destroys the only existing proofs of my rash and ill-timed marriage," and speaks of placing the boy in some institution, and of allowing her a sufficient income to live wherever she prefers, comfortably; then another, and the last of the number, evidently in reply to a strong appeal from her, cold and unscrupulously wicked, utterly refusing to acknowledge her or her child, and commanding her, in the most unmistakable terms, to leave Clermont without delay.

Claude had not read these letters in the order in which we have given a brief outline of their contents. He had gone over them rapidly with burning cheeks and throbbing temples, without noticing their succession; but when he had finished them he understood all that was necessary to reveal to him his father's true character, and he suffered as he never had before, for his faith in his idolized father—his dead father whose memory he had revered as something sacred—was utterly destroyed, and his hitherto honored name was denuded of all save the knowledge of the black crime that seemed written in indelible characters upon these time-stained pages by his

own hand, which had been so long quiet in the unbroken rest of the grave. He thought of the sorrowing, suffering woman driven out with her innocent child. The ruin of her life seemed to weigh upon him and crush him as though he had been a participator in the crime; and with it all came the terrible question, "What am I, if this unhappy woman still lives? and what proof have I that she does not? and where is the son that was born of this union? Are both mother and child dead? O my father, my father! what an inheritance of sin and misery you have left to me!" He examined again and again the papers, and the more he did so the clearer the whole history presented itself to his stricken heart. The lovely, virtuous singer, the ardent lover mad with his passion, and determined to possess her at any cost, the private marriage in the obscure town far from Paris, the satiety, weariness, and indifference, the neglected wife shut up in the chateau of Clermont, the birth of a son that renewed for a little time his affection for the mother; then the relapsing into the former neglect and coldness, the evident chafing and fretting under the fetters of a *mésalliance*, and the desire of freedom even at the price of truth and honor; the opportune destruction of what he believes to be all the proofs of his hasty marriage, and finally, the most dreadful of all, the denial of his wife and child. But how came these papers, such damning proofs of his crime, concealed in this old cabinet in the chateau of Sarzeau, so far from the scene of action? A light dawned upon his mind when he remembered Nanette had told him that this piece of furniture had been brought from Clermont. Then, in all probability, the pallid hands of poor Geneviève had placed them there for safety. Again, if she had possessed these sure proofs, why had she not used them to reinstate herself and child? There was some mystery, and the more he thought of it the more complicated it became; yet he pondered on it, determined to solve it if possible. "If this son still lives," he said over and over to himself, "he is Count of Clermont. And if the heart of the unfortunate Geneviève did

not break long ago under the pressure of her woes, she is Countess of Clermont. I will go to Châteauroux. I will go at once, and learn all I possibly can. There I may be able to solve the secret of these letters." Another solemn duty, another necessity for a great sacrifice, had suddenly thrust itself upon him. He understood all it involved, yet he was none the less decided to fulfil it. It might strip him of all; it might brand him with shame; and it would certainly place the name of his father in obloquy before the world. Nevertheless, it was his duty to expose such a crime; to give back to the wronged what they had been robbed of, and he was resolved not to flinch before it.

When Tristan entered to announce dinner, he found his master sitting with pale, sorrowful face over this package of letters. He looked up, and, smiling dimly, held out one hand to the hunchback, while he laid the other on the papers, saying, "My dear boy, I have found something here that may strip me of everything, everything, even my name; do you understand how terrible such a discovery is?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" was all Tristan said, but his face expressed the most startled surprise and poignant grief.

"To-morrow I must go to Châteauroux, and you will remain here until I return. You will always be true to me, Tristan? no matter what comes, you will be faithful?"

"O monsieur! you know I will. My heart is yours forever; it beats always for you, and it bleeds because it cannot bear a part of your sorrows."

"God bless you, dear, patient, loyal soul," said Claude, smiling through his tears. "With your love to console me, I may yet give my misfortunes a noble ending."

## PART NINTH.

### CHATEAUXROUX.

WHEN Claude arrived at La Poste, the principal inn of Châteauroux, his earnest intention to discover something of the fate of Geneviève Gautier and her

child was not in the least abated. It was a dark, rainy night in March, and the wind sighed around the house with sad complainings, that awoke strange fancies in his overburdened heart. Perhaps in that very room his father had sat on such a night with the fair Geneviève, or perhaps alone, thinking of her, and wishing away the hours that lagged between him and his desires. From the shadows of the great canopied bed, the grim wardrobe, the deeply recessed windows, he almost expected to see a graceful form steal forth and stand before him, with slender clasped hands, and eyes full of earnest entreaty. The name of Geneviève was stamped upon his brain with Châteauroux, and every spot seemed filled with her invisible presence; he felt as though no other character had any important place in the history of the town. He forgot that others whose names were known to the world had figured there, that it was the birthplace of the good General Bertrand, and that the old castle on the hill above the Indre was the lifelong prison of the unfortunate Princesse de Condé, niece of Richelieu. He did not consider that the modest name of Geneviève Gautier might never have been heard of beyond the circle of her humble family. And if it had been then, more than forty years ago, now it might have been long forgotten and blotted out by death and the grave. Poor Geneviève! what a pitiful reward for her talents and virtue, what a sad compensation for her youth, beauty, and honor! He despised the memory of his father, he felt a loathing of the life that ran in his veins, a life derived from one so unworthy, and he thought, "Thank God that the grave has hidden him from my scorn and contempt. He was my father, now he is but a handful of dust, too miserable a thing against which to cherish a feeling of revenge." Then he remembered the son of Geneviève; if he was living he was the Count of Clermont, the rightful inheritor of the château. What was he like, this unknown brother, who had so suddenly brought to life a feeling of fraternity within his heart? Was he a coarse boor brought up among peasants and ignorants; a low-bred clod who would step into his place and thrust

him from wealth to poverty? In any case he was his brother, the same blood flowed in their veins, and he hoped to be equal to his duty in affection as well as in right. "If I can but find him possessing a good simple heart, uncorrupted by the vices and vulgarities of his associates, I will take him by the hand, educate him, and make him worthy of the position he will fill." These were the noble and unselfish intentions that filled his generous soul, and he repeated softly to himself, as he looked into the glowing coals whose warmth seemed to invade his heart: "My brother, my brother. Ah, it will give me another interest in life! If he has but inherited the virtue and beauty of his unhappy mother, he will indeed be worthy of my love. I will meet him with an ardent desire to win his affection, an honest determination to do him good, and I believe I shall not fail." So building up this fair structure of imaginary happiness, with pleasant and gentle intentions, he brooded over his fire until the servant announced his dinner, which was served in an adjoining room.

Claude was anxious to begin his inquiries that night; so after the dinner was over he summoned the landlord to his room, expecting him to be the traditional old man stuffed with the history of every family in the department; but instead there entered with a flourish a round-faced, smooth-cheeked individual of about twenty-four years of age, who asked, with a very modern affectation of voice and manner, how he might be useful to M. le Comte.

Claude looked a little disappointed at the youthful appearance of his visitor, and said, as he motioned him to a chair, "My friend, I am afraid you cannot give me the information I wish. I had expected to see an older person in the proprietor of La Poste, one who could remember back some forty years."

"I am sorry, monsieur, that I am not older, to be of some service to you. My father was very old, and could have told you all about the town and its inhabitants, and every event that occurred from his childhood,—for he had a remarkable memory, my poor father; but unfortunately for you, monsieur, he died four years ago, and I am sure there is

not another person in the Department who knows so much of the history of Châteauroux as he did."

"It is not of the history of the town that I wish information, it is of a very humble person of the name of Geneviève Gautier, who, if she still lives, must be more than sixty years of age. Have you ever heard the name?"

"Gautier, Gautier, O yes, monsieur, it is a very common name in the Department de l'Indre, and there are several families in the town, but of Geneviève Gautier I have never heard."

"Ah!" replied Claude, with a sigh of disappointment mingled with relief. "I am foolish to suppose that you could know anything of her, for it is more than probable that she died long before you were born."

"It is likely, monsieur, for Châteauroux is not so large that if any one was living here by the name of Geneviève, which is very uncommon in this part of the country, I should not have heard it some time, and remembered it. But, monsieur, to-morrow morning, if you wish, I will accompany you to an old woman by the name of Gautier, who lives in the Rue St. Etienne; she is very old, and she may be able to tell you all you wish to know."

Claude thanked the landlord and dismissed him; then he sat before his fire and thought restlessly of all the possibilities and probabilities of his success or defeat in his undertaking, and wished anxiously that it was already morning. At last he threw himself on his bed, and lay awake a long time, still thinking of Geneviève Gautier. And when he slept, overcome by weariness, he dreamed of Geneviève Gautier,—dreamed that he had found her, but she was still and pale in her coffin, with face and hands of matchless beauty; that a priest kneeled by her head, and sobbed, and murmured between his sobs, "*Ora pro nobis, ora pro nobis.*" And while he looked at both, the dead Geneviève and the kneeling priest, the dead smiled, a wan, sweet smile, like moonlight flickering over a marble face; and the cowl falling away from the one who prayed revealed the haggard face of Père Benoit, stamped with the fiendish hate that had disfigured it on that night at Clermont,

when unconsciousness had obliterated it from his sight.

It was broad day when Claude awoke from the nightmare-like dream, that still troubled him with its strange influence; he did not like that the inscrutable Père Benoit should be connected even in a dream with the gentle Geneviève Gautier. It only served to make the mystery darker and deeper.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast he found the landlord ready to accompany him to the Rue St. Etienne. Together they threaded the narrow, dirty streets, until they came to one still narrower and dirtier than the others, lined on each side with hucksters' stalls, shops of tailors, shoemakers, and chair-makers, who each pursued his peaceful avocation on the side of the street before his door, unmolested by the passers by. Before one of the stalls, in the warm sun, sat a wizened old woman, her dirty knitting in her lap, her bony hands clutching a stick ornamented with tufts of bright-colored yarns, which she occasionally flourished over her stand to drive away the few flies that dared to alight upon her shrivelled fruits and vegetables.

"This is Mère Gautier," said the landlord, as he touched his hat and left Claude to a private conversation with the old crone, whose bleared eyes lighted up and whose shrunken lips trembled in a dim smile of welcome to what she supposed to be a customer.

"I do not wish to buy anything, my good woman," said Claude kindly, as she began to point out her choicest articles, — "I do not wish to buy, I only wish to ask you a few questions."

The old woman sunk back in her seat disappointedly, and resumed her attack on the foraging flies more vigorously than before, while her face seemed to say plainly, "Questions never bring me any money, and I have something else to do beside wasting my time in answering them."

The would-be interlocutor understood this, and, wishing to be successful in his investigation, he opened his pocket-book and laid a ten-franc piece on the old creature's lap. It acted like a charm, her eyes brightened, her mouth relaxed, and, forgetting her con-

stant torments, she dropped the wisp, and wiped off, with her dirty apron, a three-legged stool, which she begged monsieur to take, while she assured him, with the utmost deference, that she was entirely at his service.

Claude took the proffered seat and drew it confidentially near the old woman, in defiance of the battery of eyes levelled upon him from every window and door in the street, while he said in a persuasive voice, "I wish to learn something of one of your family, Geneviève Gautier. You must remember her, for she was living about thirty-five years ago, and she may still be alive, for aught I know to the contrary."

"Geneviève Gautier, Genev—ève Gau—tier," said the old woman slowly, striving to fish up the owner of the name from the profound depths of her memory. "Yes, monsieur, I do remember her, but that unfortunate girl did not belong to our family; she was in no way connected with our respectable family, monsieur." At this information Claude felt relieved, and politely regretted his error. "She was the orphan of a *fabricant* at Bourg Dieu, who had lofty ideas, and gave her music and dancing-masters, and educated her beyond her condition, which was her ruin, monsieur; and, beside, she was so unfortunate as to have a pretty face and a fine voice. Well, she went to Paris, — you know Paris is a long way off, and a very wicked town; there she became a singer in a theatre, or some other trap of Satan, and that was the end of her." And Mère Gautier closed her lips and folded her hands as if she wished to dismiss the subject.

"And is that all you know of her?" inquired Claude, sharply; for he was disappointed at the old woman's terseness, and not any too well pleased at her evident contempt of the person under discussion.

"I have told you all a decent woman should tell," — Claude did not know that a spasm of virtue was the reason for her reticence, — "but as you seem to have some motive other than curiosity, monsieur, I may as well add what you ought to know would be the result of such folly. In a few years the girl

came back sick and poor, with a child which she said was the son of a count to whom she had been privately married, both before the *officier civil* of Châteauroux and in the church of St. Etienne, Bourg Dieu; but no one could ever find any record of such a marriage, or any priest who performed it, so no one believed her. Although it is true that the *bureau de l'officier civil* was burned to the ground with all the records. I remember it well, for the *officier* was a good customer, and he lost his life trying to save his books. No one believed her, monsieur, because she should have had the copies of the records of her marriage, but they could not be found; so she lived here awhile half crazed and stupid, and then she disappeared and never came back again. Afterwards I remember hearing that she had died somewhere in Normandy, but I cannot remember how long after."

"And her son?" said Claude, with a trembling heart.

"O monsieur, I can't tell anything about the boy, whether he lived or died. In fact, it has been so many years since I heard her name, that I had almost forgotten that such a person ever lived."

"You do not remember the name of the town where she died?"

"I never knew, monsieur."

"Do you know of any one else in the town who could give me any further information?"

"No, monsieur, I believe there is no one in the whole Department who knows anything more. My husband came from Bourg Dieu, that is how I heard of Geneviève Gautier; and he, God rest his soul, has been dead twenty-five years."

"Then you can tell me nothing more?"

"Nothing more, monsieur," she replied, with a decision that seemed to say, I have given you full ten francs' worth of information, and I have no more time to waste.

At this moment a dirty, bare-armed woman came up, evidently to haggle for a bunch of wilted celery, but in reality to see if she could discover what was the business of the handsome young stranger with Mère Gautier. So as

Claude had nothing more to learn, he touched his hat and walked away.

"A very elegant customer," said the new-comer, looking curiously after the young man. "Did he buy much?"

"The value of this," chuckled the old crone, thrusting the ten-franc piece under the nose of her customer.

"*Eh bien!* if you have done so well this morning, you can afford me this bunch of celery for a half-sou less," returned the woman, as she walked off with the vegetable in question, after having thrown two sous and a half into Mère Gautier's tin cash-box.

Claude walked toward the church of St. Etienne, Bourg Dieu, disappointed and somewhat disheartened, for he had hoped for more precise information from Mère Gautier than he had received. First, he wished for some proof that the poor Geneviève had died before his mother's marriage; and secondly, whether the son were living or dead; and he had obtained neither. Still he did not despair, for he hoped to discover something from the church records that would throw a little more light on the clouded fate of the unfortunate Geneviève and her child. It was some time before he could learn where the Curé lived, and then it was some time before he could get his company to the church, for he was at his noonday meal, and was loath to be disturbed. However, when at last he appeared, Claude found him to be a gentlemanly person, with an intelligent face and kind manner, so he was not disposed to regret having waited patiently.

"I hope monsieur will be able to find the information he desires," he said, as he unlocked the door of the sacristy, where the books were kept.

"I hope the same," replied Claude, calmly, although his heart was ill at ease. "To begin, can you tell me whether a former Curé, one Père Joseph Clisson, is still living? He was Curé of St. Etienne in the year 18—."

"Joseph Clisson," repeated the priest, taking some heavy books from a closet as he spoke. "I will tell you directly, monsieur, whether he was removed or whether he died. In 18—, you say? Here is the letter C; Clisson; Clisson, Jean; Clisson, Pierre; Clisson, Joseph.

Ah, poor man! why did I not remember at once when you spoke of him? Although it was so very long ago, one ought never to forget his melancholy fate. In 18—, one year after your date, monsieur, he went to the Sandwich Islands as a missionary; and there he was killed by the natives, and eaten. Dreadful as it is to repeat, we have every reason to believe he was eaten, monsieur."

Claude sighed; not so much at the tragic and permanent disposal of Père Clisson, as at the constant baffling of his own hopes, and said, "How terrible! But do you not know of any one who was connected with him at that time, and who would be acquainted with contemporary events?"

"O no, monsieur, it was so long ago that I know no one of his age who is now living."

"Will you allow me to look at the record of marriages for 18—?"

"Certainly, certainly, monsieur," replied the priest, pleasantly, as he threw open the door of another closet, filled with old books, having large numbers on their dilapidated backs. Taking a step-ladder he mounted to the top; and running his finger along the different volumes, he said, "That would be between 18— and 18—; ten years each, you see, monsieur; ah, here it is." And he drew one of the shattered, torn books from the place where it had stood for years undisturbed, and reached it to Claude, while he descended the steps.

"It is in a bad state, monsieur, you see the rats have been at it," said the Curé, throwing it down on a desk. A cloud of dust started from it, mixed with a stifling odor of decayed parchment as he opened the leaves, some of which were nearly eaten up. "Whose marriage record do you wish to find, monsieur?"

"That of one Geneviève Gautier, May 14, 18—."

"May 14, 18—. Yes, yes, we will find it. I presume you are a lawyer, monsieur?"

"No, I am not," replied Claude, smiling.

"Some property in question, I suppose; am I not right?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Claude, so

laconically that it checked the very natural curiosity of the priest, who turned quickly the musty, torn pages.

"Here it is, 18—, May 1st, May 2d, May 3d, and so on until May 13th finished the page; and as the priest turned it, Claude saw that the next leaf had been torn off, or gnawed off at the top.

"Rats, rats," exclaimed the Curé with an expression of disgust; "they devour everything."

"Yes," said Claude, looking disappointedly at the mutilated page; "they have eaten the certificate I wished to see; here is nothing left but the names of the witnesses."

"How remarkable!" and the priest put on his glasses and examined carefully the fragment that bore the badly written signatures of Pierre Creton and André Rénaud, — "how remarkable that the names of the witnesses should remain, while what they witnessed to has entirely disappeared."

"I suppose it is useless to ask you if you know of any persons bearing these names?"

"I am sorry to say, monsieur, that I never heard of them before," replied the Curé, shutting the register and returning it to its place. "I have only been *pasteur* of St. Étienne for a few years, and I came here from another part of the country."

Claude saw that there was nothing further to be learned; that neither the name of his father nor the name of Geneviève Gautier was to be found upon the records of St. Étienne, Bourg Dieu. Whether the certificate of their union had been eaten, as well as the unfortunate priest who united them, he could not say; he only knew that the greater part of the page was gone, and that part had been the original register of which he had the copy. So, reluctantly and with a heavy heart, he thanked the Curé for his courtesy, and bidding him and the church of St. Étienne adieu, returned to La Poste but very little wiser than when he left it.

The next morning he left Châteauroux disappointed, but still determined to continue his investigation; for he could not enjoy his inheritance in peace, while he thought there was a possibility that

the rightful heir still lived. The name and fate of Geneviève Gautier was so impressed upon his mind, that nothing could efface it. She seemed to possess him with an invisible presence; to urge him constantly to the fulfilment of this new duty, which he understood fully to be the most sacred, the most imperative, of his life. His heart was so noble, so unselfish, that he did not suffer at the thought of losing wealth and title; he rather desired to find a more worthy

inheritor for the estate of Clermont, which had long been, virtually, without an owner, for he had from the first moment of his departure solemnly sworn to himself that he would never return to the people who had placed him under the obloquy of such a terrible crime until his innocence was acknowledged. And he had also decided never to marry; therefore he felt it to be a double duty to resign Clermont, if the other heir were still living.

## BOOK FOURTH.

### HÔTEL DE VENTADOUR.

#### PART FIRST.

##### "LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI."

THOSE who are seeking for the residences of the old French aristocracy will find the Hôtel de Ventadour, in the Rue St. Dominique, Faubourg St. Germain, Paris. It is a massive structure, built of large blocks of smoothly cut stone; the façade ornamented with fluted columns, and elaborately carved cornice and architrave. The windows of the *rez-de-chaussée* are heavily grated, and the ponderous oak doors are beautifully carved, and ornamented with bronze handles, bearing the devices and arms of the family, which boasts of being one of the oldest and most patrician in the Empire. This imposing door opens into a smoothly paved court with a fountain in the centre. Four statues representing the seasons fill the four corners of the quadrangle, and four antique urns stand between them, crowned with flowering shrubs. A broad flight of marble stairs with deep niches, each containing fine statuary, conducts to the *premier étage*; there a servant in a blue livery faced with white admits one into a large, square antechamber, with a floor of different colored marbles, and a lofty frescoed ceiling. The walls are covered with historical pictures, each representing some battle in which

a Marquis de Ventadour lost his life for his country; and if it be in winter, a bright fire burns in a huge chimney of Flanders tile, while a number of servants lounge on the carved chairs that are ranged around the walls. This room opens into another still longer, the floor of light-colored, highly polished wood, over the centre of which is laid a strip of Persian carpet. The frescoed ceiling is of a more delicate color and design than the first, and the walls are covered with mirrors and pictures. Great Sèvres vases stand on ebony brackets; and antique marble consoles support, one the bust of Marie Antoinette, the other that of Louis XVI. The furniture of carved ebony is covered with crimson embossed velvet, and curtains of the same rich material hang over the windows and doors. Within is another room equal in size and furnishing, only that the color of the tapestry is blue, and the floor is covered with a Gobelin carpet. Beyond, again, is another magnificent and brilliant apartment, resplendent with scarlet and gold; the walls and ceiling are scarlet, picked out with gold. The furniture is scarlet, with heavily gilded frames; the doors and windows are hung with scarlet, lined with gold. The ornaments, tables, and chandeliers are of the French Renaissance, gold, and

glitter with an effect of color truly dazzling, a richness almost barbaric. Here is a closed door. We have passed through the entire reception suite, and have now reached the private apartments of Madame la Marquise de Ventadour. It is true, the door is closed against intrusion, but we have a *carte d'admission*, and may be allowed to enter. This is the boudoir of Madame la Marquise, and it is a gem of perfection. Entering from the splendor of the scarlet room, it strikes one with its pure, cool color. The walls are padded with white silk knotted with pale green floss; the ceiling is painted to represent a mass of delicate clouds studded with silver stars; while at the four corners four cherubs hold up garlands of pale roses and lilies. The furniture is white, enamelled, touched with dull gold, and tapestried with pale rose-tinted silk, while clouds of lace, over the same delicate color, cover the windows and doors; and the carpet is of white velvet, overlaid with wreaths of lilies and roses. There are no mirrors, no pictures, no dainty ornaments. A Venetian glass chandelier depends from the ceiling, and a carved alabaster table beneath it supports a frosted silver urn filled with roses and lilies. In a deep, arched niche, lined with rose-colored silk, stands an exquisite group of Niobe, queen of Thebes, clasping her only surviving child in her arms, her woful face turned upward, and the tears frozen on her stony cheeks. The room is perfect in detail and tone; delicate, pure, calm; a fit temple for the goddess who reigns here supreme, the fascinating, dazzling Gabrielle Marquise de Ventadour. Now that we have poorly described the frame, let us try to do more justice to the *tableau vivant* it surrounds.

It is long after midday, but to Madame la Marquise it is morning, and she receives in her boudoir, wrapped in a rose-colored velvet *peignoir* lined with white satin and trimmed with swan's-down; it is open low at the neck, displaying a chemisette of the most delicate lace, which only half conceals the round throat, that rivals in whiteness the large pearls which surround it. Her perfect arms and small hands covered with gems are partially veiled

with the same flimsy web, which falls below her robe of velvet, almost covering the satin-shod feet that rest upon a rose-colored cushion. Her face is of remarkable beauty, but more remarkable still is the abundant and glossy hair, which, carelessly knotted and pinned back with a heavy gold arrow, falls below her waist in waves of silvery whiteness. It is not the whiteness of age, for Madame la Marquise is very young. Certainly not more than twenty-six years have passed over her lovely brow, which is as smooth and fair as an infant's. The romantic say it turned suddenly white during some terrible tragedy. The practical say it was bleached by Monsieur Antin, Rue de Richelieu; but as I never repeat gossip, I decline to say anything about it. I only know that on the first occasion when I was introduced into the presence of Madame la Marquise, her hair was as white as it is now. This morning she looks a little languid and pensive as she half reclines on her luxurious sofa, one white arm resting on a rose-colored cushion, the other buried in the folds of her robe. The fair hand, alone visible, holds negligently a small book of prayers, bound in white vellum and gold. The world says that Madame la Marquise is a most bewitching hypocrite, that she plays the farce of piety to perfection; dances and flirts *ad libitum*, and fasts and prays at discretion, receives the most notorious *roués* of Paris, frequents the most brilliant and Bohemian resorts, intrigues and gambles all night, and goes at dawn to mass. Sometimes she flashes like a meteor on the horizon of society, fascinating, dazzling, enchanting all with her radiant charms; at others, retiring, grave, simple, and serious as a devotee, she absents herself from the scenes that court her, and weeps and prays alone in her little oratory. How much of this is true I cannot say; but one thing I do know. Let the world watch, surmise, and pronounce what it may, it cannot lay its cruel finger upon one black spot in the character of Gabrielle Marquise de Ventadour. She may be reckless, inconsistent, and eccentric; she may be vain, passionate, and cruel; but there is one gem, the gem of her

soul, which she keeps pure from flaw and stain. The *beau monde* of Paris call her "La Belle Dame sans Merci," for she plays with hearts as a child plays with toys; they are thrown at her feet, and the most of them are worthless, so she tosses them about like bubbles while they amuse her, and tramples upon them when she is weary of them.

This morning, as I have said, she reclines upon her sofa, and holds a book of prayers in her hand, but she is not studying it, because she is listening to a young man who sits beside her on a low *tabouret*, reading aloud a manuscript poem. He is Philip Raymond, and several years have passed since he first parted with Claude de Clermont at Sarzeau. In appearance he has changed much, he has grown stronger and handsomer. A Raphaelesque face, with pensive blue eyes and blond hair, must always be interesting, even if it be not the highest type of manly beauty; therefore we have no fault to find with the outward and visible form, but much with the inward and spiritual, for he has not made the advances toward a better and nobler life that we hoped he would after Claude's pure and lofty example and sincere counsel. His genius has not diminished or weakened, but it has rather increased and strengthened. He pours forth his songs in tones that touch all hearts, from the humblest to the highest; his name is a household word throughout England; and while many condemn, all acknowledge that he is touched with the divine fire. In Paris he is considered the literary prodigy of the time; every circle opens its arms to receive him, and he enters all with the graceful charm that wins its way straight to the heart of both sexes; women adore him, and men almost worship him; he is amiable, gentle, and generous, but he is weak and loves pleasure and flattery, barely escaping a life of entire debauchery. Perhaps the only thing that has saved him from the depths is the effect of his frequent visits to Sarzeau, and the example of the noble, self-sacrificing life of Claude, whom he loves and reverences with no common devotion, and the strong beautiful nature of Elizabeth, who still influences in a

measure his character, although they are only friends; for she has declared any other affection impossible, and Philip no longer urges his suit, because he is hopelessly, helplessly, entangled in the chains of La Belle Dame sans Merci, and she deludes him, and torments him in the same way she does her other victims. The poem he is reading to her is of course addressed to her fatal beauty, and it seems to weary her, for when he finishes she says without the least apparent interest, "It is very pretty, but so tame, and I am surfeited with flattery. Why did you not choose some other theme?"

"How can I, when every thought is filled with you?"

"Bah! that is hackneyed."

"You are my inspiration; without thinking of you, I can do nothing."

"Feeble sentimentalities; think sometimes of God and nature."

"You are the god I worship, the nature I adore."

"Impious, I scorn such worship, I would rather have the simple love of a child."

"O Gabrielle! is my passion, my adoration, my life, my soul, nothing to you?"

"Nothing. I do not love you, I have told you so once, and repeated it so often that it has become like the lesson we learn from a hornbook at our mother's knee. Have you no new confidence, no new hope to impart? nothing original to tell? Do tell me something original, I am dying for some new thoughts, for some new emotions."

"I can only tell you the same tale, Gabrielle, and I shall repeat it forever, and with my last breath."

"O, how you weary me! If you are not more amusing, I shall refuse to admit you to a *tête-à-tête*."

"*Mon Dieu!* Gabrielle, do not punish me so severely. I will do anything you wish. Shall I improvise a song on your guitar? Shall I declaim an epic poem? Shall I recite some of the tragedies of the first Revolution? Shall I give you some gossip from Galiguani, Punch, or Bell's Life? Shall I dance the tarantella, salterello, or cachucha? Shall I perform some tricks of legerdemain, or contort my graceful body into



a writhing gymnast? Tell me, pray tell me, what I shall do to amuse you."

"*Quel enfant!* you know I hate absurdities. Tell me something serious and calm, something of your life at Sarzeau, and of your eccentric friend, M. le Comte de Clermont."

"Ah, I am jealous! But he is in Paris. Shall I bring him, that you may judge of him for yourself? Heavens! are you ill, Gabrielle? You are whiter than death!"

"Ill? no, you stupid. I am only weary enough to die with your twaddle. In Paris? What has induced him to leave his hermitage and charity-school, his barren rocks and dinner of herbs, for the follies and temptations of this modern Gomorrah?"

"He has done enough good there, by completely renovating and purifying the filthiest little town in France, and educating the most ignorant set of people in all the country; now he wishes for a more extended field of labor, so he has come here to ennoble us all by his beautiful example of perfectly disinterested charity. Ah, he has a great unselfish soul! why are there not more like him?"

"Yes, why not? yours, for example, needs enlarging and elevating."

"O Gabrielle! you are severe. It is not my fault if I have not a superior nature such as he has. Would you love me, if I tried to be more like him?"

"No, not in the least."

"Ah, what a cruel angel you are! you torture me, and drive me almost to despair. I would attempt even impossibilities, if I thought I could win your love."

"Do not, do not, I pray, for if you accomplished them it would not be your reward."

"What the world says of you is true. You have no heart."

"I have no heart for the world, and I am right. What use would the world make of my heart, if I gave it into its cruel keeping? It would break it. Ah! I know its value, and I protect it from invasion. I have sworn it to one, it is sacred to him, none other shall ever possess it."

"To one? to whom? to the memory of your dead husband? Did you love

your husband, Gabrielle? Tell me, did you love him? and have you buried your heart with him in his tomb?"

"Love him! *pas si bête!* why he was but a shadow when I married him,—a shadow trembling under the weight of eighty-four years. *O mon ami,* is it necessary to tell you why I married him? The world surmises, but it does not know, and I shall not enlighten it; but between you and me there is a sort of friendship,—I do not call it affection; I have no affection for you, only a higher liking which makes me truthful with you. Philip, I never lie to you; you are more to my life than any other of the men who surround me, and therefore I will tell you the truth. At twenty, I married the Marquis de Ventadour solely for his title and wealth. He was in his dotage, and childless; so he was entirely in my power, and I took advantage of his imbecility, and made him confer his name upon me, however not before his wife died,—O no, she had been dead nearly two months when I became Marquise de Ventadour. She was as old and feeble as he, and had a passion for rich laces. I was a lace-maker. I came here to repair her laces. I won her confidence. She saw I was clever, and that I understood my business; so she retained me in her service, which was not long, for she died soon after, and I married her husband. And now I wear her old lace, the richest lace in Paris. I think the most of it belonged to Marie Antoinette; for the mother of La Marquise was maid of honor to the unfortunate queen, and one of the first who basely fled with fortune when it turned its back upon the fair *Autrichienne*. Ah! you are surprised and shocked at the revelation. *Mon ami,* you are not superior to the rest of humanity, for you do not like the truth. The world cries out for truth, and when we give it unadulterated, it looks coldly over its shoulder, and says we are mad. You thought I was a lily from the old stock, *sans tache*, an offspring of the purest pedigree of St. Germain, and you are disappointed that it is not so."

"No, I swear you are a diamond, no matter from what mine you were taken, and the old lace of Marie Antoinette is

of double value because your lovely hands have repaired it."

"Thanks, thanks, very prettily said. I understand, my friend, that to you I am diamond, but to the remainder of the world I am paste; that is, if the world had discernment enough to discover the difference between the false and the true. But it has not, and I shall not enlighten it. I puzzle it, I bewilder it. It suspects everything and knows nothing, and yet accepts me as its queen. Do I not even rival the matchless empress? Did she not frown on me last night at the Tuileries because the Emperor picked up my fan which I dropped before her on purpose that she might see his devotion? And have I not all of the ten ministers and the hundred and fifty senators at my beck and call, who have sworn that there is no favor I could ask for in vain? And yet—and yet, Philip, all this power, the power of beauty and wealth, I would gladly lay at the feet of one whose love can never be mine."

"O Gabrielle! you grieve me, you hurt me with such a confession. Is it true then that you had a heart, a warm, passionate heart, and that you have given it to another?"

"Yes, my dear Philip, it is true that once I had a heart, but I have given it to another forever."

"O, you are cruel! you cannot mean it. It cannot be forever."

"Yes, *mon ami*, forever! I have said it, and it is enough; no more questions, no more answers, on that subject. You have interested me, or I have interested myself. Now tell me of the Comte de Clermont. Is he handsome?"

"Yes, very. He is of the noble, serious type; a grave man and yet gentle, with a smile like a child's, and eyes that seem to look through you and beyond you."

"Bring him to me. I wish to know him, although I presume he is a boor and unacquainted with the refinements of life, yet he will be new and refreshing. Will you bring him?"

"Yes, on one condition."

"Name your condition."

"That you do not trifle with him and make him suffer. He is not a boor, he

is a gentleman of the most refined manners, and he has a heart too valuable for you to break."

"I trifle with him, and make him suffer! O no, Philip, I shall have no power over such a noble soul! It is only the foolish and feeble who are subject to my caprices. I pledge you my word I will not make him suffer. Now adieu. Nanon is waiting to dress me for my drive in the Bois. Adieu." And raising the silken curtain that hangs over the door, Madame la Marquise disappears, leaving Philip Raymond bewildered, astonished, and disappointed, but more madly in love than ever.

## PART SECOND.

### A FRIDAY EVENING AT THE HÔTEL VENTADOUR.

It was as Philip Raymond had said, Claude de Clermont was in Paris, where he expected to have been long before, but many things connected with his life and employments at Sarzeau had prevented it. After his unsuccessful visit to Châteauroux he had by no means discontinued his investigation concerning the fate of Geneviève Gautier and her child, but he had spent much time in searching throughout the different towns of Normandy for more reliable information. At last, after much useless inquiry and many failures, he had learned that a person bearing that name had lived, nearly thirty-five years before, in a small town not far from Rouen, and an old woman who remembered her spoke of her as a poor, half-crazed creature with a little boy. After a long search the record of the death of Geneviève Marie Gautier was found, the age corresponding to that of the unfortunate victim of his father's cruelty. No doubt now remained to Claude of her having died several years before his mother's marriage. On examining the record further, he also found inscribed the name of one Louis Gautier, the date a little more than a year after that of the unhappy Geneviève, and the age as near as possible coinciding with that of her son. When Claude had discovered

these facts he felt relieved of a burden that had weighed heavily upon him; for he was now convinced that Geneviève Gautier and her child had both been resting for years, in peace, in the little cemetery of Malaunay.

It was less than a week after his arrival in Paris, when one evening, as he sat writing in his simple but comfortable room in the Rue St. Roch, Philip Raymond entered abruptly. He was in the most brilliant spirits, and wore the most elegant evening dress. "Ah, my friend," he cried, eagerly clasping Claude's proffered hand, "I have an invitation for you from Madame la Marquise de Ventadour, and I am come to take you. Her Friday *soirées* are the most brilliant in Paris. There you will meet all the *beaux esprits*, politicians, ministers, senators, writers, artists, and beauties most sought after by the *beau monde*, beside making the acquaintance of the Marquise, who is the most lovely woman in the country."

"Thanks for the invitation of Madame la Marquise, as well as for your kindness, my dear Philip, but I must beg to be excused from fashionable society, I have neither the time nor the inclination for it."

"You are most provoking," said Raymond, pettishly. "What! do you think to live the life of a hermit here? I pray you to give up such ascetic habits, and become a little more like a sensible being. Paris is not the place to bury one's self; at least make an exception for once, and come with me this evening. You will not regret it, for Madame la Marquise will interest and fascinate you, as she does all the world."

"Bah! not in the least. I have no intention of adding another name to her long list of victims. The Circe has bewitched you, as she has every one else, until you forget the more serious duties of your life to dance attendance upon her with the *jeunesse dorée*, the dandies and beaux who surround her. My dear Philip, you have become her slave, and your chains have degraded you to the same level with the others. Where are your noble intentions, your strong resolves of the past? And your love for the noble Elizabeth, even that is blotted out by this unworthy passion, and you

forget her in the presence of that dangerous coquette."

"O Claude! have a little more charity than the pitiless world. You do not know the woman you are condemning," replied Philip, with a crimson flush.

"No, I do not, it is true, neither do I wish to; beside, at heart I am a republican, and I have no desire to give my hand to the clasp of aristocrats, *roués*, and enriched knaves."

"Ah! you are too severe. You speak as if one should have no pleasure in life."

"No, you do not understand me. I do not condemn pure pleasure. I condemn dainty luxury and gilded vice. If I engage in such diversions, what will become of my serious work? What strength and virtue can I draw from such impure fountains?"

"You talk as though it were a frightful crime to spend an evening in the society of an attractive woman, and as though, because she has the gracious gift to charm, she should be avoided like a pestilence. In the *salons* of Madame la Marquise all meet together on a delightful equality; each one, retaining his own opinions, listens to those of others, and thereby loses his egotism and despotism, and becomes more liberal, less aggressive, and less arrogant. Is it not true that ardent, talented men of the same noble intentions, sometimes without ever having known, hate each other, who, after they have been thrown together under the refining and conciliating influence of good society, come to esteem and like each other? Madame la Marquise has the gracious faculty of making the most opposite parties perfectly at ease together, and the happy effect of her evenings is often to extinguish political suspicions and enmities. She is most liberal in her views of life, and charitable in her judgments, and I venture to assert that, in any good work you may choose to undertake, you will find in her a powerful coadjutor, for she is as noble and generous as she is lovely and fascinating."

"O my dear boy! you are bewitched by the siren; as far as I can learn she is a most heartless coquette, and I am sure her vanity would not be at all suited

with my austerity. I fancy rich dresses, laces and jewels, flattery and luxury, are the subjects she considers most worthy her thoughts. Noble liberty and manly equality have a voice too coarse and a hand too rough to please her dainty tastes; therefore, dear Raymond, say no more. I do not wish to know this woman. I do not wish my serious life disturbed by her follies."

"From your gentle remarks one would think you hated women, and had some grave wrongs to avenge on all the sex. It is absurd for you to be angry with them simply because they like lace and jewels and are beautiful. My opinion is that it is only cowardice that makes you refuse. You are afraid to meet the fire of La Marquise's splendid eyes."

"Not at all; splendid eyes never disturb me."

"Nonsense! you are too young to preach. You don't mean to tell me that a lovely woman has no power to make your heart throb faster?"

"The most lovely creature living has no power to quicken the pulsation of that organ," returned Claude, laughing at Raymond's expression of incredulity. Then he added, more seriously, "No, my friend, I am sincere, the solemn duties of life, the needs and sorrows of humanity, fill my existence, and I have no time to waste in amorous sighing, I leave that to gay gallants like you; the only passion that fills my heart is love for my country."

"Bravo! how patriotic! I swear your noble sentiments will find an echo in the fair bosom of La Belle Marquise, for I have heard her utter the same words a thousand times. Come, my dear Claude, come with me but this once, and I will promise you solemnly that, after you have spent one evening in the society of Gabrielle de Ventadour, and are not charmed with her, I will never again disturb your peace with my selfish desires. I have talked of you so much to her, that she is already interested in you, and prepared to like you immensely. I am dying of jealousy, yet still I insist upon your going, because I have pledged my word to bring you."

"I am sorry, Philip," said Claude,

with some impatience,—"I am sorry you should have done so without consulting me first; you know I have the strongest aversion to fashionable society. However, that you may not break your promise to the fair tyrant, I will go with you once, but only for an hour, for I have much to do."

"Bravo!" cried Raymond, clasping his hands with childish delight. "Now my victory is sure. Make haste with your toilet. Shall I call Tristan to assist? The poor soul was sleeping on a sofa in the anteroom when I entered. Claude, have you noticed how he has changed lately? The boy is dying! he is so thin he is ghastly, and that cough is tearing him to shreds."

"Yes, I know it too well," replied Claude, sadly, as he laid away his papers and closed his desk. "My strongest reason for coming to Paris was that he might have the benefit of milder air and a better physician than Sarzeau affords. No, I will not disturb him, I will dress alone. Poor boy, it wrings my heart to think that I may lose him."

Before Claude had completed his toilet, Tristan entered, and his master's eyes searched his thin face more anxiously than ever. It was true he had changed frightfully. Since Philip had last seen him at Sarzeau, disease had made rapid inroads upon his always feeble constitution; now, as he stood languidly before Claude, his long, pitiful-looking hands folded, and his head wearily dropped on his shoulder, while his eyes, unnaturally large and bright, beamed with gentle pride and satisfaction, his master's heart ached at the feebleness of his appearance, and he said, with a voice as tender as a mother's, "Do you feel a little better this evening, Tristan?"

"O yes, monsieur, much better." It was always the same answer, for he never complained.

"Don't sit up for me, Tristan, go to bed as soon as you like after I am gone," returned Claude, kindly, as he tied the last knot of his white cravat. "Now do I look sufficiently well dressed for fashionable society?"

"O monsieur, you are perfect!" replied Tristan, with undisguised admira-

tion. "I never saw you so elegant before."

"I wish it were for a better cause, my boy," said Claude, drawing on his gloves as he left the room to join Raymond.

"Now you please me, and do credit to yourself; you are elegant, entirely elegant," cried Philip, as he walked around his friend, and examined his dress with the affected airs of a fashionable tailor putting the last touches to the fitting of a new suit. "I am sure the heart of Madame la Marquise will surrender at the first glance. Now, *mon ami*, you must promise me not to try to win her from me, neither to make her suffer by your severity. If you see she is really interested in you, retire from the field, and leave me a fair chance. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes, with all truth, you need have no fears, you will not find a rival in me. She may have all the charms, all the graces, and all the virtues, yet she can have no power to touch my heart; I am protected by an invulnerable armor."

Philip laughed derisively as he gave the coachman the order to drive to the Hôtel Ventadour, Rue St. Dominique.

It was rather late when they arrived, and the *salons* of Madame la Marquise were crowded with a brilliant throng. She stood in the scarlet room, under the light of the great golden chandelier, clothed in dazzling white, and blazing with jewels, receiving with the grace and dignity of a queen the distinguished guests who disputed for her smiles.

In spite of the calmness and stoicism of his character, in spite of the chilling and hardening effect of his years of seclusion, in spite of the armor which he boasted of wearing, Claude's heart bounded and throbbed as it never had before, when his eyes fell upon the remarkable beauty of this woman; his head whirled, and his breath seemed to come in short gasps, thousands of lights danced before him, and thousands of voices deafened him, as he clasped Raymond's arm tightly while he led him forward to present him.

Madame la Marquise de Ventadour

received her guest with the most charming grace and sweetness, the long lashes swept the fair cheeks, and the lips trembling in a half-smile uttered what was unintelligible, yet there was no visible agitation save the rapid rise and fall of the clouds of lace over her bosom, and the sudden pallor that was swiftly succeeded by a delicate flush. Then she raised her splendid eyes and looked Claude steadily in the face, while she addressed him in calm, clear tones, which he did not seem to hear, for he made no reply, only bowing low he drew back and allowed some newcomers to take his place.

"For God's sake!" he said, in a low voice, clasping Philip's arm more tightly, "draw back a little behind this crowd until I get breath. I am stifling. I told you I was not fit for such a scene. The very air poisons me!"

"Nonsense!" returned Raymond, looking at him with surprise; "it is the sudden glare of light, and the confusion of voices. Why, you are like an actor touched with stage fright; or perhaps 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' has sent an arrow straight to your heart."

"For Heaven's sake, Philip, don't jest. I tell you I have had a shock, a terrible shock. I am thoroughly bewildered, leave me alone while I recover myself." And sinking on to a sofa in the alcove of a window, he buried his face in his hands and shut out the glare of light and the dazzling form of Gabrielle de Ventadour. A thousand emotions and memories swept over his soul. It seemed as though the events of his whole life were concentrated into that moment, yet he was not conscious of any one scene being clearer than another. All was chaos, bewildered confusion, a murmur of indistinguishable sounds. A blaze of every color mingled in the wildest disorder.

He was aroused at last by Raymond, who said severely, while he laid his hand on his shoulder, "Come! this will never do. Don't make yourself ridiculous. You are attracting the attention of the whole company. Shake off your nightmare, and go and speak to the Marquise, or leave the room."

Claude started up with a pallid face, passing his hand over his eyes as if to

clear his sight. "It is true, I am a fool, a stupid dolt, to be overcome in this way. But have patience with me, Philip, for a moment, I have received such a shock. Give me your arm, and we will take a turn through the rooms, while I compose myself sufficiently to speak to yonder dazzling creature, then afterwards I will slip quietly away. I cannot remain here, it is no place for me."

"Come with me to the library, it is cooler and quieter there," said Raymond. As they left the alcove together, Claude glanced at La Marquise. She stood in the same place, surrounded by the same throng of admirers, but her eyes were following him. On the threshold of the library another surprise awaited him. A tall, elegant-looking man in purple robes turned, as the two entered, from a group of ecclesiastics who surrounded him, and Claude saw before him Monseigneur the Bishop of Rouen. It acted like an electric shock; all the confusion and feebleness of his mind passed away like a flash before the unflinching gaze of the man who had so wronged him. In that moment each face expressed more than words can describe, while without the least apparent recognition on either side they met, and passed so near that the purple robes of the Bishop brushed against Claude.

When Raymond, with his companion, returned to the scarlet room, the number of worshippers that surrounded La Marquise had not in the least diminished, yet the moment her eyes fell upon them she gracefully motioned both to her side, while she said to Philip, "I am more than grateful to you, M. Raymond, for your prompt compliance with my wishes." Then she turned to Claude with a smile, half grave, half happy, "I have heard so much good of you from your friend, that I have long wished to know you, M. le Comte."

"You honor me, madam," replied Claude, with a low bow, "but I fear you have overestimated my humble efforts, if the kind heart of my friend exaggerates what little I have done to something worthy your notice."

"M. Raymond, will you go and talk

with Madame T——? She is dying for some of your charming compliments." Philip looked reproachfully at La Marquise as he walked off to do her bidding. "Now, M. le Comte," she said, turning to Claude with a bright smile, "I believe you are unacquainted with Parisian society, perhaps you will allow me to point out some of its celebrities?"

"You are too kind," with another grave bow, while his eyes seemed riveted upon her face.

"Do you see those two men talking with the lady in blue? The *blond* is M. le Ministre de la Guerre, the *brun* is M. le Ministre des Finances, and the lady is the celebrated Countess de M——; both are in love with her, and she is in love with neither. Yet each is ready to swear that she adores the other; while her husband, who is one of the senators, would like to shoot all three."

Claude did not reply; he seemed to be studying the countenance of La Marquise curiously. Again she flashed another glance at him; both turned visibly paler; then the long lashes swept her cheeks, and with a slightly tremulous voice she went on with her remarks. "Yonder small, dark man is M. R——, one of the leaders of the Republican party; he is a strong spirit, an agitator, an extremist, but he is wonderfully clever."

"I am well acquainted with him through his works; he writes those spirited and truthful letters in the —"

"Yes, M. le Comte, he is very adventurous; three times he has been imprisoned because of his attacks on the Imperial party, but as often as he has been liberated he has advanced his opinions with the same intrepidity and defiance. I like him; he is one of my heroes. I worship a strong, fearless soul."

"A noble woman always admires courage, no matter in what cause," said Claude at random, scarce knowing what he said, so confused were his thoughts in the presence of this remarkable woman.

"Notice that man who is passing; the short, thick man, with flat nose, and black, close-curling hair; that is M. D——; and the tall, thin man with

him is M. M——, his shadow he is called; he always goes with M. D—— to assist in gathering material for his novels. It is well known that poor M. M—— does all the work, and that M. D—— reaps the benefit, that is, the fame and the money."

"How unjust," said Claude, bitterly, "to take so contemptible an advantage of the power given to one by success!"

"It is true; but there is so little justice in society! O M. le Comte, here in my own rooms, as well as in other brilliant circles, I see things that make me blush at the deceptions we are capable of. In my salons are representatives of all parties; of the state, the Church, and the liberal professions. I encourage equality," — with a little, mocking laugh and another quick glance at Claude. "I am as thoroughly diplomatic as a statesman. I have one room for the sheep, another for the goats, and a third for the wolves; yet they all mix together; they affect to hate each other, yet they mix without much snarling. And I like a sprinkling of scarlet and purple, it gives dignity to a reception. Yonder, talking with the Archbishop of Paris, is the Bishop of Rouen. He is an ambitious man, and hopes to be a cardinal. Has he not an imposing figure and a face of remarkable intelligence?"

Claude raised his eyes and saw those of La Marquise fixed upon him with what he thought to be a strange expression. A slight shiver passed over him, but he said, calmly, "Yes, madam, his exterior is faultless, let us hope his character is equally so."

"He is a successful man. Society does him homage, the Church looks upon him as one of her most earnest and devoted teachers, his influence with the government is almost boundless, and his opposition against republicanism is a power in itself. I suppose the proof of one's superiority is his success, is it not so?"

"With the world, yes, often; but before a higher tribunal one may be judged differently."

"You take a very serious view of life, M. le Comte. It has one meaning for you and another for us who are only pleasure-seekers. We are

ambitious of the most contemptible things; you, of the most noble. Here is one of our stars, our brightest stars," as a young man with pale, earnest face, and eyes full of fire, bowed low before her and passed; "he is M. L. N——, our glorious young orator. Ah, *mon Dieu!* how he touches all hearts! He does not fear to speak the truth, no more than does that intrepid contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Did you read his last article on Equity?"

Claude bowed in reply.

"I admire the nobility and truth of his sentiments, as well as the courage with which he defends them. It is to be regretted that the nation must be deprived of such a teacher. I am told that already the secret police are using every means to discover who he is; and that the *Revue* is threatened with suppression if it publishes any more of his articles. I hope the unfortunate man will be warned in time to save himself from imprisonment."

The sweet, clear voice of La Marquise was full of anxiety, and her eyes were fixed earnestly on the face of Claude as he replied, "If he is an apostle of the truth, he must not be silent from the fear of evil consequences. — Who is that fair, florid young man talking with such animation to the group of ladies surrounding him?"

"O, that is M. D——, the popular artist; he is an immense favorite, and most amusing. To look at his inexpressive face one would not believe he could so well represent the horrors of the infernal regions. — O, Sir Edward, and Lady Courtney, and Mademoiselle Elizabeth! I am more than happy to see you all." And La Marquise held out both hands in eager welcome to the new arrivals.

Scarce had Sir Edward and the ladies replied to her kind reception when they all recognized Claude, — Sir Edward with evident pleasure, Céleste with trembling indecision, and Elizabeth with unmistakable gravity and coldness. During this first moment of excited surprise La Marquise studied the group with the keenest attention.

Sir Edward's first act was to present Claude to his wife and daughter.

"M. le Comte de Clermont, my dears,

who so modestly evaded your gratitude on that dreadful night when he risked his life to save ours."

With feelings of extreme culpability both Céleste and Elizabeth acknowledged their indebtedness, and added the conventional professions of pleasure at meeting again under such agreeable circumstances, with a calmness that surprised Claude as well as themselves.

Happily for all, at that moment Raymond appeared upon the scene, and the conversation became general. La Marquise was brilliant, with smiles that dazzled, and flashes of wit that startled; Sir Edward was overflowing with good-humor and compliments; he was one of the oldest satellites that revolved around La Marquise, and was therefore allowed more privileges than the younger aspirants for favor. Philip was jealous of Claude's long *tête-à-tête*, and uneasy in the presence of Elizabeth; so he was moody and satirical by turns. Claude was calm and almost solemn, as he was in every great crisis; to him this was a moment of no common importance. He pitied Céleste's pallor, and her unsuccessful effort to hide her agitation, that she might join in the conversation with composure; while he respected Elizabeth's anxiety to conceal her own troubled reflections, and at the same time to divert attention from her friend. "I will withdraw quietly," he thought, "and relieve these unhappy women of my presence." So, unnoticed by the others, he took leave of La Marquise and left the group at the same moment as Monseigneur the Bishop of Rouen joined it.

When Claude reached the retirement of his own room, his thoughts were still in a terrible confusion over which he had no power. The successive events of the evening, so unexpected, and of a nature so trying, had thoroughly demolished his boasted structure of stoicism, and the meeting with Fabien had aroused feelings which he had hoped could never again find a place in his heart. After sitting a long time absorbed in profound thought over his complication of difficulties, he arose, and pacing the floor with rapid strides said, in a voice full of disappointment and sorrow: "There is a fatality in

this, — there is a fatality. God knows how I have tried to avoid these shoals on which I am shipwrecked. I did not willingly rush into this danger. I struggled against it, I tried to shun it. O Philip, my friend, in your kindness you have been most cruel! That mysterious woman has thrown a spell over me that I cannot cast off. How inscrutable is the chain of circumstance that unites the severed ties of life! Again all is undone, my peace of mind is disturbed, my old love revived, my old desires renewed. In one hour I have forgotten all my years of sacrifice and sorrow; the high wall that I have striven to build with care between me and the angel I still adore is swept away by these floods of passion. O Céleste, my pale darling, I hoped we should meet no more until we met in eternity! but I will strive to be strong for thee, thou shalt never have cause to reproach me."

"Céleste," said Elizabeth that same night, as she stooped over her to kiss her before retiring, — "Céleste, darling, there seems to be a fatality in our meeting M. le Comte de Clermont again; now that it has occurred, I regret our having kept anything from papa. I felt terribly guilty when he presented him to us as though he had been a stranger."

"We will think of him then only as having seen him for the first time to-night. We will forget all the past, that will be best," returned Céleste, with a trembling sigh of regret, that plainly contradicted her assertion.

Madame la Marquise de Ventadour retired to her luxurious chamber after her last guest had departed, and locking the door against her maid, she almost tore the jewels from her arms and neck, the band that confined her hair, and the girdle encircling her waist. "They press too heavily," she said between her white teeth, as she threw them negligently on her dressing-table. "My God, how they tortured me while his truthful eyes were looking into my face! Ah, for what a price I sold myself! If tears of blood could wash away the sin, the fever, and anguish of my soul, then I should be pure and suffer no more, for I have wept them, I have wept them until my heart is drained white."



## PART THIRD.

## A DINNER IN THE RUE CASTIGLIONE.

THE next morning after the *soirée* at the Hôtel Ventadour, Claude sat at his desk vainly trying to concentrate his thoughts upon the work before him, an article which he had been preparing with great care for one of the liberal journals, which was at that time a mouthpiece of the reform party. Whatever he did toward emancipating and enlightening humanity was done after deep deliberation and mature thought, for he wished to be both generous and just; but this morning he felt incapable of calm, clear reasoning, he could neither separate nor arrange the chaos of ideas that filled his mind. He thought of Gabrielle de Ventadour, and of Céleste, and then of Fabien in his bishop's dress, honored and prosperous; of the wrong Fabien had done him, of the still greater wrong to that pale sad woman, who seemed a living but silent reproach to his cruelty; and then again the lovely face with its crown of silver-white hair, the strange expressions of the eyes, the mouth with passion and sorrow stamped under its smile, came between him and his paper, and he laid his pen down in despair and resigned himself entirely to his reverie. He thought of all who had taken part in the scene of the previous evening as we think of those who are closely connected with our interior life, invisible cords united and drew him persistently toward those whom the day before he had believed to be separated from him forever. He felt a strong desire, so strong that he could scarce conquer it, to see again that remarkable woman who had left such a strange impression upon his memory. She had attracted him, fascinated him, if you will, but it was not a physical fascination. There was no material element in the powerful spell that enthralled him; he did not connect it with her beauty, her wit, her gracious and winning manner. It was a weird, supernatural charm that invested her. He thought of her as one might think of a vision that had appeared in a dream, or of one of those startling fantasies of a diseased brain, when one who has been long forgotten in the dust and darkness of the grave, and the form of

whose face is even obliterated from memory by the effacing finger of Time, suddenly stands before us in the silence and solemnity of the night, wearing the same smile that once made our life glad. She was a resurrection of something that had died long before from his existence, and with it an old affection, an old interest was renewed to the exclusion of later influences. Then Céleste haunted him, contending with the other for the first place in his thoughts; she had changed, sadly changed, during the years that had passed since he saw her on the shore of Quiberon; she was slighter, paler, languid, and sorrowful; he saw it all at a glance, and understood that her life was one continuous martyrdom, that care and anxiety were pressing like a heavy burden upon her; and, more, he was tortured with the belief that her health was seriously undermined, and that unless something was done to save her she would sink into a premature grave. "O merciful Heavens!" he thought, "why cannot I take her away from the misery that is killing her, to the shelter of my love? I might save her, and prolong the life that is so much dearer than my own. I might make her happy, and thereby atone for the suffering I have unwillingly caused her; but it cannot be, it cannot be, I can only watch over her from afar and pray for her. My lamb, my poor gentle lamb, thy meek eyes haunt me with a mute appeal for help, and I can do nothing for thee." Mingled with his pity, his sorrow, his tender desires, was a drop of gall that imbittered his whole soul; it was his indignation, his contempt, his righteous anger, against the man who had defrauded both of happiness, "What right had he to take from us what no human power can compensate us for? He has ruined two lives; he should be punished, he should bear the mark of Cain upon him, he should be branded by the hand of God; and yet he prospers, and the world honors him. O justice! justice! thou art indeed a mockery."

In the midst of these uncomfortable reflections, a visitor was announced. It was Sir Edward Courtnay. When Claude rose to receive him, he came forward with outstretched hands, declaring with the utmost *empressement* that he could not allow a day to pass

without offering him some little hospitality. "And my wife and daughter join with me in the same feeling," he said; "therefore I am come to pray that you will dine with us this evening, quite informally, no one but yourself and Raymond."

Claude hesitated; should he accept, or should he refuse? His honorable character would not allow him to succumb to the temptation without combating it. In the first place, he did not feel at ease in regard to the deception they all three, Céleste, Elizabeth, and himself, had tacitly imposed upon Sir Edward. If he could have said, "I was once the lover of your wife, and I adore her still. I deceived you at Sarzeau by allowing you to believe that she was a stranger to me. Now, if you wish to open your doors to me, I am ready to enter." In such a case he would have felt that he was acting an honorable part. But still to continue the deception, and accept an hospitable offer made in good faith, was most revolting to him. If he alone had been involved, he would not for one moment have hesitated to declare the truth. Now it was necessary, either to accept the baronet's friendship, or to give a reason for refusing it; but if he acknowledged his own fault, he would by so doing betray the two women, who for some cause, perhaps most important to themselves, had concealed the fact of their previous meeting and of the scene that had then occurred. He did not know what had prompted them to such a course, nor what the result might be to them if he revealed all. Then again, Sir Edward had said that his wife and daughter had wished that he might be invited. They then desired to place him on a friendly footing, perhaps to let bygones be bygones. In any case it seemed a sort of treaty of peace, an offer of an amicable alliance, which he could not disregard. Of one thing he was certain, and that was that the unhappy woman needed a friend, some one who had no selfish interest in his devotion to her, and he believed himself at that moment capable of any sacrifice, any immolation, that might make him more worthy of her confidence. Therefore, after this interior

debate, which was shorter than the time taken to describe it, he accepted the invitation to dinner; and Sir Edward went away well satisfied, congratulating himself that the noble, unsuspecting nature of Claude did not detect any selfish motive under his importunate attention.

Secretly Céleste wished to see Claude again. She hoped to see him, she longed to see him. She admitted that desire to herself, and denied it the next moment with tears and blushes. "I must not see him, Elizabeth says I must not; and yet why cannot we be friends?" she repeated over and over to herself. "We might both forget the past, and be friends. Life would be worth supporting if I could but have his counsel, his aid. Poor Elizabeth is but little better able to bear my burdens than I am myself; and yet I am obliged to lay them upon her, because I cannot stand up under them. O, if we both might go to Claude, and tell him of our troubles, and ask him to show us some way out of them! I am sure if Elizabeth could look at it in that way, she might think it better to allow him to be our friend."

When, the next morning, over the breakfast-table, Sir Edward spoke of Claude, and suggested that he should be invited to dine with them that evening, both ladies unexpectedly objected; and then seeing that their objection, without apparent reason, caused some surprise, they confusedly and hesitatingly complied, and even expressed the hope that he might come.

"There is no reason in the world why he should not, my dears," said the baronet, rubbing his hands together good-naturedly. "He is a superior young man, so distinguished looking, and he belongs to one of the oldest and best families of France; besides, I am told that he is rich, very rich. He is an excellent *parti* for you, Elizabeth, an unexceptionable *parti*; encourage him, my daughter, encourage him."

"O papa! how can you talk so?" said Elizabeth, with a little anger and contempt in her voice, while Céleste turned paler, and stirred her coffee nervously.

After Sir Edward left the room, Lady



Courtney looked up, and seeing Elizabeth's eyes fixed upon her inquiringly, she flushed and paled, tried to speak, and then burst into tears.

"It is no use to weep," said Elizabeth, a little severely. "We have both deceived poor papa, and we must bear the consequences calmly, or else I must tell him all, and leave him to punish us as he thinks best."

"O Elizabeth! I implore you not to tell him," cried Céleste, wringing her hands. "It can do no good now. I will try to forget the past, and look upon Claude only as an ordinary acquaintance. I promise you, Elizabeth, that I will never refer in any way to the past when I am with him. In everything else I will do as you think best, but in this hear to me. I have no strength, no courage to bear Sir Edward's anger."

"Listen to me, Céleste," said Elizabeth, very sternly, yet her eyes were dim with tears. "We have both deceived papa, I as much as you; and perhaps my deception is even more wicked, because I am his daughter, and he should be first to me in everything. And I believe a person who has done wrong and has not the courage to confess it the worst of cowards. Now I am not a coward where I alone am concerned, but I am a coward when I am obliged to make you suffer, and I cannot find the force to do it. Therefore I shall listen to you and shall not confess this wrong to papa, but only on one condition, and that is that you will never allow M. le Comte de Clermont to refer in any way to the past. Your only safety is in that."

"I never will, Elizabeth," replied Céleste, solemnly, — "I never will; the past is as dead to me as the future is hopeless." Then she threw herself on her friend's neck and they wept silently together.

When Claude arrived at the Rue Castiglione, he found Lady Courtney and Elizabeth alone in the *salon*; they met him calmly and kindly, without the least demonstration of anxiety, or any reference to another acquaintance than the slight one of the previous evening. From their manner he understood the rôle he was expected to play, and he tacitly agreed to it, though not without

some qualms of conscience. It would be difficult to describe the feelings of the three poor souls who were struggling to keep in the straight path, after the sacrifice of their own integrity, as they stood together over the bright wood-fire, awaiting the presence of the man they had deceived, each one talking, but scarcely knowing what the other said, and neither of the three daring to fall into silence, fearful lest he or she should betray a mental inquietude to the other.

The room was filled with the calm that twilight brings; it had the simple homelike look, more English than French, for Elizabeth had left the traces of her nationality everywhere. There were warm carpets on the floors, pictures on the walls, flowers growing in *jardinières* at the windows, comfortable chairs and sofas, footstools and *tête-à-têtes*, an open piano covered with music, tables filled with books and journals, and on one side of the fire a dainty work-stand and a low sewing-chair; and then the ladies in their simple dinner-dresses seemed so much more lovely than in the lace and jewels of an evening toilet. Céleste's pale blue silk dress and pearl ornaments set off her fair face and blond hair, while Elizabeth looked sweet and noble in simple white, without jewels or ribbons. There was a sincerity and naturalness about all, an air of elegance and comfort, without fashion and luxury.

As Claude observed the details of the surroundings, the signs of quiet domestic life, his heart was touched to tenderness and filled with the old longing for such an existence. His retiring, gentle nature was created for pure family ties and loving companionship; it had been his dream long ago at Clermont, but the intervention of another and the will of God had prevented its fulfilment. And he knew that now such a desire could never be realized, the chance was over for him; another filled his place in the life of Céleste. She made a home for one who had no moral right to her, one who had obtained her unfairly, one who was utterly unworthy of the treasure he possessed, and that was perhaps the most bitter thought of all; her husband was a selfish profligate, an

unprincipled spendthrift. "If he were but a good noble man, I could endure it," he thought, "because I should know she was happy; but as it is, she is miserable, she and Elizabeth are both enduring protracted martyrdom, and God only knows when it will end." He tried to banish such unpleasant reflections. "I will at least be happy one evening in the presence of this adorable woman; she shall not know I suspect her secret, dear angel! I will make her happy by seeming happy myself, and I will watch over both until the time comes when they need a friend, a brother; then I will be ready to aid them." So he solaced himself with these few drops of consolation wrung from his pain.

When Sir Edward entered with Raymond, they found all three engaged in a cheerful conversation. Elizabeth's usual gravity and reticence seemed to have disappeared, and Céleste's gentle face was beaming with smiles.

Philip was in better humor than on the preceding evening; he had just left *la belle dame*, who had favored him with a long *tête-à-tête*, and afterwards had invited him to drive with her in the Bois, where he had been envied by all her admirers, which flattered his vanity and encouraged his hopes. To Elizabeth he was most amiable, treating her with a sort of caressing deference, such as a boy might display toward a cherished elder sister, while she in turn smiled gravely at his nonsense, and rebuked his faults gently, but seriously.

Claude took Céleste in to dinner, and sat at her side in a sort of happy dream. Dish after dish came and was sent away without his knowing of what it was composed; he ate and drank mechanically, too happy to discriminate, and joined in the general conversation with remarks that appeared apropos, but were in fact uttered without thought.

After the ladies had withdrawn, and while the gentlemen lingered over their wine, the conversation turned upon the reception of the previous evening at the Hôtel Ventadour; and Sir Edward inquired of Claude if he, like every one else, had been fascinated by *La Marquise*.

"No," replied Claude, "I think not, not, at least, in the way you mean; still she made a most powerful impression upon me. I imagine it is her remarkable style of beauty that charms, it strikes one, at the first glance as something supernatural; her fresh, youthful face, surrounded by that dazzling white hair, has a most *bizarre* effect; what could have so blanched it at her age?"

Sir Edward shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "That is a mystery, as well as herself. About five years ago, *la belle dame* suddenly flashed upon society as *La Marquise de Ventadour*. Where the lucky octogenarian found her none can tell. Society went into agonies over the enigma, but the old Marquis did not live long enough to explain it, and the fair Gabrielle is too discreet and clever to reveal a secret that constitutes her greatest power; for she well knows that if you set the world to wondering it will soon worship, and it does not matter who she *was*, she *is* the most brilliant, the most lovely, the most witty, and the most courted woman in Paris, and I might add, the most heartless, for she has no more feeling than a mummy."

"You are mistaken," said Raymond, with a sudden flush, "she is not insensible. Because she is cold to the world, it does not follow that she is cold to every one. I am sure you do her great injustice; she has a noble, generous heart."

"Indeed!" returned Sir Edward, "then you have been more successful than her other admirers if you have discovered that organ."

"I did not say she had a heart for me. *Mon Dieu!* I wish she had; she is in love with some one, and I can't discover who it is, unless it is M. le Comte, for she maddens me with her constant praises of him."

"You exaggerate fearfully, Philip," said Claude, impatiently; "Madame la Marquise wastes neither thought nor speech on such an ungracious churl as I am."

"We shall see, wait and we shall see," returned Philip, oracularly, as they left the table to join the ladies at tea in the *salon*.

The evening seemed to fly swiftly on light wings, and Claude's spirit rose and

floated away from the sad reality of his life on pinions of imaginary bliss; he was intoxicated with his happiness; the presence of Céleste acted like a charm. He listened to her while she sang, and her sweetly sympathetic voice softened him to tears; and when she selected a simple little *chanson* that they had often sung together at Clermont, he could scarcely contain his emotion; yet he was not sorrowful, his heart was full of a delicious joy, and he abandoned himself to the delight of the moment; he was only conscious that he was with Céleste, that the sweetness of the old days lingered around them, that heart spoke to heart in a mute but powerful language; often her eyes met his with a timid glance of joy, while smiles that were infantine in their freshness and unaffected happiness chased away the pensive shade from her expressive face. It was an hour that both remembered long after with mingled joy and regret, for it was the first unconscious step down that dangerous declivity from which it is impossible to return as intact as one has descended.

Philip was as full of absurdities as a child; he sang the most ridiculous songs, recounted the most laughable adventures, and recited the most amusing selections from the literature of different countries.

"Do you remember an old song I was never weary of hearing when we were children, Philip?" said Elizabeth, with softened voice and dreamy eyes.

"Indeed I do, every word of it; and I also remember how heart-broken you were if I left out one verse that you particularly liked, and that I particularly disliked. Will you hear it now? I can repeat it with all the fervor of other days." And Raymond, standing up, threw back his shoulders, extended hands, and, assuming a tragic tone, he recited the whole of that quaint old English ballad in which the sufferings of Young Beichan and Susie Pye are so pathetically narrated. When he had finished he turned to Elizabeth, and, looking her earnestly in the face, said, "We were one then, we grew together in thought and feeling."

"But we have grown far apart since those days, Philip," she replied sadly.

"Do you also remember these lines of the unfortunate Marquis of Montrose?"

"But if thou wilt be constant then,  
And faithful of thy word,  
I'll make thee glorious by my pen,  
And famous by my sword.  
I'll serve thee in such noble ways  
Was never heard before;  
I'll crown and deck thee all with bays,  
And love thee evermore."

O Elizabeth, I swear I meant it all then! Whose fault is it that you are not wearing my bays?"

"Hush, Philip, for pity's sake don't jest at our disappointment," said the poor girl, bending her head over the piece of embroidery in her fingers, to hide the hot flush that crimsoned her face.

"Have you seen these exquisite drawings in Mademoiselle's album?" And Claude, as he spoke, gave the book through which he had been looking with Céleste to Raymond. "You will find some charming little things well worth examining."

"Here is a beautiful impromptu sketch by M. D——," said Elizabeth, who had recovered from her confusion, and now leaned over Philip as calmly as though no thoughtless words of his had ever ruffled the fountain of her heart. "Is it not expressive? It illustrates a verse of Lamartine's poem, *Le Lac*. And here is another by M.C——, suggested by Deschamps's *Petite Violette*. They are all done *a prima*, as artists say. Add one to them, Philip, with a line from one of your poems."

Raymond took the album, and after working a few moments industriously he returned it to Elizabeth with a solemn countenance. He had carefully drawn a skull and cross-bones, under which he had written, *Adieu la fin*.

"O Philip, how could you ruin my book with such a horror!" she said, looking at him reproachfully; "see, papa, what a gloomy thing he has made."

"An eccentricity of genius," observed Sir Edward, returning the album to his daughter. Elizabeth took it and laid it away with a clouded face. It was only a foolish jest of Philip's, but it left a disagreeable impression upon her mind.

Raymond walked home with Claude. It was a cloudless moonlit night; and as they sauntered slowly down the Rue de Rivoli toward the Rue St. Roch, Philip said to his companion, "By Jove! I believe Elizabeth loves me, after all. Did you notice her agitation when I reminded her of our young days?"

"Yes, I did," replied Claude, "and I pitied her; you were cruel to play upon her feeling in that way; she is a noble, beautiful girl."

"She has made me suffer enough," continued Raymond, reflectively. "It is just my luck, now, when I don't care for her love, she is quite ready to give it to me. I am always working at cross-purposes in affairs of the heart. Heaven only knows how it will end with La Marquise. I adore her, and she plays with me as a cat does with a mouse."

"Leave your folly with La Marquise," said Claude, gravely, "and devote yourself to the woman you really love, and who really loves you."

"If I could believe it, if I was only sure," returned Philip, doubtfully. "I am never so happy anywhere nor with any person as I am with Elizabeth, I mean so sincerely happy, and yet I am not sure now whether I love her or not. How charming Lady Courtney was this evening! I never saw her so beautiful before. *Mon ami*, you work a spell wherever you go. Hush! look yonder in the shadow of the buildings on the other side," said Raymond, suddenly lowering his voice, "those two men are following us."

"Following us," repeated Claude as they turned into the Rue St. Roch, "for what reason?"

"Remember what I told you the other day; they are spies of the secret police, who are tracking you; your freedom of expression has become obnoxious to the government; your articles in the *Revue* have attracted too much attention in the wrong quarter. Take care, or you will find that personal liberty is not respected under this *régime* any more than is liberty of opinion."

"In spite of all I shall be true to my principles; I cannot be a slave to the fear of evil consequences," returned Claude, as he shook hands with his friend at his door.

Long after he entered his room he had not thought of retiring, he was too happy to sleep. The influence of Céleste's presence still filled his heart. He sat by his window and looked out into the silent street, where the white moonlight lay unbroken on the deserted pavement that a few hours before had resounded with hurrying footsteps. "The day has been without clouds," he thought, "and the night is serene; my soul is filled with one object that love invests with every imaginable charm. To love and to be loved is surely the greatest bliss one can experience amid the sorrows and disappointments of life; it is the only joy left to us of the paradise that was designed for our inheritance. To-night I am happy, I might say too happy. Is it not natural that I should be filled with rapture, after such a blessed hour? My whole being is full of gratitude to God. I ask for nothing more than the sight of her face, the sound of her voice, the mute and unconscious confession of her meek eyes. She loves me, I have no longer any doubt that adorable woman loves me now as she loved me in those sweet days of tender hope, — ay, and even better, for suffering has softened and purified her passion from all earthly desires; she loves me with an affection angelic and holy, and she understands that my pity, tenderness, and devotion are as pure as her love; our souls are united; our thoughts, our aspirations, our intentions, are blended into one sweet sentiment; at last we have reached that state where we can look at the past without regret, the present without desire, and the future without fear. O my angel, I will never cause thee a sorrow! I will strive to lighten thy burden. I will live but to make thee happy. I will banish every thought of self from my heart. I will crucify my nature, I will purify my soul, that I may be worthy thy saintly love." Such were the feelings and intentions that formed the greater part of his reverie; his mind was aflame with pure and earnest desire for the welfare of his beloved, there was only the single purpose before him of making the woman he worshipped happier by some sacrifice, some self-denial, when suddenly these questions seemed

to be engraved upon his conscience by a divine finger: Has man the right to seek temptation in order to prove his moral strength? If he falls into sin, who will pardon him? By doing so, is he not guilty of wrong toward the one he loves? "O my just and pitiful God!" he cried, clasping his hands and raising his eyes to heaven, "do not press this drop of sweetness from my life; permit me to live for her, to soften a little the path too rugged for her tender feet."

#### PART FOURTH.

##### THIS AND THAT.

WHEN Madame la Marquise entered her room, after her drive with Philip in the Bois, she threw herself into a chair wearily and dejectedly. An hour before she had been looking from her luxurious carriage on the gayest scene imaginable, her face beaming with smiles as she met the adoring glances of her numerous admirers, who followed and envied her as the most successful woman, in every respect, among the *beau monde* of Paris. Now she sat alone in the silence of her room, her jewelled hands clasped over the rich velvet and lace that rose and fell heavily above her throbbing heart, her eyes downcast and suffused with tears, the lines of her lovely mouth fixed in melancholy curves, and a shadow of regret and dissatisfaction resting upon her fair face. An hour before she was a creature to be envied; now she was to be pitied, for her air of depression, and her sad eyes that seemed to be searching vacancy for some impossibility, revealed a mental inquietude and a profound discouragement. There was still an hour to hang heavily before it would be time to dress for dinner,—an hour that offered her no amusement, no excitement. She might have looked over her jewels, her dresses, her laces, with her maid; she might have sat before her mirror in her dressing-room, admiring her marvellous beauty, while she adorned herself in some new finery; but she was not a woman to find diversion in such frivolities, there must be something of life, of human passion,

of joy and sorrow, emotion, strife, desire, and design, to draw away her thoughts from their interior abstraction. Therefore, instead of retiring to her dressing-room, she seated herself at the window, and looked out into the life of the Rue St. Dominique. There were lagging, weary, aimless passers, who came from nowhere, and went to no particular destination; there were rapid, feverish, hurried souls impelled on by hope or desire; there were indolent, languid beauties, who rolled dreamily along in their dainty equipages, scarce raising their white lids from their carmine-tinted cheeks; there were boisterous, careless, dissipated students from the Sorbonne, who walked with a rollicking air arm in arm with their favorite *grisettes*, whose painted faces and uncovered heads were raised with a boldness that was not innocence; there were nurses with round, healthy cheeks, who carried pale children in their arms, frail flowers that pined and faded in that unhealthy quarter; there were little boys and girls who walked together from school, hand in hand, their faces almost touching in the irrepressible eagerness of their innocent discourse,—little happy creatures, whose white, tender feet had never been wounded by the thorns of life; behind them came a dark, stout laundress carrying aloft her pole, hung with stiffly starched dresses that looked like headless human beings dangling by the neck, while she sang in a resonant voice a song of Brittany, articulating the monotonous rhythm with the clap, clap of her wooden shoes. On the opposite *trottoir* some boys were haggling for chestnuts with an old blind woman, one little rascal attracting her attention, while the other fished a handful from her scantily filled tray. The eyes of La Marquise flashed at the audacious dishonesty of the youthful brigand, a hot flush passed over her face, and she partially arose, then sank back in her seat with a weary sigh. A dirty maid of all work, with bare red arms, dragged a reluctant, crying child along by the collar, now and then administering a smart blow to quicken its lagging steps. "*Mon Dieu!*" she said fiercely, "how cruel is the human heart. That beastly woman seems to rejoice in her power over the feeble

little thing. I should like to deal stroke for stroke upon her broad shoulders." Presently the mournful creaking of an organ, accompanied with a shrill, plaintive human voice, fell on her ear. She leaned forward and looked out. An old man came slowly down the street, grinding and singing, while a little shaggy black goat trotted by his side. Just then a hearse rattled along with its sombre plumes dancing, and its long fringes waving in a fantastic manner, while the driver leaned over to nod and smile at a young maid who lounged at a *porte-cochère*; the horses trotted lightly, and the wheels clattered carelessly, as though they were conscious that they had safely deposited a sad and useless burden in Père la Chaise. It passed out of sight as a haggard, wild-eyed boy flew around a corner with his hands full of turnips, closely pursued by a gendarme. "Poor, famished wretch!" said La Marquise, watching the fugitive with eager attention. "He has stolen them to eat, and that fat, well-fed brute will take them from him, and send him to the Madelonnettes for six months. O, I hoped he would escape!" she sighed, as the officer clutched the boy by the shoulder and brought him up suddenly, trembling with fear and exhaustion. "Ah, he deserves to be struck with palsy where he stands, the unfeeling monster, he deserves it!—Justin, Justin," she called to a servant who stood near the door, watching her furtively, "go into the street and give to the officer who is dragging that starving boy to prison fifty francs to release him." And she threw her purse to the man as she spoke. "Do you understand? Give the officer fifty, and after he has gone, give the boy ten to buy him some food." Justin took the purse, merely saying with a low bow, "I understand, madame, I understand." He was too well accustomed to his mistress's eccentricities to even look surprised. Again she heard the grating of the organ, and looking down into the street she saw that the old man with his goat had stopped under her window; a number of children and maids had gathered around him, charmed with the cunning tricks of the little animal. It walked on its hind legs, and bowed and court-

sied and danced, whirling around swiftly with its forefeet over its nose. La Marquise leaned forward on the window-sill, and watched with parted lips and wide-open eyes every movement. They seemed to awaken some memory, perhaps of innocent happy childhood, for tears trembled on her lashes, and she sighed heavily more than once. When the goat had finished his little *répertoire* of accomplishments, the old man began to sing, in a broken, mournful voice, *Le Rocher de St. Malo*; and Madame la Marquise, seeming to forget that she was a lady of the Faubourg St. Germain, repeated with a dreamy voice the words that the old man sang, while she beat an accompaniment on the sill with her white fingers:—

"M. Duequais, me dit Pierre,  
Veut-tu venir avec moi?  
Tu seras homme de guerre  
Monteras la flotte du roi,  
Et tu verras les climats  
À la tête des soldats.  
Non, non, je préfère,  
Le toit de ma mère  
Le rocher de St. Malo,  
Que l'on voit de loin sur l'eau."

When the last strain died away, she covered her face with her hands and sobbed passionately for a moment; then with a sudden impatient movement she brushed away the tears, and, folding her arms proudly, leaned back in her chair, while she seemed to be debating some question with herself. Her indecision lasted for an instant only, for she called again in a clear, haughty voice, "Justin, Justin."

Again the servant appeared; he had been watching her through the folds of the curtain, and his thin, grave face was troubled. "I wish to speak to that man who is singing below; go and bring him up."

"What, madame! that dirty beggar?"

"Yes, that dirty beggar," with an imperative wave of her hand toward the door as Justin hesitated; "go quickly."

A moment after the old man stood timidly on the threshold with the goat clasped in his arms, looking with amazement at the splendor of the room.

"Come in, come in, my good man, don't be afraid," said La Marquise, ad-

vancing toward her astonished guest. "I should like to see the goat. It is very intelligent and pretty. You may go, Justin," turning severely to the servant, who lingered near her, regarding the stranger with curiosity and dislike,—"you may go, and close the door after you."

The old man looked first at the rich carpet, and then at his coarse, dirty shoes, and stood trembling and confused before her.

"What do you call your goat?" she inquired gently, wishing to put the frightened creature at his ease, while she laid her hand on the shaggy head of the little animal.

"Aimée," replied the man without raising his eyes.

"Aimée," she repeated with a gasp, "that is a singular name for a goat; why did you give it that name?"

"I named it for a little girl we lost; she played with it when it was a kid, and when we had the child no longer we called the goat by her name."

"How did you lose the child?"

"She was stolen, we never knew by whom; my wife left her in the house alone, and when she returned the little girl was gone."

"Was she your child?"

"No, madame, she was an orphan; her father was a convict; we took her when she was a baby, and loved her like our own; we lost all we had, madame, and she filled a little their place. She was pretty and so clever, O, she was too clever for her age, and we grew so fond of her; then she was stolen, and we never saw her again." The old man's voice was broken, and the tears trickled down his furrowed face and dropped one by one on the head of the goat that had fallen asleep in his arms.

"What brought you to such poverty?" inquired La Marquise in a choked voice, while she clasped her hands tightly over her heart.

"After we lost the child everything went badly; the animals died, and my poor wife took the fever, and I was left alone; then I broke my arm, and I could not till the little piece of land, and so it was taken away and I had nothing to live for; the old place was ruined for me,

and I wandered about from one town to another, until at last I came here. For more than twenty years, madame, my only companion and friend has been my goat that the child Aimée played with; she is very intelligent, almost like a human being," he said, looking at the little animal fondly; "but I can't keep her much longer, she is old, very old now, and quite weak, and would like to sleep the most of the time, so I fear I shall soon lose her. I don't know how I shall live without her, for no one would listen to my songs if Aimée's tricks did not attract them first. With her I manage to pick up sous enough to keep us from starving."

"Have no fears, my good man, you shall not want for bread if you do lose the poor goat," said La Marquise, in a quick, sharp voice, that had more distress in it than even the old man's trembling tones, as she turned toward an escritoire and took from it a roll of notes. "Here is enough money to pay your way back to your old home, and keep you there in comfort for a long time. Take it, take it, and don't look at it now," she cried, pressing it impetuously into his hand, while he drew back in astonishment that was almost fear. "It is a great deal more than you have ever had before; it will keep you from want. Don't thank me. I will not have your thanks. Put the money in a safe place where no one will steal it, and go, go quickly. It is a pleasure for me to give it to you; it is a kindness for you to take it. Do not thank me, go, go." And she hurried the bewildered old man toward the door with such haste that he could not collect his senses so as to be able to utter a word. When he had gone, and she found herself alone, she threw her head back and clasped her hands over her face like one in great distress; and there was something tragic in her attitude and voice as she cried, "*Mon Dieu!* there are some born to blight and crush those who have heaped benefits upon them." Then she paced the floor rapidly, her face paling and flushing, while the dilated nostrils, trembling lips, and restless eyes showed that she was laboring under some powerful emotion. A little rustling sound at the

closed door attracted her attention. She paused before it, and shook her head significantly, while her white teeth snapped sharply together, and her hands smote each other with a cruel ferocity. "He is there again listening." And she fixed her gleaming eyes on the door like an enraged tiger about to spring. "Ungrateful, miserable spy, he watches me as if he were paid for it. *Ma foi!* one would think he had taken a contract to listen. Shall I open the door and strike his head off at a blow? Coward, beast, to dare to do such a thing. I will turn him from my house, he shall not torture me with his presence." Then a sickly smile stole over her face, and her hands fell heavily. "No, no," she added, in slow, discouraged tones, "it is no use, he is my skeleton, my *bête noir*; he would torment me the same wherever he was. I may as well support him here." And with an irresolute and weary air she turned toward her dressing-room.

An hour after La Marquise stood in the library before the glowing fire, her elbow resting on the velvet cover of the mantle, her forehead pressed into her open palm, and her eyes fixed on the restless flames, that danced and flickered, throwing fantastic lights and shades upon her face and dress. It was the same hour, in fact the same moment, when Claude stood with Céleste and Elizabeth in the *salon* in the Rue Castiglione, trying to subdue the imperious demands of his heart; and La Marquise, alone in the twilight, was thinking of him, wondering where he was, in whose society, and what was the subject of his thoughts at that moment. Had his memory turned to her since he parted from her so abruptly the previous evening? Had he desired to see her again? Should she see him soon, and when and where? Philip had told her that his friend never went to the opera, never went into society, never rode in the Bois during the fashionable promenade; how, then, could she see him? Her need to speak with him again was imperative. Many things that she had intended to say to him in the excitement of that short interview had passed from her mind,

and she regretted that she had only half improved the time. She feared she had not left the impression upon his heart that she had hoped to leave. She felt that she had startled and bewildered him, more than she had attracted and charmed him. The vastness in the dissimilarity of their motives, aims, and desires appalled her. She knew that he stood far above her in the nobility and integrity of his nature; that he could not stoop to her, and alas! it was too late to grow up to him; there was a line of demarcation between them, over which she could not pass, and she understood well that all her personal advantages were entirely worthless to such a soul as his. "If I could but do some good deed, something to win his approbation, then I might hope for his friendship, if nothing more," she thought, while she vexed her heart and brain to discover some means of immolation, some chance to distinguish herself in a manner worthy of his approval. While she was absorbed with this new idea, and intent on contemplating the imaginary results, the door opened, and Monseigneur the Bishop of Rouen was announced.

La Marquise did not change her position. Holding out her disengaged hand, she said indifferently, and with a little impatience, "I thought you had returned to Rouen, monseigneur."

"No, although I intended it, I found I could not leave before the council adjourned," replied the Bishop, seating himself with the air of one quite at home.

"And the Archbishop, is he recovering from his indisposition?"

"He is worse. I have been summoned to his bedside."

"You will go?"

"Certainly, by the first train."

"If he dies, you will be promoted to his sacred office?"

"It is what I have worked for. I think I have earned it."

"Will your ambition be gratified then?"

"No, I must go a step higher."

"And then?"

"I shall be content."

"Without remorse, without regret?"



"Perhaps not without regret; there is always regret mingled with our happiness, the regret that we did not reach it sooner; but remorse is punishment for great sin, have I done ought to merit it?"

"I think you have, monseigneur."

"Ah! you are always severe; be my accuser then; what have I done that is so heinous in your estimation?"

"You have trampled upon the rights of others; you have not cared whom you crushed, so you conquered."

"Grave charges," said the Bishop, while a hot flush crimsoned his face; "are you sure you speak advisedly, madame?"

"I am sure I speak the truth. Look back and see if there are not things in your past that will not bear the closest scrutiny," replied La Marquise, fearlessly and sternly. "O monseigneur, if you are about to fill a still more important office in the holy Church, examine your heart and see if there are in it justice, truth, and charity."

"You are a severe monitor, madame, but I will remember your advice, and strive to profit by it; now allow me to give you a little counsel, which you may find useful in the future. Be careful how you receive M. le Comte de Clermont; he is suspected; he is a Republican and a traitor, and he is under the surveillance of the government. Do you understand what that implies?"

"Yes," replied La Marquise, turning pale and starting from her indolent position, — "yes, I understand that it implies punishment for daring to speak the truth; the truth is *passé*, and lies take the precedence; therefore a man must be silent, or lie to pamper the iniquity, injustice, and deception of this despotic reign."

"Hush, hush, you talk at random. Agitators and would-be regenerators, free-thinkers, and communists are traitors to the government, and should be treated as such."

"What proof is there that M. le Comte de Clermont is connected with either of the parties you name?"

"He is the author of the article on Equity, that has caused such indignation from all who are lovers of order and restraint."

"It is false, he is not the author of that article," said La Marquise, fixing her eyes upon the face of the Bishop with a steady gaze that did not flinch, "neither is he a contributor to the *Revue*. The secret police are at fault, they are on the wrong trail; cannot you convince them that it is so?"

"No, for I am not convinced myself, and you were just advocating truth, truth under all circumstances."

La Marquise frowned and bit her lips, and the Bishop looked at her complacently, feeling that he had cornered her; and perhaps she felt so too, for she smiled half scornfully, half pettishly, and said, "O monseigneur, after all, it is a garment that one stretches to fit his needs; cannot you accommodate it to this necessity?"

"No, for it is not my necessity, and I am not generous toward other people's."

"There, your true character shines out most beautifully, other people's necessities do not trouble you. I wonder," looking at him sadly and reflectively, — "I wonder when the time comes that you shall need an advocate, a mediator, who will present himself on your behalf? Perhaps this unhappy young man whom you are determined to crush; he has the noble soul that forgets injuries."

"You speak as though you believed I had some personal animosity against M. le Comte de Clermont."

"He has never wronged you, and yet you hate him, and you will strive to ruin him utterly, I am convinced of it," said La Marquise, with stern deliberation; then her voice softened to a sob, and she added, "O monseigneur, if you have no pity for him, have some for those who suffer with him!"

At this appeal, the Bishop rose and paced the floor in agitation; his face was pale, and his eyes were full of a lurid light, while his fingers twisted convulsively the heavy chain attached to his cross. When he turned his back, and walked hurriedly down the room, La Marquise clasped her hands, and raised her eyes, saying with a gasp, "O God, soften his heart!" Then she turned and followed him, gliding with a serpent-like grace over the rich carpet, the soft

## PART FIFTH.

IN WHICH SIR EDWARD'S MOTIVE IS OBVIOUS.

"Good morning, my dear fellow, good morning," exclaimed Sir Edward, with more than usual animation, as he entered Claude's room some two months after he had dined in the Rue Castiglione; "I am delighted to find you disengaged, as I have called on the merest trifle of business, the merest trifle; let me assure you that I won't detain you five minutes."

Claude gave a chair to his visitor, while he said cordially that he was quite at his service for as long a time as he pleased to remain.

"Thanks, thanks, my dear fellow; you are always a true Frenchman, you always understand how to place people quite at their ease; but it's only a matter of a moment, the merest trifle; do me the favor, my good fellow, to lend me three thousand francs for a few days."

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure," replied Claude, heartily. "I am most happy to be able to serve you in any way." These were not merely the usual complimentary words employed between gentlemen during the like delicate transactions. When he said, "I am happy to serve you," he meant it, for he well knew in that way he was serving Céleste, though indirectly.

So without the slightest hesitation he wrote a check for the amount, for which Sir Edward with the most businesslike importance returned his note, that Claude knew to be as worthless as the paper on which it was written, saying in a tone of assumed indifference, "Thanks, my dear fellow; not at all necessary between gentlemen, but still more business-like, more in order, in case of accident, you understand."

Claude assured him that he understood, and quietly laid the note on the check, which Sir Edward, without appearing to notice, folded together and slipped into his pocket. "Now another little matter," he continued, briskly. "Monthelon is in the market, to be sold next week; a perfectly useless lot of property to me, monsieur; it has actually eaten itself up, and so I have

trailing sheen of her dress making a shimmer of light after her. When she reached him she laid her hand on his shoulder; the touch was light, but it made him shiver, and bending forward she looked into his eyes with the most persuasive smile, saying, "*Mon père*, you have never yet refused to make me happy. You know what I wish; promise me that you will not denounce him to the government; promise me but that, and you will have my eternal gratitude."

The Bishop did not reply. La Marquise still continued to gaze into his face, her very soul in her eyes. For more than a minute they stood thus, each trying to penetrate into the hidden thoughts of the other. Then she said, "You will not promise me?"

"I cannot."

"You cannot?" Quicker than lightning the hand fell from his shoulder, and starting away from him she stood with folded arms looking at him steadily, contempt and hate plainly written on her face; then raising her right hand she pointed to the door, saying in slow, deep tones, "Go, Judas, go! I have seen you for the last time. Henceforth there is a gulf between us that nothing can bridge over. I have reached the crisis of my suffering; there will be a day when yours will also arrive. Then may you experience my pain a thousand times intensified. Go, not a word, go!"

The Bishop slowly retreated toward the door, bowing as he went like one leaving the presence of royalty. His face was ghastly, drops of sweat stood on his forehead, and his eyes seemed flames of fire devouring the face of La Marquise, as she stood, the impersonation of scorn and hate. When the heavy curtain fell over the door and hid him from her sight, her arms dropped helplessly, and she sank with a heart-breaking sigh into the nearest chair. "It is done, it is done. I would have saved him, but I could not. Judas! Judas! thou wilt suffer a terrible agony of remorse when thou hast completed thy cruel betrayal. Thou wilt live to look upon my dead face, and know that thy ambition, thy revenge, thy merciless hate, extinguished its light forever."



determined to be rid of it; not the least use in the world of keeping an estate like that when one don't live on it; I believe it joins your estate of Clermont?" Claude winced; how had he learned that. If he knew that, did he not also know more? "And I thought you might like to become its purchaser. To unite it to yours would increase the value of both. Think of it, monsieur, think of it; it would make a fine property."

"It would indeed," said Claude. "I shall consider the matter, and decide without doubt to become its owner."

Sir Edward saw that M. le Comte, for some reason, was not inclined to be expansive on the subject; so he took his hat, shook hands cordially, and went away humming an air from the last opera with the utmost *nonchalance*, while he thought, "Another little annoyance over; after all, it is not so disagreeable to have affairs with gentlemen. How cleverly he returned me my note! I wonder if he suspected it was worthless. Ha, ha! he is either very generous or very stupid, or perhaps it is an advance; he intends to ask for Elizabeth, there's no doubt but what he is fond of the girl; and if he wants her he shall have her. In that way Monthelon can be kept in the family. A devilish clever idea of mine to suggest its purchase before he proposed for her; more dignified in every way, and in the end amounts to the same. One may as well preserve his self-respect when he loses nothing by it. Three thousand francs, a nice little sum to pay my tailor and hostler; a man can't get clothes and horses without money, especially after his credit is gone, and there is no use in living in Paris if one can't dress well, go to the opera, and ride in the Bois. It is a mystery to me how those two women manage the house and dress so well without money. I suspect Lady Courtney has sold her jewels, and it is just as well if she has, for she never wore them, her beauty is not of the style to need them. So, so, *ma belle*, you thought to make me jealous when you told me of the youthful amour between M. le Comte and my wife. Bah! what do I care how many she loved before she loved me? No, no, I am not such a fool as to break off this very

useful friendship, and the prospect of an excellent alliance for Elizabeth, because of sentimental scruples. Ah, *ma belle* Marquise, you are very clever, but you can't deceive me. You are in love with M. le Comte yourself, and you fear he still has some *penchant* for Lady Courtney. I am not in the least distressed by your revelations, but I am surprised that my wife has enough *finesse* to keep her former connection a secret. How in the name of heaven has La Marquise learned it all? She seems to know more about M. le Comte than any one else, and yet she has seen him less, for Raymond says he avoids her. When I spoke of Monthelon being near Clermont, it is true he changed the subject as though it did not please him. However, I sha' n't quarrel with him, he is too useful." With this generous conclusion, Sir Edward turned into the Rue de Rivoli, and sauntered along, smiling and bowing to his fair friends with a grace and suavity that younger beaux admired and imitated.

After his visitor had gone, Claude sat for a long time in deep thought. Monthelon was to be sold, and he then and there decided to become its purchaser. He knew that it had long before been mortgaged to its full value, but he had hoped Sir Edward would devise some means to retain it in his possession for the sake of his wife. That it was really in the market showed how entire was the ruin of her fortune, and how utterly she was without provision for the future. The property that the poor old manufacturer had toiled so hard to accumulate for his child had been diminished by her guardian, and the remainder squandered by her profligate husband, and now nothing remained for her and the equally unfortunate Elizabeth but poverty. Claude had foreseen that this day must come, some two months before, when he had made the unselfish resolve to be only her friend, and he had then decided what course he should pursue. "Now," he said to himself, "the time has arrived when I can secure to her the home of her childhood, and place her beyond want. It will cost me a great sacrifice, not less than the half of my fortune, but it shall be done. She shall have Monthelon se-

cured to her if I have the means to do it." That very day Claude took the preliminary steps toward the accomplishment of his plans, but fate frustrated them in a way he little expected. During the two months since his first visit to the Rue Castiglione, scarcely a day had passed that he had not seen Céleste; indeed, the importunate advances of Sir Edward rendered formality almost impossible, even if his own inclination had opposed a close acquaintance, and how much more easy it was to drift toward such an intimacy when every feeling was in its favor. They had been days of almost unalloyed happiness to both him and Céleste; neither dared to confess it, and yet they both knew it well, and they also knew that if circumstances should put an end to their blissful intercourse they should regret it forever. Elizabeth seemed to have resigned herself to let matters take their course; her confidence in Claude and her warm friendship for him pleaded powerfully in his favor. Sir Edward had known nothing until the day before his demand upon M. le Comte's generosity; then La Marquise had enlightened him, to the end that he might disturb the influence that she had discovered Lady Courtney still exercised over her former lover, but she had not found the aid she expected from a jealous husband. He had received her information with the utmost *sang froid*, for reasons which the first part of this chapter render obvious, so nothing had occurred to derange their serene relations.

La Marquise had not made the progress in her friendship with Claude which she had hoped to do, although she had written to him, after her stormy interview with the Bishop, and requested him in the most earnest manner to avoid expressing his liberal opinions too openly if he valued his personal safety and freedom; yet she could not perceive that it had advanced her cause in the least. It is true he had called to thank her for her interest, and had conversed with her for some time in the most winning and gracious manner, but he had persistently disregarded all her delicate overtures of a more intimate relation. He had never again appeared

at her Friday *soirées*, never came to her box at the opera, never rode by her side in the Bois; in short, never paid her any of those little attentions which her heart desired, and his very indifference fed her passion and fanned it to a flame. She was more eccentric, more uncertain, more cruel, more passionate than ever. There were whole weeks when she absented herself from the world and closed her doors to all, whole days and nights when she wept and prayed in her little oratory alone, refusing food until she was exhausted with fasting, shutting out the light of the sun and the sound of human voices, until her own thoughts and her restless, feverish soul drove her back again to the world. At that time the enemies of La Marquise said she was thinner, that her form was losing its roundness, her lines their undulating grace, her movements their serpent-like flexibility; that her face was too pale, her eyes too intense in their expression, the violet shadows around them too deep, and her mouth too depressed at the corners; that she seemed absorbed, dreamy, restless, expansive, reticent, and reckless, by turns; in fact, that she seemed like a person consumed by an inward fire which she kept alive by her own inconsistencies.

Philip was in despair at her capricious conduct; one day she would receive him with a kindness that was almost tender, another day with stern, cold indifference, and again with evident dislike. There were terribly tempestuous scenes between them. Philip would accuse, reproach, and implore. La Marquise would relent, soften to penitence, entreat his forgiveness for her cruelty, and be all gentleness, all sensibility, until some expression of love and confidence from him would startle her from her tranquillity into an insane passion; then she would heap all sorts of invectives upon him, upbraiding, taunting, and insulting, in such a manner that he would fly from her presence almost terrified. If he liked emotion he had enough of it, ay, and too much, for his life was a torture, a constant tumult of hope, disappointment, and desire. He did nothing; every occupation, every improvement, every diversion, was neglected that he might indulge this unreasonable and

despotic passion. Sometimes he compared this conflict with his placid affection for Elizabeth, and then he was ready to curse the day when this cruel enchantress had lured him away from his loyalty to the most noble woman he had ever known. One morning, after a sleepless night, he arose determined to end the struggle then and forever, either by gaining a conquest or suffering a defeat. Pale, stern, and resolved, he marched toward the Hôtel de Ventadour, repeating to himself,

"He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small,  
Who will not put it to the touch,  
To win or lose it all."

He was shown into the boudoir of La Marquise. She was lying on the same rose-colored sofa, dressed in the same velvet *peignoir*, as she was the first time we saw her, her head thrown back, her hands clasped over her forehead, and her hollow eyes fixed with a mournful calm on the sorrow-stricken face of the Niobe. She gave her hand languidly and indifferently to Philip as he seated himself by her side; it was cold and damp, and there was no light of love, no fire of passion, in the slow, still gaze of her heavy eyes.

There was something solemnly portentous in this unnatural composure that disheartened and chilled Raymond's intention; it seemed like sacrilege to speak of human passion and desire in the presence of such evident mental suffering. So after the first quiet greeting he sat in silence, with his eyes fixed upon her changed face, until she turned toward him and said, "Philip, have you read *La Liberté* this morning?"

"No, why do you ask me?"

"There is another article, so daring, so full of the spirit of emancipation, so revolutionary, that it will seal his doom. I have used all my influence for him and with him, but it has been in vain; believe me, his liberty, and perhaps his life, is only a question of days. Last night I sent for him to come to me. I warned him, I implored him to leave the country while there was still time; but he refused, utterly refused, declaring he would remain and bear the consequences, whatever they might be. O

Philip, he has a noble, fearless soul, but a stern, unpitying heart. He saw I suffered, but my suffering did not move him!"

"You suffered? Then it is M. le Comte de Clermont to whom you have given your heart? You love him!"

"Yes, so well that beside him I have no other hope in life, no other desire, no other thought. I would give my life to save him from ruin, and he will not be saved by me; he scorns me, he despises me; my sacrifice has been in vain."

Philip covered his face with his hands and moaned aloud in the pain of his disappointment, regret, and sorrow.

"I hoped," she continued in the same calm, even voice, — "I hoped that my interest, my anxiety for his safety, would at least win his friendship; but it has not; there is something in me that repels him; he looks upon me with fear and distrust." Then seeming to notice for the first time that Raymond was weeping beside her, she laid her hand on his bowed head, and said with extreme gentleness, "Dear Philip, do not add to my other sorrows the sight of your suffering. Listen to me, *mon ami*, I wish to speak to you seriously and solemnly. I have a request to make, which you who love me will not refuse. It is for your own good, your own salvation. It seems to be my fate to ruin and blight those I love, those I would save. I wish to send you too away from a danger, the danger of my presence. I do not love you, I shall never love you, and you love me, and your unrequited passion is crushing you with its power. I might keep you here in selfish bondage to comfort me with your affection, your tenderness, your sympathy. I might delude you still further with the hope of some future reciprocation, but it would be a most cruel injustice to you, and would but add a greater burden to my future remorse. Therefore let me implore you, to leave me now, while I have the strength to send you from me. I may not have it to-morrow, I may not have it in an hour. I have no confidence in my good intentions. I have wronged you, I have wronged many, and I may

wrong many more; but now at this moment my desire to save you is sincere; then leave me, leave Paris for a time, seek in new scenes a cure for your sick heart, strive to forget me and the fatal passion that can work you only ill."

"O Gabrielle, I implore you to have some compassion," cried Raymond, falling on his knees before her, and clasping her hands to his tear-wet face; "do not banish me from your presence. I love you, I adore you, I am more than happy to kneel at your feet," he added, forgetting all his resolution of the morning. In her presence every resolve was swept away, and now he would bow in the dust if he might but be her slave, subject to her most imperious demands, her most cruel caprices.

For a moment she looked at him pityingly, then she leaned forward and took his face between her palms, while she said in a voice of impressive firmness, "Philip, you must go; the only way you can convince me of your love is to leave me directly, and Paris to-night; it is imperative that you should go. If you refuse, if you remain to annoy me by your presence, I shall hate and despise you. If you obey me, I shall love and respect you, and implore God to make you happy. Will you go, dear Philip?"

There was a sweet earnestness in her face, a tender pathos and gentle firmness in her voice, that seemed to touch some depths in his nature never before stirred, and he hesitated no longer. Lifting his eyes calmly to hers, that were fixed upon him with infinite pity, he said, "I will obey you, Gabrielle. I will leave Paris to-night, but I shall never forget you, never cease to love you."

She parted the hair from his forehead with her soft white fingers, and bending over him she pressed a long kiss upon it, the first and the last. Then Philip left her presence without a word; but as the door closed, a stifled sob fell upon her ear, and wrenched her heart with a spasm of pain.

An hour after Philip entered the *salon* in the Rue Castiglione. Elizabeth was reading tranquilly *La Liberté* to Lady Courtney; and just as the door opened she said, with rather languid in-

terest, "I wonder who can be so fearless and independent as to dare to write this article." When her eyes fell upon Raymond's pale, agitated face, the paper dropped from her hands and she exclaimed, "Are you ill, Philip?"

"No, not ill, but miserable. I have come to say good by. I leave Paris to-night, for Florence."

"Leave Paris to-night!" cried both ladies in astonishment. "Why so suddenly?"

"For reasons that I cannot explain," he replied with a troubled glance at Elizabeth, who had turned deathly pale.

"When will you return?" inquired Céleste.

"God only knows if ever. But I have not a moment. I have a thousand things to arrange, and only a few hours for all. Good by, Lady Courtney. Good by, Elizabeth. God bless you, may you be happier than I am!" And wringing the hands of both he rushed from the room impetuously.

When he had gone they stood looking at each other for a moment, then Elizabeth threw herself into the arms of Céleste and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

That night at the dinner-table Sir Edward Courtney looked curiously at his daughter's pale cheeks and red eyes and then said, "So Raymond leaves to-night for Italy? He has quarrelled with La Marquise, and gone off in a terrible state."

"He came to say adieu, and he did seem very much troubled; I thought it was only his sorrow at leaving," hazarded Céleste rather timidly, while she glanced at Elizabeth.

"Ah, he came here, did he? and that is the cause of your red eyes, my daughter," said Sir Edward, sternly, following his wife's glance. "I hope you have more sense than to waste your tears on such a good-for-nothing." Neither of the ladies replied, and he continued, "I have my plans for you, Elizabeth. I am expecting a proposal for you every day from M. le Comte de Clermont, an excellent *parti* in every way; of course I shall not refuse to give you to him. You know that owing to my ill luck — my misfortunes, I might say — I cannot give you a *dot*, Elizabeth; so we

must accept the offer of the first one who will take you without."

"O papa, I implore you not to speak of such a thing," cried Elizabeth, with real distress. "M. le Comte de Clermont does not care for me in the least, he has not the least intention of asking me to be his wife."

"Indeed!" said Sir Edward in tones of cruel deliberation, "then why does he come here so often? Why is he a constant visitor, if it is not for the pleasure of my daughter's society?"

Elizabeth turned crimson, and Céleste looked like one ready to faint, but neither replied.

"O, I understand! Then it must be that he is still in love with my wife, who, I have been told by strangers, was once affianced to him."

Céleste sprang from her chair, looked at her husband for a moment with wild eyes, clasped her hands to her head, and fell back in the arms of Elizabeth, fainting.

Sir Edward was terrified at the scene he had caused by his ill-advised remarks; and while Elizabeth hung over his wife, trying to restore her to consciousness, he walked the floor wringing his hands and reproaching himself for having been such a stupid fool. When at last Céleste struggled to a sitting position, and, pushing Elizabeth away, held out her hand to her husband, he came forward thoroughly willing to meet her advances, saying, "For God's sake don't make a fuss. I was only jesting. I don't care in the least that you kept it from me."

"I kept it from you," said Céleste, with a burst of tears, "because both Elizabeth and myself thought it best at first, and then after we had deceived you we were afraid to acknowledge it."

"I did it for the best, papa," said Elizabeth, coming forward boldly to the support of her friend. "It was my fault that Lady Courtney did not tell you at once, but I thought we should never meet M. le Comte again."

"And so you were leagued together against me?" And Sir Edward laughed heartily, as though he rather enjoyed the idea.

"Now, papa, that you know it," continued Elizabeth, gravely, for she was

shocked and somewhat disgusted at her father's hilarity, "I hope you will give M. le Comte de Clermont to understand that he must not come here again."

"Nonsense! what do you mean, you foolish girl?" inquired the Baronet, with real surprise, for he did not in the least understand his daughter's high-minded view of the subject. "Tell him not to come here, offend M. le Comte, such a useful friend! why, you must be insane!"

"O papa, can't you understand that it — that under the circumstances it is not quite right; that now you know it, that — O papa, you ought to know what I mean without my being obliged to explain," cried Elizabeth, in desperation at the insensibility of her father.

"Explain, explain, there is nothing to explain. M. le Comte was once engaged to Lady Courtney. Is that a reason that I should shut my door in his face? He is a gentleman, and very useful; an excellent friend. By Jove! I could not offend him, if I had cause for it, under the circumstances." And Sir Edward thought of the three thousand francs that he had borrowed a few days before, and of the indefinite amounts he intended to borrow in the future.

Poor Elizabeth made no further effort to maintain her righteous opinion. She saw that her father was determined to disregard every hint and ignore every reason for closing his door against M. le Comte de Clermont, and she was too weary to combat it any longer, so she only said, laying her hand tenderly on Céleste's head, "Well, papa, you know all now, and you must never blame us, whatever may happen in the future. Only if you have any intention of trying to arrange a marriage between M. le Comte and myself, I may as well tell you now that it is labor lost, and that I shall do all in my power to discourage it."

"You and Lady Courtney will both continue to treat M. le Comte in the same friendly manner that you have done," said Sir Edward, impressively. "Remember it is my wish; do that, and matters will arrange themselves satisfactorily to all." With these words he left the room, feeling that he had be-

haved generously and judiciously, and had discharged his duty toward his wife and daughter in the most admirable manner.

Céleste had feared a time of exposure might come, and she had imagined if it ever did that it would crush her utterly. She had said to herself over and over that she never could survive it, that it would kill her at once. It had been the sword hanging over her head by a single hair, the skeleton at her feast, the imperative voice that had disturbed the tranquillity of her conscience ever since the night when she had been presented to Claude at the Hôtel Ventadour by her unsuspecting husband. Now the storm had come and passed, and she was relieved, and thankful that it had done so little damage. She had expected her husband, at the discovery of such a gross deception, would crush and kill her with his indignation; but, instead, he had not even seemed angry. She felt almost like worshipping him for such unparalleled kindness. So she said to Elizabeth, with a sigh of relief, "I am so glad it is over. O *chérie*, how good Sir Edward is to us! We ought to love him very much for his indulgence and gentleness; we deserved to be punished, and he did not even blame us."

"Remember it always, darling; a time may come when you will need the memory of all his kindness to support you under trials that may be difficult to endure," replied Elizabeth, sadly. Then she kissed Céleste, and went away to her room to brood over her own sorrows alone.

## PART SIXTH.

### ONE OF THE FORTUITOUS EVENTS THAT WE CALL FATE.

ONE fine morning in April, and a few days after the events recorded in the last chapter, Claude walked down the Rue Castiglione. A carriage stood at Sir Edward's door, and as he mounted the stairs he met the Baronet and Lady Courtney descending.

"A few moments later and you would

have missed us altogether," said Sir Edward, shaking hands cordially. "We are just starting for Poissy, to pass the day with some friends who have a villa there."

"Elizabeth has been there for three days, and I cannot endure her absence any longer," said Céleste, "so we are going to fetch her."

"I hate the prospect of a whole day in the country, I declare I do," observed Sir Edward, glancing ruefully at his wife. "It's a regular persecution, but Lady Courtney will not go alone, and so I must consent to be victimized, and dragged away from Paris this charming day, when all the world will be in the Bois. I declare, my dear fellow," he exclaimed eagerly, as though the idea at that moment was most fortunate, — "I declare, I wish you would take my place, and accompany Lady Courtney."

"O Sir Edward!" cried Céleste, turning crimson with delight at the prospect of a day in the country with Claude, "perhaps M. le Comte has some other engagement, and will not find it convenient to go."

"There is nothing to prevent my going, if it will be agreeable to your ladyship," said Claude, happy and yet hesitating. He knew not why, but some interior voice seemed to thunder in his ears, "Has man a right to seek temptation, in order to prove his moral strength?"

"Come, come," said Sir Edward, looking at his watch, "the train leaves in twenty minutes, you have barely time to reach the station." And without any further remarks he hurried his wife into the carriage, saying, "Bring Elizabeth back with you. Remember the evening train leaves Poissy at eight. Take good care of my wife, monsieur; *bon voyage*." And he clapped the door to briskly after Claude, and turned away, touching his hat and smiling his adieus.

"I swear, there are few husbands as generous and unsuspecting as I am," he said to himself as he sauntered toward the Palais Royal, twisting his heavy gray mustache with the tips of his delicate lavender gloves. "Lady Courtney's whim to go to Poissy to-day was most inopportune, as I had promised to ride with *ma belle* Julie this afternoon,

and the pretty witch would have cried her eyes out if I had failed to keep my appointment. Ah, M. le Comte! your appearance at that moment saved me from a terrible dilemma, and assisted me to kill two birds with one stone, and I even might say three: for by inviting him to go in my place, I first show my friendship for him, and my trust in his honor; secondly, my entire confidence in my wife; and thirdly, my devotion to *ma belle* Julie. How very apropos his visit was! I've no doubt that he's in love with my wife, it's a thing that we husbands have to submit to, and so it had better be some one who is useful in return, than a fellow who has n't a thousand francs at his command when one wants a little favor. Be as happy as you can yourself, and give others the same chance, is my motto, and an excellent one it is. Beside, it isn't my business to look after other people's morals. We are responsible beings and must answer all nice little questions for ourselves; and then it's absurd to preach what we don't practise, there's no dignity in it. I don't take the trouble to avoid my own temptations, then why should I make myself responsible for others?" Just as he had finished this philosophical soliloquy he found himself at Vefour's; and entering, he ordered some *ortolan fricassé*, and a *demi-bouteille* of *château Lafitte*, off which he lunched with the best possible appetite.

When Claude and Céleste found themselves shut into the carriage alone, and on their way to the train for Poissy, their first feeling was one of confusion, from which their speedy arrival at the station happily relieved them. There they found the compartment, into which they hurried, already occupied by a chatty old gentleman, who, much to their annoyance, insisted upon addressing them as husband and wife.

Poor Céleste was ready to cry with vexation, while at the same time she felt very happy, but a little guilty for daring to indulge in such unlawful delight, and a little afraid that Elizabeth would blame her, not understanding the misadventure that had forced this welcome and yet unwelcome escort upon her. "It is not my fault," she thought; "Sir Edward would have him

accompany me. How good and generous he is! I am so thankful that he is not cross and jealous, like some husbands. It is very pleasant to take this little excursion with Claude, still it is rather awkward. However, I did nothing to bring it about; therefore my conscience does not trouble me, and I may as well have one happy day to remember when I am old." With this comfortable conclusion she resigned herself, not unwillingly, to the circumstance that this fortuitous event had thrust upon her.

As to Claude he was not at all easy. We will not say he was unhappy, on the contrary, he was at the very threshold of the seventh heaven, if such a comparison is not irreverent; yet he was not free from certain little interior pricks, that kept him from perfect bliss, and detained him at the very entrance of the paradise opened before him. He had tried to reassure himself with the same questionable logic that Céleste had used; but being the stronger and more intelligent of the two, it did not satisfy him so easily. He had been suffering a great deal for several days; innumerable anxieties harassed his waking hours, and rendered his dreams anything but peaceful. Already he was beginning to pay the first instalment of the debt he owed to his experience, a debt of ingratitude for what it had taught him, and a still greater debt of self-indulgence. His love for Céleste had shorn him of his strength. He ought never to have looked upon her face again, after the night he accidentally met her at the Hôtel de Ventadour; but blinding himself with an intention of friendship and assistance, he had now reached the very brink of the precipice he had intended to avoid. He now loved her, although he did not dare to acknowledge it even to himself, as madly and passionately as he had on that day when they had parted in the rose-garden at Monthelon; he could no longer delude himself with sophistry, he loved her, and he had not strength to give her up. Reason thundered in his ears terrible warnings; there were ominous signs in the political horizon. La Marquise had told him that his liberty and even his life were menaced, that his only safety lay in his immediate departure from

Paris, and he was confident of it himself; he had received more than one powerful admonition to that effect, and yet he hesitated. He had said to La Marquise that it was only his duty that inclined him to remain and face the consequences, whatever they might be. He had tried to say the same to his own soul, but there he stood abashed under his falsehood, and was forced to confess that it was Céleste, his love for her, his desire for her presence, that made him deaf to the voice of warning. In his good work there had been no double motive; he had striven with a single heart to do something to better a little the condition of his country. His love had not narrowed his soul, it had deepened and enlarged it, and opened his really noble and tender heart to the dolorous moaning of those in bondage. But now the time had come when to continue in that direction was to lose the chance of future usefulness, and that he had no right to do. Reckless courage is as much a sin as is cowardice. If he had not been blinded by his passion for Céleste, he would have seen more clearly into his own situation, and withdrawn from danger while there was opportunity.

I do not wish to blame Claude too severely, he is my hero and I esteem him highly; neither do I wish to gain for him the admiration of my readers by false pretences and foolish excuses. Therefore I state the case exactly as it was, not hesitating to say that he was wrong, decidedly wrong, to accompany Lady Courtinay, even at her husband's solicitation, and thereby expose himself to a temptation that he should have avoided, and still more in fault to linger in Paris, when he should have been anywhere else at that critical time.

When they reached the station at Poissy, and escaped from the presence of the garrulous old man who had made their cheeks burn more than once by his suggestive remarks, they felt a little more at their ease.

"Let us walk to the villa," said Céleste, as she took Claude's arm on the platform. "It is only a short distance and through a most delightful road."

"If you prefer it, certainly." And then they sauntered almost silently through a narrow country lane, tender with the tints of spring; the soft April air blew over their faces, sunlight and shadow flickered over their path, the green trailing branches bent down to kiss their heads, and the daisy-studded grass caressed their feet that pressed it lightly.

Sometimes Céleste raised her eyes to the face of her companion, and suddenly dropped them, trembling to find that his were fixed upon her with unmistakable adoration. Once, almost forgetting where she was, she spoke to him and called him Claude; he smiled in return, and pressed the little hand that lay on his arm. She was vexed at herself for having done so, for now she never addressed him in any other way than by his title, and she feared he might consider it an advance toward a greater familiarity; so she turned away her head and looked resolutely toward the forest of St. Germain, and the distant silvery thread of the Seine.

"This reminds me of the April days at Clermont," said Claude.

"Hush," cried Céleste, "I am never to speak of them. I promised Elizabeth never to speak of the past."

"Then we will speak of the delightful present. Are you happy this morning, Céleste?"

His voice lingered softly on her name. She did not reprove him, but turned away her face without replying. Then Claude sighed and said, "I wish such a day as this could have no to-morrow. If it could but last forever, or end to both of us at once."

"The world is very beautiful, Claude, and life, in spite of sorrow, has so much sweetness in it, I think we should not desire to shorten it even one hour."

"Do you always think so, dear Céleste?"

"Not always, O, not always!" she replied with a sigh that revealed an abyss of sadness that he had not fathomed. "Sometimes I am very weary, and wish it would all end. I don't think I have the strong nature to endure, although I strive very hard to be patient and happy."

"Poor child," said Claude with ten-



der pity, "God knows how I wish that I might bear your burdens."

"My burdens? O Claude, I have no burdens," she returned with an eagerness of denial that did not deceive him. "I am sure every one is so good to me. Think of Sir Edward, how kind he is; and dear Elizabeth does so much to make me happy. If I am not contented with my lot, it is my own fault, my own wicked heart is alone to blame." Then she paused and colored, dropping her eyes with shame, as though she had revealed too much. Claude made no reply, and both fell into a silence which they scarce dared to break, fearing lest they should encroach upon some interdicted subject. Their hearts naturally turned to the old days, and they longed to speak of them, but Céleste remembered her promise, and Claude respected it; so they said but little more until they reached the gate of the villa, where Céleste was glad to be, feeling that the presence of Elizabeth would relieve her from all embarrassment.

The porter who opened the gate looked a little surprised as he recognized Lady Courtney. "The family have all gone to Paris, madame," he said.

"Gone to Paris!" repeated Céleste, confounded.

"Yes, madame, they went in the ten-o'clock train to accompany Mademoiselle Elizabeth, who wished to return home."

"And I have come to fetch her," said Céleste. "It is an annoying *contretemps*; we have passed her on the road; and now all that remains for us to do is to turn and follow her."

"When does the next train leave?" inquired Claude of the porter.

"O monsieur, there is not another train until eight o'clock this evening."

"Eight o'clock!" exclaimed Céleste.

"Eight o'clock," repeated Claude, looking at his watch, "and it is now only one!"

"Seven hours," said Céleste; "what shall we do?"

"O, there is a great deal to see in Poissy, madame, while dinner is being prepared for you. What hour would you like to dine?"

Céleste looked at Claude, and then

said to the man, "Will the family dine at home?"

"No, madame, they will leave. Paris about the time the eight-o'clock train arrives there."

"Well," said Claude, pleasantly, "we must make the best of the misadventure. If you are not too tired," turning upon Céleste a very happy face, "we will walk through the town and see the church where St. Louis was baptized, and the other places of interest, and return to dinner at whatever hour you like."

"I think it had better be early," replied Céleste, with rather a troubled face; "say four o'clock."

"Very well," said the porter, touching his hat as they left him, "I will give the order to the cook, and when madame returns she will find everything in readiness."

It is needless to say that the time flew swiftly, and before they were aware of it the hour to dine had already arrived. When Céleste seated herself at the table opposite Claude, and their eyes met, both were visibly agitated, their position toward each other was so trying, and their hearts were so filled with old memories and hopes, that this simple meal, partaken without the presence of a third party, suggested more than either could bear quite calmly. Dish after dish went away scarce tasted. They were both too troubled to eat, and the dinner was a mere form that they were thankful to have finished.

"How calm and quiet it is here!" said Céleste, as they stood side by side at a bow-window that opened on the lawn. "I think I was not created for a city life; I pine for the country always."

"A life of seclusion and retirement brings us into more intimate acquaintance with our own hearts; we study ourselves more and others less. Therefore the objection might arise that such a continued intercourse with self would tend to make one narrow-minded, egotistical, and intolerant," replied Claude, looking at her earnestly, yet with an absorbed and troubled air.

"There are, no doubt, many detrimental influences in a life of entire seclusion, but there are some natures con-

stituted for it and to whom it has a peculiar charm. Still I do not advocate an existence entirely separated from the world. I was thinking of the sweet family life apart from the consuming cares of a great city." Again she paused in confusion; unwittingly she had expressed her companion's thoughts, and approached that dangerous ground on which it would be madness to tread.

"Céleste, may I ask you one question?" cried Claude, suddenly taking her hand. "Are you satisfied with your life?"

"O Claude! how can you ask it?" and her eyes filled with tears.

It was an avowal of all her sorrow, all her disappointment, all her hidden care and misery, all the anxiety that was consuming her. It broke down the barriers between them. It opened the floodgates of their hearts, and both wept passionately together.

"Tell me all," cried Claude, "for it is only by knowing your true situation that I can be of any assistance to you."

"It may be wrong to tell you," she sobbed, "it may seem like complaining of my good husband, who is not to blame. He has been very unsuccessful, and has lost all my fortune; but I do not blame him in the least, I only suffer because we are so helpless, Elizabeth and myself, and the future looks so terrible to us. O Claude, we so need some one to advise us, and we cannot bear to trouble poor Sir Edward, he is so kind, so good to us both!"

Claude did not dispute her belief in the goodness of her husband; he did not accuse him; he did not enlighten her; he only tried to comfort her, and to win her entire confidence. Gradually he drew from her the whole story of their complete ruin, their struggle to keep up an appearance of prosperity, their annoyances and distresses from the importunities of creditors, their sacrifices, and their efforts to hide the worst from the unprincipled man who had robbed them.

During this pitiful recital, Claude's cheeks burned, and his heart beat almost to suffocation. He looked at the frail, lovely woman before him, young still, and so unsuspecting, so innocent and gentle. "My God!" he thought,

"how terrible will be her fate, bound to that miserable man, who will drag her down with him, either to entire ruin or a premature grave! And she belongs to me; by every holy right she is mine. I will save her if she will be saved. It is my duty to save her. It is my sacred duty to rescue her from a worse fate." His passion and pity overwhelmed him, blinded and bewildered him; he felt for the time as though this adored woman, this idolized being, hung suspended over the very flames of perdition, and that it was his privilege, his duty to save her. He forgot all else beside, and clasping her hands in his, he implored her with the most passionate tones, the most forcible language, to abandon this man who had ruined her, who was unworthy of her love, who had no moral right to her, to fly with him to some secluded place, where alone and happy with each other they might retrieve the past by a blissful future. He went on with an eager impetuosity, impelled by his love, his despair, his fear, like one who stakes all on a last throw, who, if he loses, loses all; he felt it, he understood it, and yet he dared to take, in this presumptuous manner, his fate into his own hands.

At first Céleste did not understand his full meaning; but when she did she sprang away from the clasp of his hands, and stood looking at him in wild-eyed terror. At length she found voice and cried out in tones of such anguish that he never forgot them, "O Claude, Claude! are you mad that you speak so to me who have almost worshipped you?" There was a depth of reproach in this that wrung his heart; he remembered how he had once said, "She shall never have cause to reproach me." "Me who have so revered you and trusted you. It is not your own noble nature that speaks; you are insane, you know not what you say, therefore I forgive you, as I hope God will." And with a look of deep compassion and sorrow, she turned to leave him.

"Listen, for the love of Heaven, listen to me for but a moment!" he cried, springing before her, and clasping his hands in frenzied supplication. "O Céleste, have pity on me, I am mad, I am indeed mad; I love you, I adore



you, and I cannot be separated from you again; I will strive to be calm, see, I am already calmer. O Céleste, my angel, do not leave me!" And, overcome by his emotion, he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

She drew near him, almost terrified by his violent weeping, yet her face was calm and solemn, and her voice was full of tenderness as she said, "Dear Claude, control yourself for my sake, think how you alarm me; I suffer, I suffer deeply for you, and I suffer for myself, as I shall do in all the future. I shall never again be at peace. I have heard words from you that will haunt me always. O my darling Elizabeth! O my dear good husband! I can never look into your kind faces again without dreadful shame and remorse."

"Forgive me, Céleste, forgive me," he cried in broken tones, while he struggled to regain his composure. "I am more than guilty, and I deserve to be crushed by your indignation and contempt. I deserve neither pity nor mercy from you, and yet I implore both. Come near me, do not stand trembling as though you feared me. God knows I would not harm one hair of your precious head. Come near me." And, taking her hand, he drew her to the embrasure of the window.

The sun was gliding down to the west, throwing long shadows of the poplars across the lawn. The silence around them was only broken by the gentle twitter of the birds building their nests among the branches of an elm, and the soft sighing of the wind that blew over their feverish faces, and rustled the curtains that floated in and out like white wings of peace.

They looked for a few moments in silence upon the placid scene, and then Claude, drawing away from his companion, bent his head upon his hand, striving to calm the tempest that raged within; while Céleste prayed silently that God would give them both strength to conquer their suffering hearts. Thus they stood, these two poor souls, arrested on the very threshold of happiness by a solemn interior voice that neither dared to disobey. Loving each other to adoration, longing to unite

their lives, their destinies, their sorrows and joys, and yet not daring to cross that line of demarcation that God had placed between them.

At length Céleste reached out her hand across the open window, and laid it gently on the bowed head of Claude. He looked up, his face was ghastly white, and his lips were trembling with ill-suppressed emotion. "Go," she said, — "go, dear Claude, and leave me alone to think. Something tells me that after this I should never return to Sir Edward again. I must go and hide myself somewhere. I cannot deceive Elizabeth, neither can I deceive him; for now I know I do not love him, that I never loved him, that it is you, and only you, I love, and therefore I cannot see him again."

"O my blessed angel!" cried Claude, beside himself at the words, which he had only half understood, "may God forget me if I ever cause you a sorrow!"

"Leave me," she said gently, — "leave me for one hour to decide on my future course; then come to me, and I will tell you my determination."

Claude pressed her hands to his lips. The white curtains waved over them like the wings of peace; a slanting sunbeam touched their clasped hands and bowed heads with a loving benediction. Then Claude went out through the open window, into the shadow of the poplars alone, and Céleste stood gazing after him, until a winding path hid him from her sight.

Alas for them, through what shadow shall they pass before the sunlight shall touch them again!

For an hour Claude paced rapidly the long avenues of the park in a terrible state of agitation. In vain he tried to control himself by calling to his assistance some of the powerful arguments that had saved him before. But he could not reason; he could not lift his heart in calm, immovable trust to Him who hears us when we cry. He desired to be saved from this fearful conflict; he desired to do right; and yet, withal, he said, "I will not give her up, I will not give her up." Therefore Christ turned away his face, and left him alone in his struggle.

It is not difficult to imagine that such a soul must suffer intense torture before it can succumb to an ignoble deed, and that afterward the remorse must be a devouring agony. Claude had endured much; he had been through fearful mental conflicts; but such a one as this had never torn and racked all his being with a thousand keen pains; he had never before been so utterly overpowered, so completely defeated. The soft wings of night fanned his forehead, the dew fell like a balm upon the thirsty, fainting flowers, the twitter of the birds died away into the murmuring of their leafy nests, and a profound silence reigned around him. He threw himself prostrate on the ground, and burying his face in the cool, damp moss, tried to think, to reason, to arrange his plans; but there was no order, no rational intentions, no fixed purpose save one; and that was to separate Céleste from her present misery, and to bind her to himself forever. A still, deep voice seemed to say, "Renounce her, give her up forever. Go to her in noble penitence, and tell her that your path is made clear, and that it does not lie with hers. Leave her, and go back to your duties, your old, calm life, and forget, in patient labor, your unworthy passion."

"No, no," he cried, springing to his feet and turning toward the house, — "no, I will not give her up, though the heavens should crush me." The hour had passed; he reached the window where he had parted from Céleste; the room was empty, she was gone. He looked around bewildered. The wind still waved the white curtains in and out. A faint light from a crystal globe illuminated a table, on which lay some writing-materials, and among them he saw a note addressed to himself. He tore it open. It was stained and blotted with tears.

"I fly from you, Claude, because I fear you, and I fear myself still more. I go to my kind husband, my noble Elizabeth, to confess all. And then — and then — I shall leave the future to the mercy of God. In this moment the purest, the sweetest, the most tender feelings are placed in strong contrast to the unwor-

thy, the unholy, the ignoble. And I ask myself what is true and what is false; and straightway a divine finger writes before me in letters of fire, 'Thy duty at any cost. Let not the heart's wild passion, the unrestrained love, darken the clear, pure light of reason. Let not the nature desiring to grow up to the radiant sun of holiness turn downward to the clay of which it is fashioned, forgetting its origin in its base grovelling. Great and noble souls sacrifice passion and desire to virtue and purity; and he who conquereth himself is worthy of a martyr's crown. The joys of the heart are sweet, and love turneth all things to pleasure; but remorse and regret follow fast upon gratification. Passion is destitute of tenderness. Love begetteth passion; but alas! passion destroyeth love.' I cannot disregard the solemn monition of this holy teacher. My great love for you sinks into insignificance beside the importance of my duty. Therefore I fly from you forever. I do not reproach you; I do not blame you. I thank God that he has given me strength to save us both from sin. When you become calmer, when reason, when truth asserts itself, you will see with me, that though our hearts bleed to death, this parting is necessary, absolutely necessary. I would have adored you as a friend, a brother; but that cannot be. We have loved once, we shall love always, and we cannot be friends; therefore we must be strangers. I know you will respect my decision, and will never strive to change it. Farewell. God bless you, and help you to forget how we have suffered.

"CÉLESTE."

When Claude had read these lines he stood for a few moments like one stupefied by a sudden blow. Then he pressed his hand to his head, sighed heavily and sank almost unconscious into the chair where Céleste had sat to write these truthful but crushing words. His feverish passion was calmed and cooled suddenly and completely; he felt as though she were lying dead before him, stricken lifeless by his hand. The profound silence tortured him; the regular waving of the white curtains in the wind seemed like spectral forms; the incessant com-

plaints of his conscience affrighted him; inaction and repose were unendurable, and he arose and plunged again into the darkness. A half-hour after he appeared at the lodge, and muttering some scarcely intelligible excuse for being so late, he asked if Lady Courtney had gone.

"Yes, monsieur, she left more than an hour ago; one of the servants walked with her to the station."

Claude looked at his watch, it was nearly nine o'clock; Celeste was already far on her way to Paris. "When will the next train leave?"

"At eleven o'clock, monsieur."

Claude thanked the servant and turned away mechanically, scarce knowing, scarce caring, where he went.

"Another *contretemps*," thought the porter as he closed the gate after him.

## PART SEVENTH.

"STERNITUR INFELIX ALIENO VULNERE."

WHEN Claude reached Paris, somewhere about midnight, he was really ill from fatigue and agitation. He had been through a kind of special suffering that left nothing for consolation. He had been, as it were, intoxicated by his emotions, and had acted in the most insane manner, destroying and annulling all the laws of reason, which he had constructed for his own security out of his past experience. By his importunate desire to rescue Celeste from what he thought to be misery, but what was in reality duty, he had in one rash moment overthrown the wall which he had erected for her safety, and thereby left her defenceless. Now he knew that they were indeed parted forever, and that he had destroyed his only chance of aiding her; there was no longer any intention of friendship to fall back upon. He had tried that specious project, and had proved it to be a failure. He had intended to do so much for her, but his own folly had prevented him from doing anything. These were the thoughts that made his remorse unendurable, and added to his sorrow for

her loss a thousand poignant regrets for his own weakness and indiscretion.

When Claude entered his room in the Rue St. Roch, he found Tristan waiting for him, pale and weary with watching and anxiety; for his absence during the whole day, without any explanation, had alarmed him terribly. When the faithful servant raised his eyes, and looked upon the troubled face of his master, he knew something unusual had occurred. And when Claude threw himself, overcome by his feelings, upon the faithful heart that never failed him, Tristan understood that he had received another heavy blow, and he tried to comfort him in the best way he could. Then there followed two or three days of illness; of fever, delirium, moaning, and tossing, when some of the old scenes after his flight from Clermont were reacted, and Tristan's failing strength was tested to the uttermost. However, the frenzy soon exhausted itself; it was not long or serious. On the fourth day after that sunbright morning when he and Celeste walked through the flowers and light into shadow, he arose, pale and weak, but calm; and, dressing himself, he sent Tristan for a carriage, and drove to the Rue Castiglione, for he had determined to see Celeste again, but once again. He felt that he could not endure life without hearing from her lips that she forgave him, and that she was well and free from any new anxiety. Then he intended to leave Paris, and, returning to Sarzeau, endeavor there to reunite again the broken threads of his life; to take up the burden anew, and go on patiently with his humble duties. For the last two months he had been happy, — too happy, as he had learned from this last experience. He had been dwelling in paradise; and now he was driven out, and the gates were closed upon him forever. It was not so much the pain of his banishment as it was the thought that he had brought it upon himself.

I remember once standing on the roof of the Cathedral of Milan, just as the sun sank below the Alps, throwing a last beam of light over the brow of that wonderful statue by Michael Angelo of Adam after his expul-

sion from Eden. Looking at this statue, I was confused by the contradictory expression of the face. It is true there was much of regret in it; a sad, calm longing for his Eden; a desire for something he had left behind; but withal, a placid satisfaction, a resignation, a contentment, most remarkable in one who had lost so much. I, who then stood, with bleeding heart and rebellious soul, on the outer threshold of my Eden, could not understand this patient acquiescence; and feeling that the great master was at fault in his conception, I said, "It cannot be after his expulsion, for his face is not even sorrowful."

"You forget," replied my companion, "that he was not driven out alone."

Poor Claude had not even Adam's consolation to apply to his regretful soul, for he had not only brought his expulsion upon himself, but he had been expelled alone; and that perhaps was the bitterest thought of all, that henceforth he must be entirely separated from his idol. When he reached the Rue Castiglione, the first thing that attracted his notice was a card attached to the *porte cochère* of Sir Edward's house, bearing the suggestive words, *A louer, le premier étage.*

"The family have gone, monsieur," said the old woman who sat knitting in the door.

"Gone! where?"

"Heaven only knows. They went away yesterday, bag and baggage, and the apartment is to let."

"Did they leave no address?"

"No, monsieur, not with me. I asked Mademoiselle where they were going, and she said she did not know. Poor thing, she is an angel, and Madame too, for that matter. O monsieur, there are many strange things in this world. It's not me nor you that they did not wish to know where they were going, but the duns, the creditors of milord, who made their lives wretched! Poor young things! Heaven bless them wherever they are!"

Claude made no reply, but his heart echoed the old woman's wish, as he turned away sick with disappointment.

When he reached his room again he threw himself into a chair like one who

has no further aim in life, saying in a weary, dejected voice, "They have gone, Tristan, and God only knows to what fate." In the evening the thought occurred to him that La Marquise, being intimate with Sir Edward, might know something of their whereabouts. "I will go directly, Tristan. Help me to dress. I will not be late, that I may see her alone." While dressing he thought of the night when Philip had come to him full of life and happiness, to take him for the first time to La Marquise. Toward what sad results he had conducted him. Poor Philip, now far from him, was tasting of the bitter cup that he had long ago drunk to the dregs, and which he must drink again, replenished in a measure by his own hand.

When Claude entered the antechamber at the Hôtel Ventadour it was quite early, and there were no signs of other visitors.

"Does Madame receive this evening?" said a footman to another servant, as Claude gave him his card.

"No," replied the man, turning his back and walking to the farther side of the room.

"*Quel impertinent!*" muttered the footman, looking after him curiously. And then turning to Claude, he said, politely, "Madame does not receive this evening, M. le Comte."

"Take my card to her at once," said Claude in a tone that admitted of no dispute, "and say to her that she will do me a great favor if she will receive me."

In a moment the footman returned, and, throwing open the door of the scarlet room, conducted Claude into the presence of his mistress, saying with an imposing air, "M. le Comte de Clermont, madame."

La Marquise stood in the centre of the room, under the great golden chandelier, dressed in a sort of demi-toilet of white cashmere heavily embroidered with black. There was something funereal and solemn in her appearance that chilled Claude as his eyes fell upon her; but when she came forward with a warm smile trembling on her lip and a sudden flush of pink upon her delicate cheek, she seemed transformed into

something singularly beautiful and gracious.

"To what accident do I owe this pleasure?" she said, holding out her hand in eager welcome. "O M. le Comte, I am so glad to see you safe and well. I feared so many terrible things for you. You are welcome, most welcome."

"And you are kind, most kind," replied Claude with some warmth, for her earnest, almost tender greeting touched his suffering heart like a balm.

"Will you come into my *boudoir*? It is more cosy for a *tête-à-tête*, and beside I am such an invalid that I rarely leave it now." And she raised the curtain as she spoke, and entered the fair, calm retreat, that revealed nothing of the terrible tempests it had so often witnessed.

Claude followed her, and as she seated herself on the sofa, he noticed her air of languor and weakness, how thin she had become since the last time he had seen her, and how transparently white was her cheek; there was something ethereal in the pure lines of her face, the hollow intense eyes, and the masses of silvery hair.

"You are indeed ill," he said gently.

"What are you suffering from?"

"The physicians do not know. I am dying of a disease that baffles their skill of detection," she replied, with a dim smile and a strange quivering of the lips.

"O madame, you grieve me. So young, so beautiful, and so happy, is it possible that nothing can be done to save you?"

"Nothing," she replied calmly; "I know my fate and I am contented. O monsieur, there are some who exhaust life early, they live with such intensity that they consume themselves! Unfortunately I was born with such a nature. I was touched with a fever that has urged me on to the most enervating extremes, and now at the time when I should be happy and hopeful, with a long life before me, I am looking impatiently for the end."

"Pardon me," said Claude, gently; "is there not still some remedy? Is it right to allow the life that God has given to slip quietly away from us, without making any effort to retain it?"

And are we not guilty if we accuse nature, when in reality it is our own self-indulgence that has ruined us?"

"If there is any aim in living, if we can benefit or render happy those around us, if by penance and tears we can atone for sin, and make the soul more pure and worthy of its eternal inheritance, then, perhaps, we should seek to extend to the utmost limits the frail thread of existence; but if, on the contrary, life has nothing more to give us, if we know that we have absolutely lost every chance of making ourselves happy or others better, and if we have exhausted our tears and penances, should we still desire to live?"

"We should; there is no extremity so great that we should turn from it to death for a refuge," replied Claude, solemnly.

"I do not complain. I do not desire to hasten the end, but when it arrives it will be welcome. Neither do I reproach God that he has not given me happiness. I was not created to possess it. I should have abused it, and become more selfish, intolerant, and arrogant. If one should live to say, 'I have arrived at the plenitude of bliss. I have tasted the ineffable, the divine. I have consummated the extreme of hope, aspiration, and desire, and there is no more of joy to experience,' would it not be only at the sacrifice of his life? for such a day could have no end. It must be the union of mortality and immortality, the first delicious draught from the fount of eternal beatification. Therefore I do not wish to be old. I desire to live with all the intensity and emotion possible; and when all is finished, I would feel vividly the transport and ravishment, the ecstasy of immortal happiness."

Claude looked at her with surprise and pity. So young and so beautiful, to speak thus of a life too early exhausted. What had been the sorrow and disappointment that had blighted her existence? What poisonous worm had crept into the heart of this fair flower, withering it and killing it so early? His heart, tender from the smart of his own sorrow, was full of commiseration for her; he longed to comfort her, and yet he knew not what to say. When

she had finished speaking her face had fallen into her hands, and now he saw a tear trickle slowly from between her fingers and fall into her lap. She was weeping silently. The sight was more than he could endure; he arose and paced the floor rapidly, scarce knowing whether to rush from her presence; or whether to throw himself on his knees before her and strive to comfort her with gentle words and tender caresses.

When Claude left his seat by her side, the hands of La Marquise fell heavily; with an impatient gesture she dashed away the tears that trembled on her lashes. "*Mon Dieu!*" she thought, "where is my pride, to weep in the presence of this cold, stern man, who has neither pity nor love for me? O, how he will despise me for my weakness!" Then with an effort she said calmly, "Pardon me, M. le Comte, I am very nervous and foolish this evening. It is only when I cannot control my emotion that I feel how my illness has gained upon me."

In a moment Claude was at her side, and had her thin, white hands in his. "O madame," he said, looking at her with the tenderest pity, "if you could but see into my heart, you would know how deep, how sincere is my interest for you. Can I help you? can I do aught to render you happier? Command me as you would a brother."

La Marquise drew away her hands from his grasp, and leaning back on her sofa she looked into his earnest, noble face with an expression so intense, so inquiring, so full of devotion, that it was like a revelation to Claude. The hot blood rushed to his head, a shadow seemed to gather before his eyes, and from that shadow looked the white, passionate face of Aimée, as he had last seen her before she disappeared forever. And when La Marquise spoke, her voice sounded to him like a sad song of childhood brought suddenly back to memory after a long lapse of years.

"M. le Comte," she said, in an even, calm voice, tender with a monotone of sorrow and regret, "your kind professions of interest come too late, nothing can alleviate my suffering; but if anything earthly could cure me, your friendship and brotherly affection would.

I have revered your character, I have admired your noble sentiments, your pure life of sacrifice, and your efforts for the good of others, and I have long desired to win your esteem. Once it might have saved me, but now it is too late. There are wounds that friendship cannot heal, still it may soothe them. Let me do something for you; in that way you may grant me a reprieve, you may give me respite from an anxiety that is devouring me. Permit me to use what power I possess with the members of the government in your behalf. You have so far disregarded my warnings, perhaps you have not thought yourself in sufficient danger to warrant them. But I have not exaggerated; your case is most critical. I implore you to give me some guaranty that you will leave Paris, and retire from all your political associates; and that you will neither use your pen nor your influence against the present administration. In that case it may not be too late to save you."

"I have already decided to leave Paris," replied Claude, touched to the heart by her earnest pleading, "but I cannot promise all you ask. I suffer to refuse you, still I must be true to my principles at any cost. I must support my opinions, even at the sacrifice of my life, if it should be necessary. As long as I am tortured by the wrongs and woes of humanity, I must do something in their behalf. I cannot be intimidated by the despotism of a government that would crush the truth."

"Then I can do nothing?" said La Marquise, in a despairing voice.

"Yes, madame, you can do much; you can lend your support to our cause; you can encourage us to continue strong and faithful, during the struggle that all lovers of liberty must soon engage in. Our nation sleeps in security over a volcanic fire that will soon burst forth with terrible fury and devastation; then we shall need true hearts and courageous souls to resist the devouring flood."

"Ah that I might do something," cried La Marquise, while a sudden flash of enthusiasm illuminated her face with a wonderful beauty; then it faded away, and a look of profound dejection suc-

ceeded it. "No, no, it is too late now. Once my soul was full of ardor, once I longed to be a heroine, but it was some time ago, before this feebleness came upon me. Still I have strength to do something for you, but you will not permit me. O, why will you deny me the pleasure, the consolation, of trying to serve you?"

"You can indeed serve me if you desire to, but in another way, by assisting another for me," cried Claude eagerly, as he thought of Céleste and her need of a friend.

"Tell me how, and I pledge you my word to devote myself to your wishes."

Then Claude opened his heart to her, and told her of his former love for Céleste, of his present interest in her unhappy fate, and of his anxiety to discover her retreat, that he might be able to lighten the burden of her life. The propriety of employing a third person had never before occurred to him; now, in thinking of it, it seemed feasible and natural that a woman in the position of La Marquise, with wealth and leisure at her command, could do so much to assist these two poor women, without their suspecting the real benefactor, that he at once told her of his plan to purchase Monthelon, and settle it upon Céleste, thereby placing her and Elizabeth beyond the chance of necessity. She listened to him attentively, though with increased pallor and sudden spasms of pain, that turned her quivering lips white; and when he had told her all, she said, "You can depend upon me. I will do all I possibly can for Lady Courtney. I shall learn where they are from Sir Edward, who, I am confident, will not remain away long. Rest in peace; while I live she shall not need a friend."

Claude poured out a torrent of thanks from the overflowing gratitude of his heart, which did not seem to render La Marquise any happier. On the contrary, her face expressed the most poignant suffering, as she listened to him, and her voice had a ring of deep anguish, as she cried out, "Pray, pray, do not thank me."

When, after some further conversation, Claude arose to leave, La Mar-

quise said, looking at him anxiously, "Do you carry arms, M. le Comte?"

"No, I do not," replied Claude, with a smile at the strange question. "I have never thought it necessary for a gentleman to go armed like a highway robber."

"How will you defend yourself if you are attacked by ruffians?"

"With my good right hand, and if that fails me I shall trust in Providence. In any case, I will not take life."

"May God protect you then," she said solemnly; "and if harm comes to you, remember that I tried to save you."

Claude pressed her hand fervently to his lips, and thanking her again he left her with a lighter heart than when he had entered her presence. As he turned from the Rue St. Dominique, the bell of St. Sulpice was striking midnight. He had been more than three hours with La Marquise, and yet the time had seemed very short. He could not find a *fiacre*, so he walked down the Rue Dauphine toward the Pont Neuf, thinking of his conversation with the strangely interesting woman who seemed to feel such an anxiety concerning him. He was not vain, and he loved Céleste too well to cherish any warmer sentiment for another than that of friendship; yet he knew La Marquise entertained an affection for him as extraordinary as it was disinterested, and he also knew that nothing could make him waver in his fidelity to that adored being who filled all his thoughts. Still he was obliged to confess that this wonderful woman fascinated him in a remarkable manner. "She is a mystery," he thought; "what a generous nature, what a noble character, though warped and disfigured by pride and vanity; what exaltation of spirit mingled with morbid fancies and unhealthy conceptions; a sad but beautiful wreck of what should have been a perfect woman. While I looked at her and talked with her I was constantly possessed with the thought of one the expression of whose face is becoming obliterated from my memory by time or some confusion of resemblance; for when I think of Aimée, La Marquise comes

before me; and when I think of La Marquise, the figure of Aimée starts up, sad, passionate, and reproachful, as she stood in the shadow-haunted twilight, so long ago." So musing, he crossed the Pont Neuf to the statue of Henry IV. There he paused for a few moments to look over the parapet into the Seine, with its ceaseless, solemn flow, its insensible, un pitying progress toward the sea, over the tears, the moans of despair, the cries of anguish, that are hidden and silenced within its relentless bosom. Far below, like a procession of giants, glided the shadows of the numerous piers, sombre and mournful, into distance; while the stars of heaven blended mysteriously with the far-off lights that marked the winding of the river. The damp air blew over his face with a sudden chill, a sickening memory made the blood curdle in his veins. The yellow water, flowing on in the flickering glare of the gaslight, whirled and eddied over some crimson body beneath it. A white face with black tangled hair gleamed for a moment out of the darkness, and then disappeared. It was the body of a poor suicide, wrapped in a crimson shawl, floating down among the shadows of the piers; but it seemed to Claude as though the ghastly face of Aimée had looked at him reproachfully, from under the shadow of the cliff at Clermont. Something startled him, and turning his head from his absorbed contemplation of the river, he saw by his side, almost looking over his shoulder, the wild eyes, the haggard, never-to-be-forgotten features of Père Benoit, while at the same moment two men, wrapped in dark mantles, sprang upon him from behind the statue of Henry IV. For an instant he was so surprised as to be powerless, then he saw that if he hesitated for a moment he was lost. So he turned square upon his assailants, and bracing himself against the parapet of the bridge he dealt an effectual blow straight between the eyes of the ruffian who was endeavoring to pinion his arms. He staggered for a moment, then fell heavily, and lay as though unconscious; while Père Benoit and the other sprang upon their victim, one trying to cover his mouth, the other to

fasten his hands. The struggle was short but terrible; and it might have ended fatally for Claude, if the sharp report of a pistol and the heavy fall of Père Benoit had not alarmed the other ruffian, who turned and fled. Then he saw that the first, whom he had supposed unconscious, had risen to his feet and was also flying with the other. It was he then who had fired the shot, designing it for Claude, but instead it had struck his accomplice, and laid him helpless at the feet of his intended victim.

The whole scene had been so sudden, so short, and so confounding in the result, that Claude stood looking at the prostrate man like one bewildered, until the hurrying feet of approaching gendarmes, whom the report of a pistol had attracted to the spot, aroused him, and he bent over the suffering man and raised his head. The full light of the lamp fell upon his ghastly face and upon a red stream trickling over his hands that were clasped on his chest. He was conscious, and his wide-open eyes were full of anxious intelligence as he fixed them upon the face of Claude, saying in a clear, strong voice, "Take me home, take me at once. I have much to say to Madame la Marquise."

"Madame la Marquise de Ventadour?" inquired Claude, as he beckoned to a gendarme hurrying toward him.

"Yes, I am her servant, Justin, and I must see her before I die. It will not be directly, but it will be soon." And he struggled to his feet and looked wildly around him.

At that moment two gendarmes had arrived upon the scene, and after a hurried explanation from Claude, one ran for a litter to the nearest *caserne*, while the others tried to stop the crimson tide that was rapidly exhausting the strength of the miserable man.

As quickly as possible they arrived with the litter, and placing their burden upon it, the bearers turned toward the Rue St. Dominique; while Claude, silent and apprehensive, walked by their side, thinking of the reality of his danger, the clairvoyant warning of La Marquise, the relentless hate of this mysterious Père Benoit, who declared himself to be a servant of the woman



who had tried to save him. What could it all mean, and what motive had this man for his persecution and enmity?

## PART EIGHTH.

SOMETHING MORE OF GENEVIÈVE GAUTIER.

WHEN they reached the chamber of the wounded man in the Hôtel Ventadour, the servants gathered around him with surprised and curious looks. Yes, it was Justin, the taciturn, morose disagreeable Justin, who, though apparently the confidential servant of La Marquise, was in reality disliked by her as much as he was by all the domestics. There was no doubt as to his identity, but there was some as to his honesty when they saw that he was disguised, or perhaps I should say that he was out of his disguise, at least to Claude; for his handsome livery and white curling wig made him less himself than the dress he now wore, the threadbare, dirty, blood-stained dress of a priest. But the servants of La Marquise had never known him as Père Benoit, so one can understand their astonishment when they looked upon him in this new character.

"*Ce garçon est un coquin!*" said the footman to whom he had been impertinent that same evening, and who disliked him even more than did the others. "A fine thing, a servant disguised as a priest, or a priest disguised as a servant, I don't know which, but either is bad enough. I always suspected him for a knave, and no doubt that at last he has got his just deserts; but I will bring a doctor nevertheless." So he went out and left the other servants to strip off the disguise of the wounded man and place him comfortably in his bed.

When Claude entered, he learned that La Marquise had not yet retired, and that she would see him again in her *boudoir*. He found her very much excited, and her excitement seemed to increase when he recounted to her his strange adventure, and entreated her, if possible, to throw some light upon a mystery that perplexed him beyond

expression. La Marquise listened to him with the most marked agitation, while he also told her briefly of his former knowledge of this man as a priest, under the patronage of the then Archdeacon, and of his unaccountable enmity toward him, without any apparent reason; of his effort to take his life at Clermont, and of his attack on the Pont Neuf, and then begged her to explain to him why it was that he found this dangerous man domesticated in her household.

"What you tell me more than surprises me," she cried as she paced the floor excitedly, her cheeks crimson and her eyes flaming. Every sign of languor and weakness had disappeared, and she seemed to be struggling to control a rising wrath. "I cannot conceive what reason this man can have to dislike you to such an extent as to seek your life. It is indeed a mystery to me. When I married M. le Marquis, I found him among my husband's servants and favored with his confidence. For certain reasons which I cannot explain I retained him in my service after the death of Le Marquis. Until now I have always found him devoted and faithful, though eccentric to such a degree that I have sometimes thought him insane. I can only account for this strange occurrence in one way; he is a spy of the government, and a tool of the secret police. It was their intention to abduct you and imprison you, without accusation or trial. Ah, I know how the demons carry on their work! You would not have been the first who has mysteriously disappeared from the world, to drag out years in a prison cell. It was because of such a fear that I warned you. This pure administration prefers to dispose of its enemies in a cowardly, treacherous manner. But if it fails with such means, then it resorts to others. It arrests noble, truthful men in broad daylight, denounces them as traitors, drags them off to a mock trial, condemns them, and plunges them into La Roquette for an indefinite period. You have escaped this once, M. le Comte, but the next time you will be less fortunate. Even the death of this miserable man, who is evidently employed against you, will not save

you. Therefore I entreat you to fly, to fly at once. To think that one of my servants should betray you to these ruffians maddens me. Ungrateful wretch! dastardly villain! If he escapes death, he will not escape my punishment."

Claude looked at her, almost alarmed at her fury. Her eyes seemed to emit sparks of electric light, her teeth were pressed into her underlip, and the veins stood out like knotted cords on her white forehead, while her hands were rigidly clenched with a vice-like force. "Calm yourself, I implore you," he said soothingly. "Do not waste your strength and indignation on the miserable man who is expiating his sin with suffering and death."

"Ah, death is too good for such a traitor! I should like to torture him with the pains of a thousand deaths!" she cried with a frenzy of anger, pacing the floor, and grinding her teeth as she repeated it over and over.

"This excitement will kill you," said Claude imploringly, for he was now thoroughly distressed and alarmed at the tempest the news of the attack had raised, and he feared the most injurious consequences to one in her delicate health. "He should not have been brought here to disturb you. I regret it deeply, but he implored so to see you, saying he had something important to communicate, and it seemed the nearest shelter for him."

"Something to communicate? Ah, perhaps he will reveal the whole plot. The Archbishop of Rouen is at the bottom of this, I suspect, and I would give much to be sure. He did well when he wished to be brought here. I will go to him directly." And she turned excitedly toward the door, where she was met by her maid.

"The doctor wishes to speak with you, madame. He has dressed the wound of Justin, and he says he cannot last until morning. They have sent for a notary to take down a deposition he wishes to make. Will you see the doctor, madame?"

"Yes, send him here."

A tall, thin man entered, and bowing low to La Marquise, he said, "My patient is as comfortable as possible, but

sinking fast. I cannot find the ball, although I have probed the wound, which is near the carotid artery; an eighth of an inch farther, and instant death would have been the result, madame; a terrible wound, a mortal wound."

"I am glad of it," said La Marquise, in a hard, sharp voice; "such a wretch deserves to die."

"But, madame, his case is —"

"Never mind his case. I assure you I don't care in the least how much he suffers; I tell you he deserves it. What have you to say to me beside giving me a synopsis of his case? I tell you I don't want to hear anything about it, only that he suffers, that is all."

The surgeon looked at her and then at Claude, as though he would like to ask if Madame la Marquise was insane, but dared not; then he stammered out, "My message, madame, from the dying man, is that he wishes to see you and M. le Comte de Clermont — I presume this is M. le Comte," bowing to Claude, — "in the presence of a notary, without other witnesses."

"Very well. You may go."

And the doctor bowed himself out, thinking as he went, "A rapid development of insanity, brought on by over-excitement, with a febrile tendency to the brain."

Then La Marquise turned to Claude, and holding out her hand she said more calmly, "Come with me; I shall need you to support me, for I have a foreboding of something that will wring my soul."

When they entered the room where lay the wounded man, and the gaze of La Marquise fell upon his ghastly face, his wild eyes, and his clipped gray hair, — for all disguises were now thrown aside, and he presented almost the same appearance as he did on that morning when, as an escaped convict, he first appeared before Fabien on the *tour de barre* of Notre Dame, — she uttered a sharp cry, and falling heavily into a chair at the foot of his bed, she covered her face with her hands, as though she could not endure the sight.

A notary sat at a table, with a paper spread before him, and a pen in his fingers, ready to begin his work. Claude



stood near La Marquise, with folded arms. The faint flame of the shaded lamp threw a circle of light over the paper and hands of the notary, and all else was in half-shade. A profound silence, broken only by the labored breathing of the dying, filled the room, and rendered the scene solemnly impressive.

"I am ready for your deposition," said the notary.

"I am also ready." And the hollow eyes turned with an intense gaze upon the two figures at the foot of the bed, while he said in a clear, calm voice, unlike a dying man, "My name is Justin Gautier. I was born in Bourg Dieu, Département de l'Indre, in the year 17—. My only surviving parent died and left me an orphan at twelve years of age; and I was then adopted into the family of my uncle, Louis Gautier, of Bourg Dieu. He had but one child, a daughter, named Geneviève Marie." Claude started, and leaned forward with an expression of the deepest interest. "She was two years older than myself, and most beautiful. I loved her, and she was my affianced wife. Her father died suddenly from grief at the failure of a speculation that ruined him, leaving us both without a sou. I left Bourg Dieu to seek my fortune, and Geneviève went to Paris, where her wonderful voice, remarkable grace, and beauty procured for her a situation as second soprano in the Italian opera. There she was persecuted by the attentions of the former Comte de Clermont; but being virtuous as well as beautiful, she resisted all his advances, until, overcome by his passion, he offered her marriage. She loved him; he was a noble, rich and handsome, and I was but a poor, mean clod, unfit to mate with such perfection. Although she deserted me for him, God is my witness that I never reproached her. I loved her too well to stand between her and fortune. But from the moment I knew she had given her heart to the Comte de Clermont, I hated him with an intense hatred. They were married privately in St. Étienne, Bourg Dieu, and I saw her leave the church as Comtesse de Clermont. The sight changed my

very nature. I had been a simple, gentle creature until then. Afterward I became reckless, and indifferent to everything. I fled from France to America, not caring where I went or how I passed my days. Ten years after the marriage of Geneviève Gautier, and while I was still in the wilds of America, I was told that a Frenchman was dying in our camp, and as I was a fellow-countryman he wished to see me. I went to him, and found that he was very near eternity, and suffering from terrible remorse of conscience, from which he could find no relief, as there was not a priest within hundreds of miles to listen to his confession. After talking with him for some time, I drew from him the story of his crime. He was Andre Rénaud, and had been valet and confidential servant to M. le Comte de Clermont, and was one of the witnesses of his marriage with Geneviève Gautier. Controlling myself as well as I possibly could, I listened to the story of her desertion, the unfortunate burning of the records at Châteauroux, the death of the Curé who performed the marriage service, the destruction of the church record, the death of the other witness, and lastly of the bribe offered by the Count to this dying man to leave the country forever after he had destroyed, as he thought, the copies of the certificates. I cannot describe my exultation when I learned, before he finished his confession, that the copies of the certificates had not been destroyed as supposed; that this vile accomplice had hidden them with a number of letters in a secret panel that he had discovered in an old cabinet at Clermont, for the purpose of extorting more money from his master at some future time. Therefore the records were still in existence, and he had determined to return to France to make use of them, when death overtook him and frustrated his plans. Without leading the dying man to suspect that I had any special interest in his narrative, I drew from him all the particulars. And before his body was cold, I was on my way to the coast, where I intended to embark at once for France. When I reached Châteauroux, I found the man's story of the desertion substantially true.

Poor Geneviève, but a wreck of her former self, was living in poverty, cared for by a faithful maid, who had never deserted her. And her son, the lawful Comte de Clermont, was a charity-scholar in the College of St. Vincent. As I said, she was but a wreck. Her mind was weakened and her health shattered to a fearful degree. Still, she recognized me, and with her poor, weak arms around my neck, she implored me to do something for her child. When I looked upon the ruin of my idol, my beautiful, adored Geneviève, I took a solemn oath that I would be revenged upon the man who had wrought this evil. I was determined by some means to gain possession of these papers, and thereby to expose the crime of M. le Comte, and reinstall his wife and child. My first plan, that I might not be separated from Geneviève, was to marry the good girl who had devoted herself to her mistress so unselfishly. Then I removed to Malaunay, which was near enough to Clermont for my purpose, and too far away to create suspicion. It is needless to say how often I tried to gain admittance to the château of Clermont, that I might search the cabinet for the papers, nor how often I was unsuccessful, for the greatest care was necessary that I should not excite suspicion. In the midst of my efforts, poor Geneviève died without the pain of knowing how unfortunate I was, for the last few months of her life were passed in a gentle insanity, in which she believed herself to be living over her days of happiness with the false man she still adored. Less than two years after her death, M. le Comte de Clermont married again, and brought a bride to the château. I waited until a son was born of that union, then I thought my time was come to have my revenge. I made another daring effort to gain access to the old cabinet, but failed again, just missing detection, which would have ruined all. After this ill success I was somewhat discouraged, and thought it better to leave that part of the country for a while; so I returned to Châteauroux and settled down to a peaceable life with my good wife, whom I esteemed and loved for her devotion to Geneviève. We were poor, for

I had earned but little during the time I had lived near Clermont, and when I became the father of a sweet little girl I felt that I must devote myself to some serious occupation to provide for her; but dearly as I loved her, I was still haunted by the desire to fulfil my oath to Geneviève, and to be revenged on the Count of Clermont. At last I could endure inaction no longer. I started again for Rouen, leaving my wife and child at Châteauroux. One night, determined to accomplish my design then or never, like a thief I broke into the château of Clermont, and gained access to the room where the cabinet stood, and even had broken a lock to one of the doors, when I was surprised by the servants. I resisted, but was overpowered, imprisoned, tried, and sentenced to the galleys for fifteen years. Without a farewell to my wife and child, I began my living death. For four years I endured it, existing on the hope of seeing my child again; it was that hope that kept me alive. At the end of that time an opportunity offered and I escaped. I went back to Châteauroux. My wife had been dead for more than a year, my poor child was living with people I despised. I stole her and fled with her like a criminal, determined to go again to Rouen and find the son of Geneviève, who was then a priest in the college of St. Vincent, and, after telling him all I knew, to leave him to work out his own revenge, while I fled to another country with my child. I reached Rouen half dead from hunger and weariness, only to discover that I was pursued. The cathedral was the only place that offered a refuge. I entered it, and hoping to conceal myself I mounted to the bell tower; but there I was followed by the officers, who arrested me and dragged me away to another imprisonment more dreadful than the first. I left my child in the care of a priest whom I found on the platform of the tower. His heart was filled with pity for me, and he promised to protect the unfortunate little creature who betrayed her father by pointing out to the officers his hiding-place. The agony of being captured and taken back to my dreadful prison was nothing in comparison with the thought that my own child did not love me, nay, that

she feared me, hated me, and betrayed me." Here the voice of the suffering man took such a tone of sharp anguish, that La Marquise trembled and cowered like one smitten with sudden fear, and Claude groaned heavily, while the notary laid down his pen and wiped his eyes as if his sight was dim. "I went back to prison hopeless. I no longer resisted my fate. I endured the remainder of my term in sullen silence. But when I found myself free again, hope revived within me, and I turned my weary feet again toward the spot where I had left my child. I arrived one night in Rouen, hungry, suffering, and ill, but I did not know how or where to find her, for I did not even know the name of the man with whom I had left her. I felt the old desire to see Clermont again. A servant in the town told me that the Count had been dead for years, and that his son lived at Clermont,—his son who had usurped the place of the lawful heir, the child of Geneviève Gautier. Full of the old determination once more, I entered the grounds of Clermont. A lighted window and the sound of music attracted me. I looked in and there I saw my child, grown to a lovely maiden, dancing like a fairy with bright eyes and smiling mouth. My love did not deceive me, I knew it was my child, my Aimée. O my God, how my heart exulted to see her so beautiful!"

"Have pity on me, have pity on me!" cried La Marquise, suddenly falling on her knees before the bed, while she extended her hands toward the dying man. "O, I remember it all! I remember how I treated you with scorn and contempt."

"Aimée, is it Aimée?" exclaimed Claude, looking at her with horror and surprise, like one who, if he should see a corpse suddenly arise and stand before him, would forget all else in the terror occasioned by the shock.

"Yes, it is Aimée," she said, raising her face to his; "look at me closely and you will perhaps see in my changed features some traces of Aimée. Yes La Marquise de Ventadour is Aimée, the child that Fabien saved from want and suffering. And the convict Père Benoit and Justin the servant are one and the same, and her father,—her father

whom she betrayed, and whom she scorned and insulted when he returned from his long imprisonment, and knelt at her feet imploring her pity."

"My child, my child, do not reproach yourself, you did not know I was your father." And the dying man stretched out one thin hand toward her. He could not reach her head, and his extended hand fell helpless. La Marquise seized it and pressed it to her heart and then to her lips, covering it with tears and kisses.

"No, no, I did not understand it, my heart was false to me, I was born to curse those who love me. O my father, but just now I rejoiced in your suffering, I wished a thousand tortures to come upon you; forgive me, and bless me. Do not remember my wrongs against you."

"This atones for all. I have not deserved this. Is it true, or is it a dream, that my child calls me father?"

"I implore you not to excite monsieur," said the notary with a troubled face, "he has not finished his deposition, and his strength is failing fast."

"It is true, go on; I will try to gather my feeble senses. Aimée, hold my hand. This is what I would say. I gained access to Clermont, I searched the cabinet, but I found nothing. The man had deceived me, or the papers had been discovered by another and removed from their hiding-place. Come nearer, M. le Comte de Clermont, and listen to my last words; the words of a dying man cannot be false. I have hated you, I have plotted against you with the son of Geneviève Gautier. We have tried to ruin you, because you were the son of the man who crushed the sweetest flower that ever bloomed; her son and her lover have tried to avenge her wrongs. We have made you suffer, we have dishonored you, we have driven you from your inheritance, but we have failed to remove the stain from the name of Geneviève Gautier and her son, who is the lawful heir of the title and estate of Clermont." Here his voice sank to a whisper, and for a moment fell into silence; then he started up to a sitting position, and stretching out his hand toward the notary he said in a loud, ringing voice, "In the presence

of God, and with the fear of death before me, I, Justin Gautier, do declare Fabien, Archbishop of Rouen, to be the son of the former Comte de Clermont, and of Geneviève Marie Gautier, his wife." For a moment there was silence in the room, only broken by a heavy groan from Claude. Then the dying man sank back on his pillow with a gurgling gasp. "Aimée, your hand. Remember your father hated Claude de Clermont and tried to take his life; let that memory make a great gulf between you. Think of the cause his father gave me to hate his son, and forgive me for that hate. Love Fabien, his brother; be grateful to him, because he saved me from despair. Have I not served you well and faithfully all these years? Have I not watched over you with the utmost care? It was I, your poor despised father, who made you Marquise de Ventadour. I discovered you hidden in Paris, after your flight from Clermont, earning a scanty subsistence as a lace-maker. I became a servant to the Marquis de Ventadour, that I might serve you through Madame la Marquise. I was sent to find a lace-maker. I brought you. I had great influence over the feeble old man, and interested him in you, so that after his wife died he offered you marriage. O my child, how many times I longed to discover myself to you, and yet I feared to, I feared your scorn and contempt!"

"Ah, if I had but known you were my father!" sobbed La Marquise. "I recognized you at once as Père Benoit, but I believed you had not discovered me to be Aimée, and therefore I continued to treat you as a stranger, although I felt that you had some peculiar interest in me. I thought of many things, but I knew nothing, so I remained silent. O, how cruel I have been to you, when I might have made your life peaceful and happy!" Then she thought of the wrong and injustice he had done Claude, who was innocent of his father's crimes, and a sudden revulsion of feeling caused her to draw away her hands and cry out, "Why, why have you made it so hard for me to forgive you? Entreat pardon from him you have so wronged before you can hope for mine.

You are near eternity: pray to God for forgiveness and mercy."

But the ear of her father was already deaf to her cry; for before the words died on her lips, he stretched out his hands toward her, and cried in a voice piercing with the agony of death, "Aimée, Aimée!" Then the hands fell, a film gathered over the wild eyes, and the head rolled helplessly on the pillow. A moment after the notary folded his paper, saying, "His deposition is finished, he is dead."

Claude stooped over La Marquise to lift her up. She had thrown herself upon her father's body with extended arms, her white hair covering him like a shroud, while the crimson tide from his wound welled forth and stained the cold hands that were clenched over his heart.

"Take Madame away from this dreadful scene," said the doctor, who had been summoned when his skill was no longer needed; "take her to her room where she will be quiet, for her nerves are terribly shaken, and sleep is absolutely necessary."

Claude assisted her maid to carry her to her room; there they laid her half unconscious upon a sofa, and tried every means to soothe her agitation. "Do not leave me," she said more than once to Claude,— "do not leave me until I have explained all to you, for I cannot rest until I have done so." More than an hour after, when she was a little composed and her passionate weeping had died into long, heavy sobs, she held out her hands to him, and said, "O Claude, how I must suffer for all my future life, what terrible remorse I must feel when I remember my cruelty to my unhappy father! My heart is torn with different emotions. I love him and pity him when I think of his sorrow, and his undying affection for me, and I hate and despise him when I remember how he has wronged you. O, what a burden of pain and regret I must endure while life lasts! And you, do you not despise me for all my deception and folly? When I left Clermont I was insane with passion, and I wished to make you suffer. I rushed madly down the path on the edge of the precipice and hid among the rocks until

it was quite dark; then I hurried away to St. Ouen like a culprit, where I took the night train for Paris. I threw my scarf into the river, thinking if it was found you would believe me drowned and so accuse yourself always of having caused my death. For more than a year I remained in Paris undiscovered, during which time I heard nothing from Clermont. I supposed you had married Céleste, and was living happily on your estate."

Claude sighed, and said, "If you had listened to me that day when I entreated you to help me, all would have been different."

"Do not reproach me. I know how I have ruined your life. I am bitterly conscious of my ingratitude to one who heaped favors upon me. I have stung the hand that caressed me. I once thought I loved you too well to cause you suffering. I know now that I loved myself too well to make you happy. But, Claude, I am enduring a terrible expiation for my follies. If we sow tares we shall reap the same; and my harvest is abundant. It is only lately that I learned of your being accused of causing my death, and of the dreadful scene at Clermont; or, believe me when I say it, I should have made any sacrifice to have proved you innocent. Until now the Aimée of Clermont has been dead to the world; but she would have arisen to life to vindicate you, if she had not indulged in another hope as weak as it was delusive. When I learned from the Archbishop, who discovered me through my unhappy father, that Céleste was married and you were still free, I believed if you could see me at the zenith of my triumph, honored and courted by all, you might come to return my fatal affection, which has never changed nor diminished with time and absence."

"O Aimée, how we have tormented each other! Our very love seems to have turned to evil for us," said Claude, sadly.

"You cannot understand all the distress and weariness of a life of continual deception,—the excitement and devouring anxiety, the fear and expectation of discovery. I adopted every possible means to change my appearance. I

sacrificed my hair. Do you not remember my beautiful hair, Claude? I wept bitterly when I found it bleached white; but it transformed me. I scarce recognized myself. The first time I saw you was a moment of intense agony; for I feared you would discover in La Marquise the lost Aimée. You were visibly agitated, almost overcome, by the strange impression I made upon you, but you were not convinced."

"It seemed as though the spirit of Aimée had risen before me; for you startled me by your striking resemblance to her, which I then believed to be only accidental," said Claude in explanation of the violent emotion he had betrayed on that memorable night, when he had allowed himself to be conducted reluctantly toward his destiny.

"I soon discovered that your love for Céleste had not changed, that you still adored her. And then I knew my case was hopeless; but I tried to save you. I was sincere in my intention for your good; without selfish interest, or hope of reward from you, I used all my influence with those in power on your behalf. It is to that you owe your liberty until to-night; but I can do no more. Dear Claude, if you wish to spare me still more bitter anguish, leave Paris at once."

"I will," he said, rising; "before the day is over I shall be on my way to Sarzeau. But my dear Aimée, my dear sister, my heart aches to leave you alone in your sorrow. I suffer to think I can do nothing for you."

"To know you safe will render me happier. You forgive me, you do not despise me, henceforth there can be nothing but kindness between us; therefore I have nothing to complain of. After this tempest is over we shall meet in a more placid haven. Until then adieu, dear Claude. May God protect you and make you to prosper in every undertaking."

"When shall we meet again, Aimée, and how?" said Claude, looking at her with tearful eyes.

"The day is breaking," and she pointed to the window through which struggled the pale dawn; "let it be an omen of hope and peace. Adieu."

## PART NINTH.

## TOO LATE TO SAVE HIMSELF.

"WHAT! what! daylight? Daylight coming into the room, and Monsieur Claude not yet returned? *Mon Dieu!* where can he be?" And Tristan stumbled up from the sofa in his master's dressing-room, where he had fallen asleep at midnight. "How chilly it is when one wakes suddenly in the morning and finds himself out of bed!" And he shivered as he peeped through the blinds into the gray, deserted streets. "It's always dreary before the sun rises. The sun makes all the difference between day and night; still it is calm, very calm and silent; the great city sleeps more heavily just before it awakes. It's melancholy to think of thousands of people lying like dead bodies, entirely unconscious. How strange if they never should awake! if the sun should never rise! if it should never grow any nearer day, and I should be the only one awake in this great world, doomed to remain awake always, and to look from this high window out on to the gray, chilly city, with every sound hushed, and everybody sleeping forever! Ah, what a fancy! I have strange fancies always now. Certainly it's because I'm ill and can't live long. I'm always thinking of dead men and graves, and those dreadful catacombs where my bones may be thrown some day, if I die in Paris. I wish Monsieur Claude would hurry back to Sarzeau. He always says he's going, and yet he does not go. It's Madame Céleste that's keeping him here. What's the use of searching for a thing when you don't know where to search? She may be in Paris, she may be in England, or even farther, for all he knows; and yet he remains here and runs the risk of being imprisoned, and perhaps guillotined, for the sake of finding another man's wife. I should say it was n't right, if it was any one else but Monsieur Claude. I know he must have some good reason for what he does, so I sha'n't blame him; but I do wish I could go back to Sarzeau. I should like to feel the breeze from the sea, and hear the birds in the morning, and sit in the sun under Janot's vines on the south wall. It's so much better there than in Paris. It

may be very well to live here for those who like noise and crowds and danger, but to die here, oh!" And the poor soul shivered all over, as his thoughts returned to the dolorous subject that distressed him always. "Monsieur Claude says it's foolish and wicked too to care where our body is buried, when our soul is in glory; but for some reason I don't like to think of this poor deformed skeleton being tossed about in the catacombs for people to look at and say, 'Poor unfortunate, he was a hunchback!' It's dreadful to think that one's remains will show for years after how one was afflicted in life. The world looks at it as a sort of reproach, and blames the ill-fated creature for God's doings. It's all deplorable enough, and my life might have been worse than a galley-slave's, if Monsieur Claude had n't saved me from misery. How beautifully my days have passed with him! It's everything to be always near one you love. I could n't live away from him. O, where can he be? Morning, broad daylight, and his bed empty! He may be in prison even now, and if he is I shall never see him again. Hark! some one is at the *porte cochère*. I wish I could see the court from here. Ah, there he comes! I hear his step on the stairs." And Tristan sprang to the door and opened it with a radiant face.

Claude entered slowly and heavily. He was very pale. His hair was dishevelled, and his eyes were red from his vigil; still there was a deep meaning in his face, a stern, cold resolve, and his voice was harsh for the first time to Tristan, as he said, "What! have you been sitting up all night? Have you no more sense than to ruin yourself in this way? Don't you know that the cold and fatigue will kill you? I have told you repeatedly not to wait for me when I was out."

"O monsieur, I did not intend to; I went to sleep on the sofa, and when I woke it was daylight," replied the hunchback, deprecatingly, while he busied himself with kindling a fire, for the morning was damp and chilly.

Claude threw himself into a chair, and sat with his eyes fixed on vacancy, mentally contemplating the scene through which he had passed since he

left his room not many hours before. He scarce thought of the attack upon his person, although he was sore and aching from his struggle for his life. He did not feel any sensibility, any gratitude to God for saving him from the terrible danger he had encountered; neither did he think of the sudden and dreadful death of his enemy, the swift and sure retribution that had followed his sin; for his soul was full of the revelations that had been made by the dying man. Many things that had seemed mysterious had been explained; he had discovered Aimée in La Marquise, and that discovery would remove the stigma that had rested upon his name for nearly ten years. Surely this was a cause for thankfulness and satisfaction, yet it did not arouse any emotion of that nature; he was aching and smarting under a pain that he was not prepared to endure. In fact, he was experiencing a trial almost beyond the strength of humanity to bear.

We can make great sacrifices, we can support great torments with becoming heroism, we can even find strength to endure the pains of death, for one we love. Being human, I say, we can do these for one we love; but as mortals can we do these things for one we have hated, for one who has wronged us bitterly, for one who has branded us with suffering? Can we forget our anguish and our tears, and with placid, smiling lips bless the one who has cursed us? Ah! this is the crucible in which to test us, to discover if there is any divinity moulded into our clay.

We know how Claude some time before had tried, his heart filled with good intentions, to find this brother that the sin of his father had defrauded of his inheritance, and how he had never hesitated when he saw his duty clearly before him, but had hastened with almost eagerness to fulfil it; and now he did not suffer to know that his brother lived, and that he must resign his birthright, his title, his worldly goods, to him. There was no avarice in his feelings. He did not fear poverty, he did not unduly esteem pedigree, and to take the position of a second son was no annoyance to him. His suffering was not because he had found this

brother, but because he was a man he despised, his bitterest enemy, his most merciless persecutor, the one who had parted him from Céleste, who had ruined his life, who had sacrificed his honor and his happiness, who had been false to his trust, who had betrayed, deceived, denounced and abandoned him in his hour of need, and knowing, with all that, that the same blood ran in their veins, that they were brothers. Was he not an unnatural monster, a cruel miscreant, who could so disregard the ties of relationship, and immolate his father's son for his ambition, pride, and revenge? What should he do? How could he, when there was no compulsion, heap benefits upon the one who had so wronged him? How could he, by sacrificing himself, put the top stone to the lofty structure of this man's honors? Had he not already enough? He had robbed him while he held his inheritance in trust; must he then impoverish himself to give this faithless guardian the remainder? And with all these torturing thoughts, a, to him, still more powerful reason than these why he should not resign all obtruded itself, for by doing so he must lose the chance of assisting Céleste in her poverty. What would become of her, if left to the cold charity of the world? How could she live, when nothing more remained? Had he not the right to take justice into his own hands, and return to this defrauded woman the wealth her guardian had stolen from her? Was he not responsible for her welfare; and if he had been the cause of her misfortunes, should he not make some reparation? Then was it not absolutely his duty, under the circumstances, to keep the secret of these papers locked within his own heart? Or was it not better to destroy them altogether, and so end the trial, and secure his future welfare, not for himself entirely, but for those dependent on him? No living soul but himself knew of their existence; they were in his hands. A moment and the bright flame Tristan had kindled would destroy every trace of them forever, and leave him free to carry out his plans for the good of Céleste. The revelation that Justin Gautier had made on his death-bed, though true beyond a doubt, was

of no use in establishing Fabien's claims, without the papers he possessed. If he destroyed them, nothing could be changed in his situation, he would still enjoy all. And now he knew Aimée lived, and his innocence of the crime that had driven him from Clermont could be established, and nothing could prevent him from returning there to triumph over his enemy. And then when Monthelon was in his possession, and he intended it should be as soon as the arrangements were concluded, and La Marquise had discovered Céleste, she should become its owner again, and reside there as in the old days. Such a possibility filled his soul with joy, and he, not knowing through what seas of fire he must pass before such a consummation could arrive, exulted to himself, and prematurely congratulated himself that he had not, from a far-fetched sense of duty, decided to resign these papers, and thereby lose the chance of such a blissful future.

Methinks I hear my readers say, with some disappointment, "Alas, how has this fine gold become dim!" Have patience a little longer, kind hearts. Remember he was but human, and the temptation was terrible. And remember also how this man had wronged him, and how difficult it is for mortals to be godlike.

Tristan sat near the fire he had kindled, watching his master's face closely. He knew there was some powerful combat raging within; and when Claude sprang up suddenly, and, going to his desk, opened it with an eager hand, the servant thought, "Now he has conquered," when in fact he was on the verge of a lamentable defeat. It is well for us that God does not judge us by the outward appearance, else we should come to confusion when we looked within. He turned over the papers with an impetuous hand, and drew from the bottom of the desk a yellow package tied with a ribbon. He regarded it for a moment, while a dreadful pallor settled over his features; then, with a groan of anguish, he flung it on the table, and falling into a chair he covered his face with his hands. For more than a half-hour he sat there without a sound; then he

looked up and said in an unsteady voice, "Tristan."

"Monsieur?"

"Tristan, I am in torment."

"In torment, monsieur?"

"Yes, I am suffering almost the pains of hell."

"O, how dreadful! But have you done anything wrong?"

"I have, Tristan. It is because I have, and because I still wish to, that I suffer."

"Have you found Madame Céleste, monsieur?" For in Tristan's estimation, Claude's interest in another man's wife was the only fault he had ever committed; and he could think of nothing else but the remorse for that, which could entail such a fearful punishment.

"No, no, I have not found her. It is something new, something more trying than any trouble I have ever known. I have a great many strange things to tell you, Tristan. Mademoiselle Aimée is still living, and I have seen her."

"Seen her? O, thank God! And you are not glad?" cried Tristan in one breath, for Claude's rather ambiguous words confused him.

"Certainly I am thankful to know she lives. Who has suffered from her disappearance more than I have, and who has greater cause for joy at her discovery?"

"O monsieur, tell me, please, where she is, and when I may see her! It will be like heaven to see her again." And tears of delight rolled over the hunchback's wan face.

Then Claude told him briefly of the scene through which he had passed; of the attack by Péro Benoit and his accomplices; of the dying man's deposition as Justin Gautier, the discovery that the Archbishop was his brother, and that La Marquise was Aimée; and of the existence of the necessary proofs which would take away his title and estate, to confer them upon his enemy: all of which Tristan listened to with tears drenching his face, while he wrung his hands moaning, "Oh! oh! oh!" with every variation of sorrow.

"Now, *mon ami*," said Claude, looking steadily at his servant, "what would you think of the man who possessed those proofs, if he should throw them into the



flames and watch them until they were consumed?"

"O monsieur, I can't tell you!" replied Tristan, hesitating.

"Tell me the truth; what would you think of him?"

"I should think he was still more wicked than Monseigneur the Archbishop," said the hunchback, with a solemn emphasis on each word.

Claude winced as he turned toward the table and took up the package of papers, saying, "I am that man, Tristan. I have the proofs, and no one else. They are the papers I found in the old cabinet at Sarzeau, and I have decided to destroy them."

"O monsieur!" And the servant drew away from his master with a look of horror.

"Yes, it is my duty. Think of it, if I give them to that man it will ruin me. I can do nothing for myself, nothing for those I love. I shall be poor, very poor; for my father made no provision for a younger son, and I will not accept the charity of the man I hate," cried Claude, lashing himself into a fury to find an excuse for the deed he intended to commit.

"But, monsieur, it is nothing to be poor, if one has done no wrong. Give Monseigneur the papers, and leave God to punish him, and we will work together with a clear conscience and a light heart, because we shall have no great weight of sin to press us down and make us weary. I can work for you while I live, which may perhaps be longer than it would be if I knew you had committed such a sin."

"O Tristan, it is not for myself alone that I suffer," cried Claude, leaning his head upon the chimney-piece, with the papers still in his hand. The flames curled up crisply with a significant hiss, the coals gleamed like the hungry mouth of a wild beast. How soon, how very soon, all would disappear, if he should open his fingers and let the little bundle of papers drop into the devouring fire, and a breath would disperse the white ashes, all that would remain of the proof of his father's sin and his enemy's good fortune. The great drops of sweat started out on his forehead, strong fingers seemed to be clutching his throat,

an iron band pressed upon his brain, and a leaden weight stopped the pulsation of his heart. It was a moment to try both soul and body, a moment on which depended all his future. It was the crisis, the turning-point, in his moral as well as his physical existence. Tristan stood before him with his great eyes fixed upon his face in mute entreaty.

"Think, monsieur, think that God sees you," he gasped; "think of your confusion and fear when you meet poor Geneviève Gautier in eternity. Forget the Archdeacon's wrongs, and remember how she suffered. Do not destroy the papers, send them away at once, and you will thank God afterward."

"I cannot, Tristan, I cannot. O, I believed I had drunk all the bitterness of life before, but this is the drop that kills me! I have been burnt in the fire, I have been trodden in the wine-press, but this is the crowning trial, the wrenching pain that wrings my soul beyond endurance. O Tristan, Tristan, I cannot, I will not ruin myself, and every chance of my future happiness, for this man who has so wronged me!"

"Christ died for those who pierced him. His crown was given to him upon the point of a spear."

"But I am not Christ-like, I am human, pitifully human; for what goodness and strength I have gained from my discipline are all swept away. I am weak and powerless in the hands of Satan, who will conquer me. O, I am mad, I am suffering beyond description! If I give these up, my life is ruined; if I keep them, like Judas, I shall dash myself to pieces upon a stone. Take them, Tristan, for God's sake take them; take them out of my sight, where they will tempt me no more." And throwing the package to his servant, Claude fell on his knees and burst into tears. For a few moments he prayed silently, weeping while he prayed, and then he arose saying, "It is over, Tristan, it is over, have no more fears. It is my last conflict; there can be nothing worse in store for me than what I have suffered this night. My dear old friend, I have had many terrible combats, and God has never deserted me, neither have you. In eternity, when my scars are counted, those that you have healed will plead

for you. Do not look at me with pity in your tender eyes; look at me with joy, dear Tristan, for I am newly crowned; the thorns are removed, and a crown of fresh cool bay encircles my unworthy brow. You cannot see it, but I can feel it. O, how great is the reward of a righteous determination! I cannot understand why I hesitated; now my duty seems easy, my sacrifice no sacrifice at all, but rather a blessing. When God removes one hope he gives us another; already my future brightens before me."

"Thanks be to him," he thought, "when I see her, whether here or in eternity, I can look into her face without shame."

Then he took the package of papers from the table where Tristan had laid them, and folding them carefully in a heavy envelope, he wrote with a steady hand the address of the Archbishop of Rouen, after which he looked at it for some time. His eyes red and heavy with weeping, his pale face stained with tears, bore traces of the tempest through which he had passed; now its force was spent, and there was a settled calm, a peaceful, earnest intention in its expression, that showed how important a victory he had won. "Tristan," he said, as he put a number of stamps upon the envelope, "give this to the porter, and tell him to take it to the post at once. I do not wish to keep Monseigneur out of his inheritance one hour."

"But, monsieur, do you not intend to write some explanation, at least to let him know that you have sent him the papers?" inquired the hunchback, who had felt some satisfaction in imagining the Archbishop's discomfiture when he knew that Claude had so nobly resigned all to him.

"No, *mon ami*, I do not. I might go to him myself and, with a great show of renunciation, place these proofs in his hands. It would make a very affecting scene, and would heap coals of fire upon his head; but I have not merited such a gratification. If God had not given me strength, I should have been no better than he is; therefore I have no right to exult over my victory, I should be only quietly thankful that I obtained it through the aid of another."

Tristan took the package without any further remark, and left the room.

An hour after, these long-missing proofs, that Fabien had searched for, that Justin Gautier had planned and plotted to get possession of, and which had caused so much suffering to so many, were travelling peaceably toward their destination. Monseigneur the Archbishop, at that moment reverently performing high mass in Notre Dame, little thought how near he was to the consummation of his long-cherished hopes. And Aimée, as she wept in remorseful sorrow over the silent body of her father, had no impression of the struggle, the suffering, the pain, his revelation had caused to him she loved better than life. While in another part of the city a little scene was being enacted, that bore some moral resemblance to the tragedy of eighteen hundred years ago, when the Jews came out with swords and staves to take one who had tried to save them.

Tristan, after he had delivered the package to the porter, returned to serve his master's breakfast with a feeling of relief that the troublesome thing was fairly off, and that there was now no chance to yield to temptation, even if one was tempted.

While Claude drank his coffee and ate his rolls with a better appetite than he would have had an hour or two before, he said to Tristan, "I have business to arrange which will detain me for some time. While I am away everything must be packed and prepared, for we must leave Paris for Sarzeau in the three-o'clock train. I shall go there and await some communication from Monseigneur. I hope he will not try to deprive me of that little retreat. It is very dear to me, and if I may keep it I shall be content. We can be happy there, Tristan, can we not?" Then he sighed and thought of Céleste; his only hope for her now was in La Marquise.

"Happy? O yes, monsieur! one is rich enough at Sarzeau with very little. I will help Janot, and we will raise enough off the grounds to live on," replied Tristan, eagerly, forgetting in the desire to do something for his beloved master how very near he was



to laying down his own burden forever.

"In any case we will stand by each other, my dear boy; while I live you shall never suffer want," said Claude, kindly, as he took his hat and gloves to go out.

There was a tap at the door, and a servant entered with rather an alarmed manner, saying, "Two men are in the antechamber who wish to see M. le Comte directly."

Claude walked peaceably toward them, drawing on his gloves as he went, never dreaming to what fate he was going. But when he saw the men, a sudden impression made him change color and falter. They stood near the door with folded arms and portentously grave faces. One was tall and thin, with a solemn aspect; the other was short and stout, with a twinkle in his small gray eyes which told plainly that his gravity was assumed for the occasion: and both wore a sort of military undress.

The taller of the two advanced toward Claude as he entered, and touching his cap with an air half respectful, half supercilious, he said, "M. le Comte de Clermont?"

"I am he," replied Claude, calmly.

The tall man turned to the short man, who took a paper out of the crown of his greasy cap, saying in an undertone, as he gave it to his companion, "No trouble here; a peaceable party; gendarmes not needed."

"Monsieur," said the officer, in a deliberate voice, slowly unfolding the paper, which bore the enormous seal of the state, — "monsieur, I have here a warrant from the government for your arrest."

"Indeed!" said Claude, still with remarkable calmness. "On what accusation?"

The tall man passed the warrant to the short man, who, holding a single eye-glass very near his nose, glanced over it, saying, "Political offences of a grave nature. Conspiracy against the administration. Incendiary articles written with revolutionary intentions, etc., etc. I hope monsieur will go with us peaceably."

"Certainly. Allow me a few mo-

ments to give some orders to my servant."

"In our presence only, monsieur," said the tall man, stiffly.

At that moment Tristan rushed into the room with a face of ghastly pallor, and, throwing his arms around Claude, cried, "Take me with you, monsieur."

The sudden appearance of the poor hunchback startled the men, and they drew back in evident dislike and annoyance at such a singular interruption.

"You cannot go with me, my poor boy," said Claude, gently caressing his hair; "the time has come when we must part, and God only knows for how long it may be."

"It will be forever, monsieur, it will be forever. When you leave me I shall die, as people die from hunger and thirst."

"Hush, *mon ami*, you wring my heart. Have patience, it may not be for long. I shall be tried, and, I hope, liberated. I am not guilty of any crime, then why should I be imprisoned? Go back to Sarzeau, and wait for me; do not fret, for that will ruin your health. Try and live for me, Tristan."

But the poor creature only clung to him, sobbing in the wildest grief, "It will be forever, it will be forever."

"Will monsieur do us the favor to accompany us as soon as possible?" said the tall man, in a voice of cold authority, while the short man added, looking encouragingly at Tristan, "The sooner monsieur goes, the sooner he'll get back. Don't be down-hearted, my man; you can't tell anything about these arrests. People are suspected one day, and tried and liberated the next. If you don't fret, I dare say you'll see your master back to-morrow," he said, winking with one eye to the tall man, who responded by drawing his mouth a little on one side.

Neither poor Tristan nor Claude noticed this by-play, nor the man's insincere attempt to console them, for both were so wrapped up in their own misery as to be insensible to outward influences. Again the tall man spoke, and this time more imperiously. And Claude knew the moment had come when he must tear himself from the

clinging arms of his faithful friend and servant. Raising the wan, tear-wet face to his, he said, "My dear boy, it may not be for long; but if it should be forever on earth, there is a sweet rest for us in eternity, which we shall have won with much tribulation. Think of it, and desire it as I shall, and when it comes it will be most welcome. Rest assured we shall meet again, dear soul, without the fear of parting. Go to La Marquise and tell her all; she will provide for you, for my sake. Farewell. Trust in God, and pray for me." And bending over him he imprinted a long kiss on the pale forehead, and then with a supreme effort tore himself away, and followed the men.

Tristan stood looking after him until the door closed, then, with a heavy groan, fell senseless upon the floor, and lay like one dead.

## PART TENTH.

### LA ROQUETTE.

"THE birds float by on free wings; the drifts of white clouds sweep over the immense space of heaven; the wind drives them here and there, coming and going, to and fro, from the four corners of the earth. God has made everything free, and yet man dares to fetter his fellow-man." And Claude de Clermont pressed his face against the iron bars of his cell in the prison of La Roquette, and looked with intense longing out into the blue sky and misty clouds that floated away serenely beyond his line of vision.

More than seven months had passed since that morning when he had said to Tristan, after his mental conflict was ended, "There can be nothing worse in store for me than what I have suffered this night." And yet, since then, he had thought of those past sorrows as trifles light as air compared to the anguish that seemed to consume him in the unbroken silence of his cell.

He had gone through a trial after his arrest, which was a farce, a mere mockery of justice; and he had been con-

demned to five years' imprisonment, with but little hope of intervention or mediation from the outside world. When he had said, strong in the consciousness of right, that he was prepared to bear the consequences of his own acts, he had not imagined that they could be so terrible, or so impossible to endure. He had tried by every means left to him to communicate with La Marquise, that he might hear some news of Céleste, and whether poor Tristan had survived the shock of separation. But neither letter nor message had been delivered; and he had remained during these seven long months in a state of the most harrowing anxiety. At first he had been calm and patient, praying to God for deliverance, and hoping against hope that something might occur to shorten the term of his sentence. He had great faith in La Marquise; and knowing her influence with those in power, he believed she might effect his release, or at least discover some means to correspond with him. But as weeks and months passed by, and no tidings from the outside world came to him, he began to think that he was abandoned to his fate; and then a sort of frenzy took possession of him. He paced like a caged lion the narrow limits of his cell; he wrung his hands; he implored God wildly, impatiently, importunately, to deliver him from a living death. He raged like a tempest until his strength was exhausted, and then he would throw himself moaning upon his bed. All the hours of the solemn night had heard his heart-breaking sobs, his piteous prayers; and the gray dawn had stolen into his grated window and found him still sleepless. His prison-fare was like dry dust in his parched mouth; he loathed it, he could not force himself to eat, and the scanty supply of water did not allay the fever that was consuming him. His turnkey often looked at him with a dreary shake of the head, but he could do nothing to relieve him; he was not a brutal man, he was only faithful to his trust. Claude had searched his face with its mingled expression of sarcasm and sadness to see if he could discover any hope of assistance; but it was discouraging. It revealed pity, it is true, but an inflexi-

ble determination to perform his duty, even at the sacrifice of compassion and mercy. Then there came a time when his paroxysms of rebellion and desperation exhausted his strength, and he was as feeble and fretful as a child; weeping and complaining to the deaf, insensible walls of his cell as though they were the merciless human beings who had caused his woe. But that phase of suffering did not last long, and to it succeeded a quiet hopelessness, a resignation that was almost despair. At times he read and studied the few books that were allowed him. Again he resorted to the most trivial things to divert his mind from its anguish; for he sat for hours with folded arms looking at the stones of his floor, counting them over and over, mentally arranging them into different patterns, tracing in their fractures, blemishes, and stains resemblances to faces and forms he had seen during the other life he had lived. Sometimes nearly whole days would pass in which he would be absorbed by memory, living over the scenes at Clermont, the free, wild life at Sarzeau, his wanderings among the mountains, his calm existence in the valleys, his dreamy idling on the golden sands of Quiberon, his restless tossing on the foam-dressed waves, the rapid, eager motion of the long walks over the barren coast. All would pass before him in regular succession, like the panorama of a dream; and then he would return to himself with a start to find his glowing visions, his broad distances, his freedom of motion, bounded by four narrow stone walls, that seemed to enclose him until they pressed upon his brain to suffocation. At first his window had been covered with a shutter that only admitted a feeble light through a small aperture; within a few days, through the intercession of his turnkey, that had been removed, and a new world opened before him. From his casement he could see the backs of the buildings on the Rue de la Muette, and their living, moving inhabitants passing and repassing before the open windows. Sometimes an honest, fresh face would lean forth and look up to the sky, and then turn with a motion of pity toward the prison. It was the face of an elderly woman, and she seemed to be a seamstress; for she often sat for hours with her head bent over her work, and when she arose it was with the air of relief apparent in one who has finished a task. During nearly all the long days Claude would stand with his face pressed against his iron grating, watching every movement and sign of life in these habitations of the poor — for it was not a quarter of the city where the rich resided — with an interest felt only by one who is separated entirely from the world and its concerns. He had come to feel a sort of friendship for this honest face, that so often regarded him with compassion; and the little window by which she sat seemed a haven where his vexed thoughts could find repose. One morning he noticed some unusual signs; the small panes were being carefully washed, and fresh curtains were being arranged by dexterous hands; then some pots of choice flowers were placed upon the sill, and the blossoms were tied up and watered with the closest attention, and a small, gilded cage with a pretty, sprightly canary was hung above; while the back of a soft-cushioned crimson chair gleamed with a charming effect of color between the snowy lace of the curtains. "It is being prepared for an invalid," thought Claude, "but what a dreary view they have selected, — the uninviting walls of this prison, with rows of grated windows against which are pressed pale, despairing faces. However, I suppose it cannot matter much to one who is near eternal freedom." While he was thinking of this, with his eyes still fixed intent upon the window, he saw two men place the feeble form of a sick man in the chair, and then draw back, while a woman drew near with a small glass in one white hand, and a fan and smelling-bottle in the other; she placed the glass to the invalid's lips and fanned him gently, for he seemed to have fainted from exhaustion. The man was emaciated to a frightful degree, the body bowed and deformed; while the face of the woman who bent over him was like an angel's, with a silver crown about the head. "My God!" cried Claude, in a voice that made the stone walls reverberate, "it is Tristan and La

Marquise; dear, suffering Tristan!" And for a moment it seemed as though he must wrench away the bars and fly to him; but no, he could not, so he only pressed his face against them and bathed them with his tears. When Tristan was sufficiently recovered to move, his first act was to lean from the window and fix his hollow eyes, with a searching scrutiny, on the walls of La Roquette, while Aimée supported his head and looked with him. Claude could see their gaze follow the line of windows until it rested upon his. Almost frantic, he pressed his face against the bars with a force that wounded him, and waved his hand and kissed it, going through a pantomime of the most extravagant joy. In a moment the signs were returned; they had recognized him, even through his bars. And Tristan, folding his arms over his heart, and raising his eyes to heaven, fell back in his chair with a smile of ecstasy irradiating his wan face. La Marquise waved her white hand, and kissed it over and over, her eyes beaming with joy; then she drew back, and leaning over Tristan she ministered to him with the tenderness and gentleness of a mother, to show Claude that his poor suffering servant was cared for by her; that she had not neglected him, neither had she forgotten her promise to assist her he loved. A burden seemed to fall from him, and, overcome with gratitude and joy, he sank upon his knees and poured out his soul in thanksgiving to God.

Every day this affecting pantomime was repeated; every morning with the earliest dawn Claude was at his casement, his face pressed against the bars, his eyes devouring the opposite window, until Tristan was placed in his chair, and Aimée was at his side, bending her lovely face over him, arranging his hair with her soft hands, feeding him with the most tempting dainties, or supporting his fainting head upon her bosom. Sometimes the dying hunchback would rally enough to lean from the window and make some sign of love to his idolized master. He would kiss his hand, press it to his heart, point with expressive gestures of adoration to Aimée, take her white fingers in his, and raise

them to heaven, making the form of a circle in the air to denote eternity; and then, folding his arms, he would open them suddenly, waving them upward like wings, to show that he should soon fly toward endless happiness. Although the bars of a prison separated them, yet their souls conversed together, and held the sweetest intercourse. The days flew to Claude, and when darkness dropped a curtain between them and shut out their beloved faces, he felt as though he could not endure the hours until he could look upon them again. Every morning he said to himself, knowing how frail was the poor life on which he fixed his hopes, "This day may be the last, or this morning he may be already in paradise."

About ten days of this affecting intercourse had passed, when Claude knew that the last one had arrived. He was at his casement as usual with the first beam of the sun, watching the window with earnest, anxious eyes. The curtains were drawn, and there was no sign of life until nearly midday; then Aimée's white hand opened the blinds and waved a sad good-morning to him, pointing within to show that the invalid was unable to leave his bed, after which she closed the window and returned to her attendance at his side. All through the day Claude remained at his post in a state of anxiety difficult to describe. From time to time Aimée would appear, make a sad signal, and then withdraw. When the afternoon was declining, and the shadow of the prison fell long and gaunt across the court-yard, and the swallows inhabiting the niches in the massive wall began to make active preparations for their evening meal, Claude saw the window opened and the curtain drawn aside; then two men appeared, laying the motionless form of Tristan in his chair, while Aimée supported his head. At first he thought the spirit had already taken flight, and that it was the poor clay they had placed there for him to look upon, so still, so white, and lifeless did he seem. No, he was still living; for Aimée's gentle hand was placing a cordial to his lips, and his feeble fingers were moving upon his breast with a faint fluttering motion like the wing of a dying bird. After a

few moments he opened his eyes and raised his head to take a farewell of his beloved master. He tried to clasp his hands to show his happiness, but they fell powerless. He turned his face upward with a smile of ineffable peace, raised one thin, trembling finger toward heaven, and then sank back into Aimée's arms. The last beams of the sun touched with a benediction the silvery halo of her hair, and rested upon the white forehead, the hollow cheek, and closed lids of Tristan, as La Marquise watched the breath flutter from between his parted lips that murmured her name with his master's until they were silent forever; then Claude saw her lay the poor, lifeless head back upon the pillow, press a long kiss on the placid brow, and make the sign of the cross over his still heart, and so he knew that the aching, deformed body was free from pain forever, and the freed, happy soul was at rest with God. Aimée wiped away her tears and raised her eyes upward, seeming to say to him, "A little longer and we shall weep no more." Then the shadow of night fell between them, and Claude, crushed, overwhelmed, dissolved in tears, sank upon his miserable bed, and wept and prayed away the dreary hours.

Three months more had dragged away their weary length since the night of Tristan's departure for his new home, and Claude had watched in vain for another glimpse of Aimée's face. She had never come again. A few days after the flowers had disappeared, the singing bird had been removed, and the invalid's chair had been replaced by the ordinary seat of the poor woman, who again bent over her work, raising her head now and then to glance compassionately at the barred windows of La Roquette, and Claude's life had returned to its old monotony, its old, hopeless resignation; but he was less miserable than before, for now he was relieved of the anxiety that had preyed upon him. He was confident La Marquise had kept her promise regarding Céleste, and he knew poor Tristan was safely disposed of for eternity; so there was nothing but his own miserable failure to brood over, which was not so desperate and comfortless, since he had had this brief

reunion with his old ties. He found himself oftener looking toward the heavens than the earth. There seemed to be no possibilities of a future for him. His country that he had so loved, that he still loved with the deepest compassion, was cruel, ungrateful, unconscious. Those he had tried to save had turned upon him and wounded him. His heart had been full of noble intentions, unselfish desires, and warm interest for humanity, and humanity had crushed him, wrung his soul, and abandoned him to despair. Therefore he felt that earth had no place for him, that he was one of the pariahs to whom God sometimes opens his doors when the world drives them out. He prayed often—not hoping for mercy from man—that a Divine power would interpose and shorten the term of his punishment; that his prison doors might be opened, not to a feeble, exhausted body, but to a triumphant, exulting soul that had left behind its garment of tears and scars.

One afternoon he sat on the edge of his narrow bed, his hands clasped listlessly, his sad eyes searching the intense blue of a June heaven, striving if perchance he might discover some angel face smiling upon him from the transparent ether, when a noise at his door startled him. It was not the hour for the turnkey's visit, and this unusual interruption filled him with surprise. He started to his feet with an eagerness that showed how hope always lives within us, and looked with parted lips breathlessly, as the heavy door rolled back on its hinges, and admitted a woman, wrapped in a dark mantle, with a heavy veil covering her face.

"Remember, madam, an hour is not long," said the turnkey, as he closed the door.

"Aimée!" cried Claude, as she threw aside her veil.

"Claude, dear Claude!" and she threw herself weeping into his arms.

For a moment they sobbed passionately together; then she drew away from his embrace, saying, "We have no time to waste in weeping, for I have much to say, and an hour is nothing."

"You have been ill," said Claude, looking at her changed face sorrowfully.

Her complexion was pale, — the sickly, opaque pallor of parchment; her cheeks had lost their roundness, her temples were sunken, showing the blue veins through which ebbed and flowed the sluggish tide of life, while her great eyes seemed to float in purple shadows, and her white, transparent hands had the vague, languid motion and the cold damp of those who are already touched with the last chill.

"Yes, I have been ill, very ill, ever since poor Tristan died, or I should not have left you alone so long. I should have visited you at the window every day."

"How did you learn where my cell was situated?"

"Through bribing an officer. O Claude, I have almost moved heaven and earth in my effort to release you. I have been myself on my knees to the Emperor."

"For me? O Aimée, I have not deserved this!"

"Yes, for you; but he would not listen to me. He who once courted my smiles refused me the only favor I ever asked of him. May God punish him as he deserves! Do you know why he refused me?" she cried, with a flash of her old fire. "It was because I had lost my beauty, my charm. My power went with it. I did not flash upon him in my former splendor, as La Marquise, the most lovely lady in Paris, but I tottered before him, pale and weak, an unhappy suppliant; and he had no ear for my prayer, no smiles, no false flattery. He refused me, and dismissed me coldly. Then I implored the influence of those beneath him in power, but I failed. All I could gain was permission to see you for one hour. O my God, how I hate the world, the cringing, false, cruel, unjust world! I have tested it, and hate it, and thank God with every breath that I am nearly done with it. What is a woman's power? Her beauty, her miserable, perishable beauty; and when sickness and suffering take that away, she is helpless. I once boasted that I could command and I should be obeyed. Now I entreat, and no one listens. O Claude, I would willingly have given my life to have saved you from this,

but it is not of enough value to shorten your imprisonment by one day."

"I implore you, Aimée, not to add to my suffering the memory of such bitter words. To me you have been an angel of mercy. Your goodness to poor Tristan removed a heavy burden from my weary life. And Céleste?"

"She is provided for, Claude; she is free. You can now love her without sin. A few weeks ago Sir Edward was found dead in his bed. Céleste is a widow."

Claude seemed so paralyzed by this news that he made no reply.

"I bought Monthelon. I searched everywhere for her. One day I was passing the Mont de Piété, and she and Elizabeth came out; they were dressed so poorly that I scarce recognized them. They had been to pawn their last article of value. Now they are living at Monthelon, comfortable, and God knows I hope they are happy."

"You are an angel," cried Claude, clasping her thin hands in his. "O that I may live to show my gratitude!"

"Tristan died happy, after he saw you. His sorrow was heart-breaking when you were taken away. I think he never ceased to weep until death dried his eyes. However, when I know that La Roquette could be seen from the window of a seamstress who worked for me, I did not allow myself to rest until I discovered, by bribes and entreaties, that your cell was on the side visible. Then poor Tristan, although the doctor said he was dying, implored so pitifully to be brought here, that I complied; and the sight of your face, even between bars, rendered his last hours blissful. And he went to heaven strong in the faith that I was all-powerful, and would in the end secure your freedom. I have tried, Claude, but I have failed, and the failure is killing me; every day that you remain here takes one week from my life."

"O Aimée, do not suffer so for me, I am not worthy of it."

"I brought all your sorrow upon you by my folly and passion, and my remorse is consuming me."

"Do not accuse yourself, it is God's doings, and he cannot be unjust. Let us bow to his will together. Our sor-

rows will end when eternity opens its portals to us; let us wait patiently, dear Aimée, until that moment arrives."

"Ah, my God! it is true, there is nothing enduring here but sorrow and tears; when they end we are at rest forever. I have prayed for you, I have wept for you, more than for myself. Your name is branded upon my heart. I tell you it now, because by that you will know with what suffering I have made my expiation. My pride is dead, slain by my own hand; my vanity is clothed in ashes; my ambition is but for a grave where you may sometimes drop a tear. There is only one who can procure your release,—the one who denounced you, who betrayed you, the Judas who later will be consumed with remorse as I now am. I shall go to him and on my knees implore him to undo the work he has done. I shall bow before the man I hate, because he has wronged you, even though he has heaped favors upon me. I shall tell him of your noble renunciation, which I learned from Tristan,—how you courageously gave him the proofs that conferred his title, his honorable birth, upon him; and if that godlike act does not touch his nature, then he is altogether inhuman, a monster fit only for the fires of hell."

"I entreat of you not to humble yourself to the Comte de Clermont." Claude winced when he applied his former title to his enemy, but he did it knowing it was his by every right. "It will be useless, he is invulnerable; neither prayers nor tears can avail for me."

"I shall go, nevertheless. It is nearly a year since he saw me; perhaps when he looks upon my changed face his heart will soften. I will leave nothing undone to make you happy at last. You will be free, you will marry Céleste. And if you but bless my memory, my soul in paradise will know it and rejoice, and my poor heart will throb in the silence and darkness of my grave."

"Aimée, my beloved sister!" cried Claude, entirely overcome with emotion, "my good angel, I adore you with an adoration holier than any earthly affection; my love for you is something sublime and reverent, worthy to be eternal. O, why have I known you so late!

or was I blind, that I did not discover the beauty and nobility of your nature long before? But now that we have come to understand each other, why speak as though this parting was forever? We may both be happy for many years, my beloved; but if we miss the fruition of our hopes on earth, we shall find them hereafter. Let us forget the pains and passions of life, its disappointments and regrets, and look calmly forward to that complete existence which we are being schooled for by the faithful hand of God."

They sat side by side on the hard couch, where Claude had so often wept away the long hours of the night, with clasped hands and tear-drenched face. An arrow of sunlight struck across the stone wall, and fell lower and lower until it reached the silvery waves of Aimée's hair; there it rested a moment, and then passed away in scattered radiance, like the beams of glory surrounding the head of a saint. The hour had gone, but a moment remained, and still they sat looking into each other's faces, silent and solemn, for both felt that it was for the last time, that now the supreme pain of the moment of parting forever on earth had arrived, and neither had power to utter the farewell. At length the steps of the turnkey outside aroused them, and Aimée said in a faint, broken voice, "Courage, dear heart," while she clasped the hand of Claude as though they stood in the face of some terrible danger. "Courage, this is our last parting; when we meet again my happy face will wear the smiles of youth, and thou shalt look at me with eyes free from tears."

"The hour is up," cried the turnkey, throwing open the door.

"Thou shalt be free, Claude; courage and hope, thou shalt be free. My love has ruined thee, but it shall end in salvation. One last embrace. Thou wilt smile on me in eternity."

Claude clasped her in his arms, covering her face with tears and kisses, while he sobbed, "God bless thee, my darling, God bless thee!"

"Farewell. Thou knowest how I love thee, therefore I have not suffered in vain. It will not be long until we meet again. Courage, patience, dear Claude."

And then she pressed his hand again in hers, and smiled with an expression of angelic sweetness; and looking back from the door smiled again, raising her sad eyes upward. And so she passed from his sight forever.

## PART ELEVENTH.

### A DAY OF WRATH.

THERE was no light in the study at Clermont but the faint light from the dying embers in the chimney. Day had gone, and the soft shadows of evening had crept in unnoticed by the Archbishop, who sat in his carved chair by the table, on which lay the neglected instruments of his occult studies, his head bowed in his hands, absorbed in thought. It was just one year since the night he had refused La Marquise the favor she had implored, and he had not seen her since, nor had she shown any signs of relenting, after the stern and haughty manner in which she had dismissed him from her presence. If he had foreseen what suffering his banishment would bring upon him, he might have hesitated before he pronounced the fatal word that doomed him to such a punishment. But he was not clairvoyant enough to understand how much greater was her love than her gratitude; and he was wounded to the quick, that she, forgetting all his kindness and favors, should espouse the cause of another, and treat him with insult and scorn because he had refused to do the same. He had said over and over to himself, "If she should come to me and implore my forgiveness on her knees, I would not pardon her. Her ingratitude, her cruelty, have embittered my heart against her. My Aimée, the little girl I saved from want and suffering, and educated and cared for as though she had been my own, died indeed that day when she disappeared from Clermont. I never again found her in the haughty, imperious Marquise de Ventadour; still I supposed I had some claims upon her affection and consideration, but she has disappointed me, she has proved herself as thankless

as the perfidious ingrates who turn upon you and sting you after you have warmed them to life. I will dismiss her from my heart; she is dead to me, I will think of her no more." Although he had determined to banish her absolutely from his thoughts, he had failed to do it, for she haunted him persistently, and his life was but one long desire to see her again and to effect a reconciliation. Still he had defeated his own wishes; for bitterly and revengefully he had at once denounced Claude to the government, and procured his arrest, after the failure of their efforts to remove him privately. At last his vengeance was complete, for with the news of Claude's arrest came the long-missing proofs that disinherited the unfortunate young man, and installed him in his place. Where these papers came from was a profound mystery to the Archbishop. He sometimes thought that Justin Gantier had played him false, that he had gained possession of the proofs, and retained them for some reason of his own, until when dying he had repented and caused them to be sent to him in this singular manner. Then again everything seemed to contradict that supposition, and he was more puzzled and uncertain than before; for he wished most earnestly to know who had resigned these important papers, after keeping them back for more than forty years. However, this very natural curiosity did not prevent him from enjoying to the full his new honors. Since the day he had heard from his dying mother that he was the rightful heir of Clermont, he had never for one hour forgotten his intention, his determination, to reinstate himself, and prove his mother's innocence, no matter at what cost. It had been in reality the aim of his life. He had kept his own counsel, his name, his purpose, a secret from all but Justin Gantier, whom he had discovered in the released convict who defied God in the sombre gloom of the park of Clermont. From that moment the two had worked together, professedly for the same purpose; but while the wretched man had but the one object, which was to crush and ruin the son of the man he hated, Fabien had the double desire



of revenge and self-aggrandizement to urge him on to the consummation of his plans. Now, after years of anxious search, useless labor, and disappointment, suddenly, when he had almost ceased to hope that his greatest ambition was to be realized, these proofs had been placed mysteriously in his hands, and without the slightest opposition he had taken possession of his long-coveted inheritance and title. Now indeed he had arrived at the summit of earthly prosperity, he was Count of Clermont and Archbishop of Rouen; an important personage in both Church and State. But for some reason, when he rode in grand equipage from the Bishop's palace, which he often did, to pass several days in each week at his château of Clermont, it seemed as though he were going to his own burial, and that the beautiful pile he had so desired to possess was a magnificent tomb prepared for his reception. The vast, lofty rooms seemed to chill him, and the silence appalled him; the study, that once had been his favorite resort, now made him shudder when he entered it, for his morbid imagination filled it with impalpable forms, and every shadow was haunted by pallid, reproachful faces. Sometimes the skull that looked from its iron casement would assume the face of the former Comte de Clermont, and, from the hollow orbits, eyes filled with lurid light seemed to gaze intently upon him, and, whichever way he turned, those same eyes followed him, piercing, inquiring, steadfast, until, almost terrified, he would rush from the room to find relief in pacing hurriedly the long avenues of the park. Again Aimée seemed to fill the place with her presence, mocking, laughing, singing, coaxing, the wayward sprite that had transformed the stern silence of the château into merry music; or, haughty, scornful, bitter, she seemed to stand before him, pointing imperiously to the door while she said in tones that made him shiver, "Go, Judas, go; I have looked upon thee for the last time." Then the scene would change, and she would approach him pale, wan, solemn, and taking him by the hand would lead him forth through long stone galleries, damp and

odious with prison smells, and heavy with foul vapors, until they reached a barred door which she would throw open to reveal a dark, narrow cell where sat a young man, on the edge of a miserable pallet, listless, hopeless, with swollen eyes and haggard, despairing face. Then, pointing to the forlorn picture, she would fix her deep eyes upon him and say, "There is thy work accomplished." In no matter what place he was, the same scenes passed before him. During the solemn ceremonies in Notre Dame, when he bowed his mitred head before the altar, a voice seemed to whisper to him, "Prepare for a day of wrath; prepare for a day of wrath"; and a phantom-like procession seemed to mingle with the smoke of the incense rising and floating away into the shadows of the vaulted roof, while they looked back upon him reproachfully, ominously, threateningly. He had swallowed eagerly the long-desired draught of gratified revenge and ambition that he had distilled from the tears of his victims, and it had turned to liquid fire within him. It was consuming him, torturing him, rendering his days miserable and his nights a burden. Yet still he endured, for his hateful pride would not allow him an antidote. He had planted thorns in his pillow, and he did not intend to complain because they pierced him. Now, as he sat alone in the gathering gloom, he was absorbed in a sort of retrospective view of his life, following step by step his own ascent up the ladder of prosperity, until he had reached all but the topmost round, on which rested the coveted hat of a cardinal. As in imagination he leaned forward to grasp it, the structure gave way beneath him and precipitated him suddenly from his ambitious height down to the ghostly silence of his gloomy study. Springing up he pulled the bell violently, for he could not endure darkness; and as the servant appeared hurriedly at his imperative summons, he said in a stern, harsh voice, "Why do you leave me here without either light or fire?"

"Monseigneur did not ring," returned the man in a timid, deprecating voice, as he set the candles upon the table,

and prepared to stir up the fire to a blaze.

The Archbishop took the bellows from his hands, and blew the fire furiously, as if he could by so doing evaporate his wrath, that the slightest annoyance provoked.

"Will Monseigneur need anything more at present?" inquired the man, as he lingered with an air which seemed to indicate that he was afraid to leave the room, and equally afraid to remain.

"No, you may go."

Now, in the full blaze of the candles and the light of the glowing fire, the changes during a year in the face of the Archbishop were strongly apparent. The hair that fell below his purple cap was of an iron-gray, his face was marred with lines indelibly stamped by passion and remorse, and his brows were fiercely contracted, while his deep-set eyes looked forth from their shadows with the uneasy, evasive expression of one who knows not where to seek for peace, and his mouth, that once denoted gentle firmness, was now compressed with cruel severity and stern resolve. When he arose to pace the floor, impelled by an unappeasable restlessness, it was evident that his once upright and vigorous form was more bowed than it should have been in so short a time.

"How the hours drag," he said, looking at his watch with the impatient frequency of one who wishes the moments to pass more swiftly,—"how the hours drag, when the elasticity of youth is gone and the blood flows slowly through the veins! Once the days were too short for my earnest occupation, my ardent desires, my lofty intentions. I climbed upward with the sun, and when he declined I still kept on unwearied at my labor. Now I rise heavily, I go through the dull routine of my duties, and before day has reached his zenith I am fatigued with everything around me. O for the irresponsible nature of youth, that wears its little sorrow like a light garment to be thrown aside at will, while in later years even honor and prosperity become burdens that corrode and poison the heart! Had I ever an infancy? Had I ever a boyhood? All I can remember is my mother's tears, my own poverty, self-denial, hunger,

and cold. Ah, they are not pictures that shine out warm and bright from the background of one's memory! Once I thought true felicity consisted in having enough to eat, a fire in winter, plenty of covering for my bed, and all the books I needed for my studies; now I have all these in abundance, and yet I am farther away from happiness than when I only coveted the necessities of life. Our wants increase with their gratification, and to always desire and never possess is, after all, the only enjoyment. Do we not sometimes defraud ourselves and mar God's plans with foolish haste? Is it wise to rush heedlessly to the end, thereby entangling the threads of fate to involve ourselves in hopeless confusion? If we are just and wait patiently, will not God's intentions mature for our profit? Have I not been a moral suicide, for is man less a sinner who puts to death his own happiness than he who puts away his life? With my present feelings I might say that my existence had been a failure, for I have missed what men most desire to possess, human affection. I cannot think of one being who loves me. It is the fate of mental superiority to live above the little needs of the heart. Why should we, who have so much, desire what was only intended for babes and weaklings? Love, love, it is the most puerile of human passions. Pride, ambition, a desire to soar above the feeble beings who surround us, these are aspirations laudable and godlike. And there is no spontaneity in gratitude; it is a base reward one toils to earn, and even then he is often defrauded of his wages. Love, gratitude, they are alike dainty luxuries for effeminate natures. Thank God, I have outlived the weakness of such sentimental longings! In other times, when there was something sweet and fresh in my heart, I did desire love, her love, that strange, bewitching child; how she crept into my heart with her serpent-like charm, her insinuating grace! Yes, I loved her, I adored her; but now she is dead to me. O my Aimée, my Aimée, why did you defraud me of the wages I toiled so hard to earn? Some one at the door! I can never be alone and undisturbed. Knock as long as you



please, you will not get in. I have other guests now that fill all my heart." And he closed his lips with stern resolve, while he walked away from the door without replying to the soft tap, tap. "I have told that stupid Jean never to disturb me, never to approach my door until I summon him. And yet he dares to disobey me. Come in," he cried, in a harsh voice, as the knock was repeated a little more impatiently. And believing it to be his servant, he turned in the middle of the floor with his most cruel expression, his most forbidding aspect.

The door softly opened, and in the shadow stood a woman, draped from head to foot in mournful purple, while her snowy hair, pale face, and hollow eyes made her look more like a spectre than a human being. "*Mon père*," she said softly and sweetly as she approached him, "I have come to implore your forgiveness. Your Aimée has returned to you, penitent. See, I am no longer the imperious woman who drove you from her presence a year ago. I am your Aimée, your humble, suffering Aimée. What, you will not speak to me, you will not forgive me! O *mon père*, remember how you loved me once; forget all my ingratitude, all my cruelty, and take me back again into your heart." And she laid her thin hand gently on the folded arms of the Archbishop, and looked into his face piteously. It might have been a marble face, with eyes of metallic glitter, for all the life there appeared to be in it. He did not seem to see her, he did not seem to hear her, but stood with terrible inflexibility in every line of his upright figure.

"Look at me, *mon père*, cannot you see that I am dying? I have risen from my sick-bed to come to you. My physician told me it was madness, it was death, to do so; but still I dared it, because I could not die without your forgiveness, because I could not die away from Clermont. I have come back to my dear old home, my childhood's home, to die in my room where I dreamed away my blessed girlhood. You will not turn me away. You are master here. You are Comte de Clermont, but you will not turn your poor

Aimée away from your heart and house. Open your arms, and let me die there. I have come to them for shelter. O *mon père*, take me into your heart again." And falling on her knees, she pressed her lips to his hands, and wet them with her tears.

The Archbishop drew away, and looked at her as she knelt before him, her head bowed, her pride at his feet. And as he looked, an arrow seemed to pierce his soul. With a groan of agony he opened his arms and cried, "Come to my heart, come forever."

Nearly a month passed, after Aimée's return to Clermont, in the most peaceable relation with the Archbishop. He was gentle, affectionate, tender toward her, striving by every means to make her forget that he had ever for a moment treated her with coldness or cruelty. And she was the old Aimée in her sweetest moods, but never again the Aimée that once changed the stern silence of the château into merry music. Her voice was never heard but in feeble, languid tones, whose failing sweetness seemed to have a touch of heaven's melody in them. She glided through the corridors or sunny garden walks, leaning on the arm of the Archbishop, with a languor and helplessness which was touching. She was thin and weak to a pitiful degree, but she suffered no pain, no distress.

When the Archbishop, with sinking heart, asked her physician the nature of her disease, he shook his head sadly, and replied, "I cannot say, monseigneur. It is one of those cases that baffle medical skill. She seems to be consuming—melting away, one might call it—under the heat of an inward fever. The mind, acting upon the body, has wasted it until there is no more substance to feed upon than there is in the shell of a crystal vase. It is true, the life still flickers there, shining faintly through; but a breath will put it out, monseigneur."

During all this time La Marquise had tried to win the love, the confidence, the tender sympathy of the Archbishop by every gentle art. She had established the best possible terms between him and Céleste, while Elizabeth was her devoted and unwearied

nurse. It was affecting to see these three women together, each trying to outdo the other in demonstrations of love. Céleste, in her deep mourning, sad and suffering, but patient; talking, thinking, and dreaming of poor Claude in his prison-cell. While Aimée, with her feeble flame of life just ready to be extinguished, comforted, assured, and promised her that all would be well. "The Archbishop will not refuse me when he knows it is my last request," she said. "I have not spoken of it yet, because I wished to soften his heart with my love, so it would be ready to listen and melt at the story of poor Claude's suffering. And he does not know yet that it was he who sent the proofs of his mother's marriage. When he knows all, rest assured that he will use every effort to release him; and he will not strive in vain, for with his powerful influence he can accomplish all he wishes."

One evening, after a day of excessive weakness, Aimée expressed a wish to be dressed and assisted to the Archbishop's study. She had not left her room, and so she had not seen him for the day. Now she sent her maid to say that she would spend the evening with him. "I am very weak, dear Nanon," she said, while she leaned her head against the shoulder of her maid, who was brushing out the silver waves of her hair. "After I am dead, cut off a long, thick tress, and give it, with your own hands, to M. Claude, when he returns to Clermont. It will be all that will remain of La Marquise. Alas, there is nothing left of Aimée but the poor heart that will soon be dust!"

"O madam, you will recover, you will live to see him again!" cried Nanon, bursting into tears.

"Yes, *ma chère*, I shall see him again, but not here, not here."

When she entered the study, the candles were lit, and a bright fire was burning on the hearth, before which sat the Archbishop, benevolent, bland, and peaceful; for he did not know how near his day of wrath had approached. When he saw her, he arose with a warm smile, and led her to a large easy-chair, that had been placed there for her comfort, saying, "You are better

this evening, *ma chérie*; your cheek has some of its old color. Without seeing you, the day has been endless. Why did you not come down for a little air? Clermont is curing you; already you are more your old self. Why have you remained all day in your room?"

"I was saving my strength for this evening. I have so much to say to you, *mon père*. No, I will not have the chair; I wish to sit, for this once, in my old place at your feet." And nestling close to his side, she leaned her head upon his arm, and raised her eyes to his with trust and love.

There was a silence for a few moments, while the Archbishop looked intent on the face upturned to his, and perhaps for the first time the terrible change in it smote his heart with a sharp pain. It was indeed like a crystal vase through which the soul shone softly.

"*Mon père*," she said, pressing her head a little closer against his arm, while she smiled with something of her old playfulness, "when Nature planned me, she made a mistake for some reason, for I am a sort of a paradox, in a degree unnatural; I might say when I am most contented, then I am most discontented; when I am the happiest, then I am the most miserable; and when I am near arriving at the consummation of my ardent desires, then I wish it deferred. I have been very wayward and sinful, I have caused you much suffering; yet I sometimes rejoice in it, for I know you will all remember me because of the scars I have left. I have prayed and longed with inexpressible longing for death. I have wished to discover the mysteries of eternity, and now they are near being revealed in all their sublime beauty. I gather this veil of earth around me, and do not care for the crowning of my desires. Is it because your tenderness, your love, has made earth so sweet to me at last?" She felt a tear drop upon her forehead, and she went on with the most winning gentleness. "You have completed your good work toward the poor child you saved from misery, by making her last days so peaceful; and you still have the power to render them even blissful. I know now you will not refuse my last request, the only thing your poor Aimée

will ever ask." She felt him shiver, and the hand she clasped grew suddenly cold and rigid. "O *mon père*, do not refuse me now; crown your love with a beautiful diadem of mercy. Forget your animosity toward poor Claude, and rescue him from his terrible imprisonment."

The Archbishop, still paler than the pale pleader who sat at his feet, drew away coldly from her feverish, clinging hands, and said, in a voice that bore little resemblance to his former tones of loving interest, "Aimée, you ask too much; you presume upon my pity and love for you to implore assistance for one whom I have no power to assist. M. de Clermont is alone to blame for his punishment, and he must bear it as others have before him, with patience and fortitude."

The poor face clouded, and heavy tears fell over her cheeks. "Think a moment, *mon père*, before you refuse me. He has committed no crime, he has suffered much, and he is wasting his life in a dreary cell. You, with your powerful influence, can procure his release; and beside," she continued more warmly, more impressively, "you owe him something; he performed toward you an act truly noble and heroic."

"I do not understand you."

"It was he who sent you the proofs of your mother's marriage."

"Is it possible?" And his face expressed the deepest surprise, but no relenting. "How came he possessed of them?"

"He discovered them hidden in an old cabinet at Sarzeau, which had been removed there from Clermont."

"And he retained them for I cannot say how long a time; that was truly honorable!"

"He did not know you were his brother until he learned it from my unfortunate father on his dying-bed; M. de Clermont alone knew of the existence of these papers. A less honorable man might still have retained proofs that disinherited him. Can you not see how noble an act it was?"

"No, I see only a simple right. If he had not done as he did, he would have been a contemptible villain!"

cried the Archbishop, with an explosion of wrath that made Aimée tremble and draw away from his side.

"Then," she said, hopelessly, "you will do nothing for him?"

"I cannot; I have no power to change the decree of the state."

"O *mon père*," she cried at last, with a supreme effort, "I implore you not to refuse me; I entreat you to promise me that you will do what you can. Think of poor Céleste; she has loved him so long, her suffering will kill her, as mine has killed me. Look at me; I am dying, and every hour that Claude remains in prison takes months from my life. If you have no pity for him, for Céleste, have pity for me. I have suffered so, I have so little time to live, promise me, O promise me, that you will try to save him, and I will bless you with my last breath, and I will meet you so joyfully in heaven. O *mon père*, do not refuse your Aimée the last request she will ever make of you." And falling on her knees before him, she clasped his hands and drenched them with her tears.

The Archbishop was in terrible agony, the dawn of his day of wrath had come. He stood up and trembled like an aspen in the wind; a white foam gathered on his lips, and his eyes were distended as with fear, while he cried, "My God! my God! ask me anything but that, and I will do it; but that I cannot do."

Aimée staggered to her feet, and, leaning against the chimney for support, she clasped her hands and raised them to heaven like one asking succor from God, while she cried in tones that echoed in his ears until they were dull in death, "My Claude, thou wilt know in eternity how I gave my life for thee. Father in heaven, deal not with this merciless man as he has dealt with the defenceless. Do not let remorse consume him, as anguish has consumed me. Forgive me, O God, for all the sins of my life, and let me sit at thy feet in eternity." Then her hands fell, her head drooped forward, and she would have sunk unconscious to the floor, had not the Archbishop clasped her in his arms.

How that night passed to the miserable man he never knew. It was a tem-

pest of anguish through which he was whirled pitilessly, for remorse had already begun to torture his soul with a pain impossible to soothe. When he saw Aimée sink lifeless before him, he believed she was already dead, and a frenzy took possession of him. He hung over her, he implored her to listen to him, he accused himself of killing her by his refusal to grant her request; but when he discovered that she had only fainted from excitement, a reaction took place, and he was ready to congratulate himself that he had promised her nothing. All through the night he paced the floor of his room, torn to pieces with conflicting emotions. Anxiety for Aimée, which the frequent messages from her room that she was slowly recovering did not relieve, mingled with the regret that he had added another pain to her suffering heart, and that he had allowed to pass an opportunity to win her devotion, and bind her more closely to him. When the dawn came, pale and haggard he still struggled. It was the *Dies iræ* of his soul. Solemnly, mournfully, pealed the strains of vengeance through and through the silent chambers, where he battled with the demons who were loath to deliver him up to the angels of mercy, who, calm and white, hovered above, waiting to bear his first tear of penitence to God. All through the day the conflict raged; he saw no one, not even his servant; he locked the door of his oratory, and throwing himself prone before the crucifix, he extended his hands, crying, "Miserere mei, Deus, miserere!" All the sins of his life seemed to press upon him, a burden that only God's mercy could remove. He was suspended over a gulf of raging fire, he was scorched and shrivelled with the heat of Divine indignation. Voices that seemed to resound with the reverberation of ages rolled into his presence, question upon question. "Unfaithful steward, where are the treasures committed to thy keeping? Shepherd of souls, where are thy sheep?" And from such demands as these there could be no evasion. An eye searched him now that saw through his garment of hypocrisy, and dragged his most hidden sin to light; so he could only extend his hands and clasp the feet of the dying

Christ, crying with broken tones of penitence, "Miserere, miserere."

The swift wrath of God had poured upon him a terrible retribution; it crushed, overwhelmed, and conquered him. When the day was nearly done the burden rolled off from his thankful soul, and he arose to his feet a new man. The white-winged angels who hovered above banished the defeated demons, and gathering up the first tears of penitence that the Archbishop had ever shed, they soared away toward the battlements of heaven, bearing with them a freed soul that had won its ransom with tears.

After this day of wrath the Archbishop presented a forlorn appearance. He needed to wash away the tears, the traces of his conflict, to compose his disordered dress, and to break his fast for the first time in twenty-four hours. Then with a placid mien and a thankful heart he presented himself at Aimée's door to impart to her the result of his day's seclusion. "How happy she will be! She will live to bless me, dear sweet sufferer! She has conquered me with God's help. Henceforth I will live for others; for her first, and then for all humanity. O benignant Saviour, thou shalt find in me from this day a faithful servant!"

Nanon was peacefully sewing in the casement of her mistress's antechamber. The slanting rays of the declining sun fell over her white cap, and rested, a bar of light, from the window to the closed door. The Archbishop's gentle tap startled her, and she looked up with surprise at his calm and gracious face.

"How is your mistress?" he said as he glanced at the work in her hand; "she must be better if she does not need your care."

"She wished to be alone, monseigneur," replied Nanon, rising and placing her embroidery in her basket as she spoke. "This morning she seemed better than I expected, after her attack of last night, and she wished to get up and be dressed as usual. After she had written a short letter, she took some wine-whey, and then she said with such a smile, dear angel!—O monseigneur, she is an angel!"—and Nanon wiped away the tears, that perhaps were tears

of gratitude because her beloved mistress had already reached such a state of perfection, — "she said, giving my hand a little clasp and kissing it, 'Dear good Nanon, you have been very kind and faithful to me, think of me when I am gone!' O monseigneur, as though I could ever forget the angel! 'Yesterday I hoped I might live longer, but to-day I know I have lived long enough. Now leave me alone, I wish to pray undisturbed. I wish to prepare for my last communion; leave me until the sun sets, and then come to me.' So I closed the door and left the sweet saint to pray. I suppose her prayers are for others, for she cannot need them for herself. Now, monseigneur, the sun is just setting, and I will go to her."

"Let me go to her first, Nanon," said the Archbishop, wiping away his tears. "Let me go and pray a moment with her." So crossing the antechamber softly, he pushed open the door, and, entering, closed it after him.

Aimée was kneeling at a *Prie-Dieu*, her hands clasped on the crimson cushion, her forehead bowed on her clasped hands. The soft light that streamed in through the azure curtains of the window fell over her silvery hair and white dress, bathing her whole figure in a sort of ethereal radiance; the room was filled with a solemn silence that was only broken by the clear strain of a bird that floated by the open casement away into the distant heavens like a freed, happy soul.

"She is absorbed in prayer"; and the Archbishop crossed the floor softly, and laid his hand upon her bowed head, saying, "Accept my benediction, my child."

She did not move, she did not reply. God had touched her with *his* benediction an hour before.

Nanon heard a dreadful cry, a heavy fall, and, rushing into the room, she saw the Archbishop lying prostrate before the kneeling figure of her mistress.

## PART TWELFTH.

### CROWNED AT LAST.

PERHAPS there is no deeper feeling of discouragement, dissatisfaction, and

regret than that with which an author lays down his pen at the conclusion of a long task, that he knows he has only half completed, in spite of the good intentions and ardent hopes with which he commenced it. And mingled with this disappointment is a feeling of sorrow at parting with the companions who have borne him silent company during a journey marked by so many disheartening failures. They have all become very dear to him; he has smiled with them and wept with them, been exalted by their triumphs and humbled by their defeats. Therefore he suffers to think that the world may not understand them as he has, may not feel the same charity, patience, and affection for them that he has conceived during the silent hours of the night and the renewed intimacy of the day, when they have been his absorbing though sometimes wearying associates. Now as I am about to say adieu to this cherished, though unsatisfactory endeavor, I experience all that others have proved before me; and as I glance at the title I have selected for my last chapter, I am conscious of the cruel irony of the words if applied to my labor. But as it is only my small procession of conquerors who have merited to be crowned at last, I bow my diminished head patiently under my garland of rue, not entirely discouraged if I may be allowed to hope humbly that some time in the future it may be changed to a modest wreath of bays.

"A year, a year to-day; for a whole year, that seems even ages, I have endured this bondage. If one year can be so long and so difficult to support, what will four more years bring me to?" And Claude de Clermont looked hopelessly from his casement into the distance, that he had haunted with his gaze until every line and tone were as familiar to him as the four walls of his prison. "I hoped Aimée would have accomplished something toward my deliverance, but it seems that she has failed to gain the assistance of the Archbishop. I was almost certain her effort would be in vain; his heart is destitute of pity. I am abandoned to

my fate. O Céleste, my darling, one barrier between us has been levelled by the hand of God, but the injustice of man has raised another that I can only pass over to my grave. My health, my reason, my hope, are fast sinking under this weight that presses me down. A little longer and my earthly deliverance, if it comes at all, will come too late. Poor Aimée must be ill, for if she were able she would have been at yonder window to give me some sign of love and hope. She is the only one who can do aught for me; if she has failed, there remains no other prospect of liberation." And overcome, as he had been so many times, by the anguish of hope deferred, he buried his face in his pillow and wept freely, feeling that the tears would perhaps cool the fever of his brain. It was the hour for his noonday meal, so he did not raise his head when the door of his cell was opened, believing it to be the turnkey who entered with his food, until a voice, once familiar, but now changed and broken with emotion, said, "Look up, my brother. I am come to release you."

Claude started as though an angel had spoken to him, and raising his tear-wet face he saw the Archbishop standing before him with outstretched arms. In an instant he had flown to their shelter, and, pressed against the heart of his brother, was weeping and thanking God, forgetful of injuries, wrongs, and suffering.

At length the Archbishop, who had sobbed like a child while he caressed and kissed the head of Claude, raised his happy face, and looking at him with love and sorrow said, "Poor boy, how you have changed! Can you ever forgive me for the misery I have caused you?"

"The happiness of this moment atones for all," cried Claude, rapturously kissing the hands that still caressed him. "The past is dead; my cell shall be its tomb; here we will bury it and leave it to decay. O my brother, my brother!" And he could say no more, for his joy choked his utterance.

"Here," said the Archbishop, showing him a document bearing the enormous seal of the state, which at this time had no ominous meaning, — "here is your

pardon. I have neither slept nor slumbered since I promised to procure it."

"And Aimée? I thought she would have brought it to me."

"My boy, she is an angel in heaven. It was only when I saw her dead before me that I promised what she implored almost with her last breath. I would give all the years of sorrow that are in store for me, all my honors, all my wealth, if I could but see the smile of joyful gratitude that death has defrauded me of. But she already is happy in paradise; she knows I have fulfilled her wish, and she will bless me hereafter."

"She will live forever in our hearts; we will remember her as we remember the saint who watches over our lives," said Claude, reverently.

"Let us leave this place; while I remain here I suffer remorse the most poignant. Come, Céleste waits for you. She shall be your wife, all shall be as you once wished it; nothing shall be changed. You shall still be Count de Clermont; for my title, my inheritance, are henceforth in heaven, and I desire nothing earthly."

Before Claude left his cell, he looked once more with tear-dimmed eyes on the window that had enclosed a sad, touching picture, which never could be effaced from his memory, and, stooping, he pressed his face for the last time upon his pillow, so lately wet with hopeless tears, and murmured a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who had delivered him from his sorrows. Then, taking the arm of the Archbishop, he left the place that was the grave of despair, hate, revenge, and regret, as well as the gate to future joy, love, and hope.

The soft shades of evening were gathering among the branches that hung over the winding avenues of Clermont; the air was balmy with the breath of May, and melodious with the sweet good-night strains of the little songsters who fluttered above their new-made nests. Nature was in one of her most gracious moods. Tender, gentle, fragrant, tuneful, she had scattered beauty and blessing over the day, and now she was obliterating the golden tracks

of the sun with the sweet, purple violets of the night.

The pines that grew in sombre companionship above the shaded turf of the Allée des Soupirs murmured together sadly, but not ominously, for there were no spirits but the spirits of love and peace abroad this evening, and they touched caressingly the bowed heads of Claude and Céleste as they walked with clasped hands, talking softly of the morrow, that was to crown their happiness with a holy benediction.

"We will never talk of the sorrows of the past but as of blessings in disguise," said Céleste, raising her soft eyes, filled with adoration, to the face of her companion.

"We will never talk of them at all, my Céleste; we will remember only the good, the noble, the sweet deeds that have won for us such a crown of happiness. Let us sit here and watch the last tints of sunlight paint the winding river with the sapphire hue of hope. With this day ends our old life, and tomorrow begins our new. May we keep in constant remembrance the mercy and goodness of God, who has brought us together at last!"

"Elizabeth had a letter from Philip to-day. He will be home in a month. She has seemed happier since she received it. I think she will not say No to him when he returns. I hope not, at least. O Claude, I am very happy,

and I wish every one else to be the same!"

"There is no reason why they should not marry now, for dear Aimée has left Elizabeth a handsome legacy, and they can live at Monthelon, since the Archbishop insists upon my retaining Clermont. Is he not kind to us, darling? He seems to desire nothing besides our happiness. To-day he said with such sadness and gentleness, 'I shall often visit you at Clermont; it is holy to me as the place where my Aimée laid aside her garments of earth. But I shall never leave the palace; it is under the shadow of Notre Dame, and near her grave. It will be my home until I am laid by her side.'"

"How he loved her!" said Céleste, tearfully. And then they fell into silence, while they watched the twilight gather over the river, the distant town, and the slender spires of St. Ouen.

Suddenly on the still air tolled slowly, solemnly, majestically, the vesper bells of Notre Dame, calling alike the happy, the sorrowing, and the sinful to their evening orisons.

It is the hour when the Archbishop goes to pray and weep by the tomb of Aimée.

Toll softly, ye vesper bells, above the silent sleeper and the sorrow-stricken mourner, for when your matins ring out, they will sound like marriage-chimes, musical with gladness and hope.

THE END.

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