THE

COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO.

A COMPANION TO

ALEXANDER DUMAS'

COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO.

The "Countess of Monte-Cristo" is unquestionably the most wonderful romance of the age. In plot, character, incidents, and language—it is unsurpassably great. While it strips from successful villany and vice all the gorgeous and glittering drapery that conceals their deformity, it in not a solitary instance palliates or palters with social inequalities, but aims at a high morality. Whether the author describes the lovely Countess of Monte-Cristo, pale and pure as a lily, or the outcast, Nini Moustache, sad type of the "one more unfortunate" class, it is always done chastely, though powerfully. Many portions of this book are as profoundly affecting as the most sombre scenes of VICTOR HUGO—others surpass the most brilliant word-pictures of EUGENE SUE—while the complete work has no parallel, not even in the most perfect work and master-piece of the great DUMAS, "THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO."

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

In introducing this great work, "The Countess of Monte-Cristo," it will not be out of place to say a few words of its peculiarities, and excellencies, and thus account for the unexampled success it has already met with abroad. In Paris, "La Comtesse de Monte-Cristo" has rapidly passed through edition after edition, since its appearance, sumptuously illustrated in the feuilleton of *Le Voleur*. In this country, it has not only largely increased the circulation of *Le Messager Franco-Americain*, as it ran through the columns of that excellent journal, but has, also, been reproduced in book form, by the publisher of that sheet, in French. Although the *New York Herald* deals more largely in facts than in fiction, yet column after column of the "Countess of Monte-Cristo" has appeared in that paper, and its re-publication in the *New York Evening Telegram*, has proved even a greater attraction than their famous Cartoons; adding tens of thousands to their already immense circulation. Nor is this at all astonishing, for the "Countess of Monte-Cristo" is unquestionably the most wonderful romance of the age. In plot, character, incidents, language—it is unsurpassably great. While it strips from successful villany and vice all the gorgeous and glittering drapery that conceals their deformity, it in not a solitary instance palliates or palters with social inequalities, but aims at a high morality. Whether the author describes the lovely Countess of Monte-Cristo, pale and pure as a lily, or the outcast, Nini Moustache sad type of the "one more unfortunate" class, it is always done chastely though powerfully. Many portions of this book are as profoundly affecting as the most sombre scenes of Victor Hugo—others surpass the most brilliant word-pictures of Eugene Sue—while the complete work has no parallel, not even in the most perfect work and master-piece of the great Dumas.

THE

COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE SHADOWS OF NOIRMONT.

THE scene before us is located in the southern extremity of the province of Limousin.

The routes, thoroughfares for so many years worked upon by the administration, are not even at the date of our history, in a condition for use. The valley roads, sandwiched, as it were, between the clay embankments, unite only miserable villages and farm-houses.

The horizon is nearly always obscured by the thick foliage of the chestnut copse.

At intervals the road leaps up to the surface, then the eye is greeted by glintings of green pastures, the sparkling mirror of a little lake, and the blue hills that are lost to view in the misty atmosphere of the horizon.

The traveler as he passes through the country, plows through the under-brush of the forest or treads upon the red heath and yellow furze. Everywhere is presented a picture of solitude—that "divine retreat," so dear to the dreamer.

At the bottom of a narrow basin, that it would be more proper to compare to a quagmire than a valley, rises a confused mass of buildings from which ascend three long tongues of flame. This gigantic valley or channel casts its strong light upon the surrounding hills like a scaffold heap of the Titans.

Such is the general aspect, at once, of the chateau and the manufactory. On every hand extends a vast pond, which narrows toward the north where it is spanned by a stone bridge—a modern substitute for the draw-bridge, from which can still be seen two turrets, isolated from the principal mass of buildings like an advanced sentry.

Nothing could be more fantastic at nightfall than this picture of a landscape.

The tall black towers bathe their feet in an atmosphere of burnished gold, and adorn their faces with the roseate drapery of the eventide, and the strong light of the valley. Add to this the commingling of the varied sounds of the environs—the deep murmur of the waterfall—the metallic vibrations of the hammers, the bellowing of the wind in the thicket, and you have a *tout ensemble* of Noirmont.

Noirmont's furnace was formerly Noirmont castle, as its airy towers and solid walls would indicate. But it was at a remote period, for no person remembered only Noirmont ruin lost amid the ivy and the brambles, and the stone arches which afforded a retreat for the wind and storms of the north.

From time immemorial, to within twenty years to the debut of this history, the screech-owl and the sea-eagle were the sole occupants of this eyrie of vultures.

Every one fled from the frightful noises of the valley, and after nightfall the most dauntless countryman crossed himself before he undertook the journey through it, while the superstitious in passing to Apreval, went twelve miles up the river to avoid these ill-fated ruins.

Now to restore Noirmont, this fortress destroyed by the ancient counts, to the living tenable fabric which presents itself to us at the commencement of this recital, both time and the energies of a living man had been necessary.

This man surely was a man of genius and as surely a man of wealth. In adding to his own riches, he enriched the whole country. The forests, hitherto useless, were made to contribute of their treasures, the idle hands were employed, the water-fall, after so many generations of idleness, was set to turning a wheel again, and suddenly, as though by magic, everything was changed. The buildings were rendered inhabitable, the feverish restlessness subdued because the pay was better and the nourishment more healthful; the barren fields by cultivation were rendered arable; money poured in as naturally as blood into the heart, and the whole population had been resuscitated, as it were, by a single man.

Such was the work of M. Georges de Rancogne, a work that unfortunately he left incomplete, for about six months before the opening of this history, he died universally regretted, and sincerely lamented by his young wife.

It is the last day of March; the night is dark and dreary. The chimneys of the dwellings do not, as ordinarily send forth their lurid lights. The machinery is still. One hears only the sighing of the wind among the branches and the trickling of the water in the brushwood. The great detached inky mass of Noirmont furnace shadowed on the darker hills, that one could imagine rather than see it, indicated by the sombre reflection upon the more lucid mirror of the pond or lake.

It is a night, as the countrymen would put it, too hideous to put out a dog, nevertheless, from the court of a neighboring farmhouse, a dog has set up a terrific howl that rends the air at a great distance, which as the superstitious would say, is a forerunner of death.

By listening attentively there could have been heard the splashing of a horse-step in the mud, on the valley road.

Nearer the chateau, between the bank of the pond and the wall of the building, upon a kind of parapet that jutted out from the road, there passed and repassed a shadow—the shadow of a man. When he caught the sound of the horse, this man stopped and listened.

On the other side, before the front of the garden, there was a second shadow—the shadow of a woman. It stood motionless, near a little gate that opened into the country. She was waiting also.

Finally, upon a third point between the new portions of the building and the common, there was a third shadow—a shadow of a lad of fifteen, climbing over the walls with an agility that denoted practice in this exercise.

At the moment that he had taken a position to leap to the other side he stopped with a quick gesture and inclination of the head to listen. Shaking his head he said:

"It is the wind. I have been deceived."

And he leaped into the court.

He was not deceived. Two distinct sounds pierced through the tumult of the storm: a sharp, prolonged whistle, and a cry of a sea-eagle.

At this twofold signal, the promenader of the parapet and the woman that was standing near the gate left their respective positions: the woman advanced to greet a young man whose features were concealed under the broad-brimmed hat usually worn by the countrymen of Limousin—the man threw himself into a barge which silently crossed to the opposite shore of the lake, where a man upon horseback was impatiently awaiting him.

"Ah! here you are, doctor," murmured the rower in an undertone. "They have need of you here this evening, but it is necessary that I should speak to you beforehand. Your horse will do very well there under the shed. Come with me quickly."

The two men entered the barge together, and crossed over to the chateau.

While they are crossing we will give our attention to what is passing on the other side.

"Is it you, M. Octavius?" asked a young girl, in a surprised but fresh, sweet voice.

As the young man remained silent, she took him by the hand.

"Madam has concealed nothing from me," added she, "and I would give my life for madam!"

She cast down her eyes, so that, even in the darkness, no one should read the expression, and murmured:

"I would give my life for those who love madam!"

She felt the hand that she still held tremble in her own, and the young man scarcely could articulate:

"For those that she loves?"

"Madam has been very sad," said the young girl, shaking her beautiful blonde head gravely, "but after she received your note she was almost happy. One must love madam, M. Octavius, because she has suffered so much!"

The gate closed after them, and Octavius followed his pretty usher toward the chateau.

As they were about to enter, the false

countryman—M. Octavius—stopped his guide.

"Rosa, many things must have happened at Noirmont since duty called me into exile. It is necessary that I should be made acquainted with these before going up stairs."

And he pointed to a pale light that issued through an aperture of the blinds below.

"Come then," murmured the young girl.

Instead of entering the chateau with Octavius she turned to the right and took the way that led to the commons. Neither knew that a fourth shadow concealed itself behind the high walls and followed them silently.

"I treat you to the worst," said Rosa, "but had we have gone in here it would have been necessary to have crossed the chamber of madam."

Octavius replied only by a gesture of approbation, and the two disappeared by the open gateway, up the back staircase.

Behind them glided their spy.

The two young people entered a small chamber, feebly lighted by an office lamp. It was a narrow cabinet, furnished only with a couch, a cherry table and a large trunk. A basin of holy water surmounted by a branch of box was fastened over the pillow of the bed against the whitewashed wall. Upon the table was a vase of sand-stone with flowers.

"Madam is sleeping," said Rosa, "we are favored."

Octavius took an inventory at a glance of this charming habitation, so to speak, of modesty.

Rosa remarked the observation and blushed.

"It is my chamber," said she.

The young man threw off his peasant's hat, displaying in full view a noble countenance, crowned with luxuriant curls. Rosa took this in at a glance, and, with something between a smile and a tear, said:

"I was but a child when you left Noirmont, but I recognized you."

"And I also, Rosa," cried Octavius. "I recognized your voice, in which I have always had so much implicit confidence since I confided to you a secret which involved both life and honor."

He had seized the hand of Rosa in his own, and she pressed it to her bosom.

"The secret I reposed here," replied she, "will never be disclosed. Listen to what has passed since your departure, in the house of your brother."

Outside, the spy was gliding into the staircase, he was already opposite the door of the chamber. He straightened himself up by degrees, and his curious eyes found their way into the keyhole.

Octavius' bared head was exactly on a level with the aperture.

The spy uttered a suppressed shriek.

"It is he!"

At this time the party in the barge were carrying on a conversation in an undertone.

"So," said the doctor, trembling, either from cold or from fear, "so is it this evening?"

His interlocutor made a deliberate gesture in the affirmative.

"Calculate, it is just nine months."

"Disagreeable work, Monsieur Champion."

"Bah, Doctor Toinon, it is the best work that pays best."

"It is especially otherwise in this case," murmured the doctor, with an expression of discouragement.

But he did not say much more.

A loud protracted whistle interpenetrated the atmosphere.

The face of Champion brightened with an expression of triumph.

"Otherwise?" said he, "Otherwise—— he is here."

CHAPTER II.

THE FOUR LIGHTS.

Four lights illuminated, after the fashion of four inspirited eyes, the vast surface of the front of Noirmont.

One of these lights as dim and half intercepted by the shutter that Octavius had pointed out to Rosa, in saying, "It is necessary that I should know these things before going up stairs."

Another light shone out from the half open shutters of the chamber where we left the young people together.

The third, at one of the extremities of the building, cast a long slender light upon the unruffled surface of the lake.

The fourth, lit up the arch of a door opening upon the court opposite the commons.

Following the order of the drama, we will return to the scenes corresponding to each of these lights.

Light first.—In a spacious apartment that appears to be the workshop of a cooper, we find an old man and a youth. The apartment seems to be even larger

than it is, owing to the dim light of a candle which is set securely in a bit of cleft wood and pinned into the mantel of a high chimney. Upon the fire-place two brands, in the vain attempt to draw together, had finally smouldered out.

The surrounding space is encumbered with half-built casks, and staves and hoops in indescribable confusion. The old man is lying upon a pallet, indifferently protected against the cold by some covers of serge; the youth sits upon a block, listening with almost feverish eagerness to the wanderings of the invalid.

From time to time he straightened himself up and extended an arm, as attenuated as the arm of a skeleton; he grasped the cup that the youth held out to him, and, somewhat reanimated, continued:

"Joseph, the time has come. Death is very near."

"Banish the thought, Father Beasson. Death!"

"Listen to me. Noireau howls at the moon; there have been vipers seen on the summit of Grandval, and all that love Rancogne will speak twenty years hence of this night."

Then changing suddenly the current of thought with the mobility of the fever:

"The Rancognes were a race of true gentlemen, Joseph, as true as you now behold two Christians. In the olden time one would have had to travel a long way to have found so brave and powerful a family. Noirmont belonged to their estate, and Apreval and Rancogne, the meadow and the forest, the plain and the hill. They were fierce and proud; as fierce as their swords, as proud as their proud motto: *Qui ne se rend coigne.* They talked of the hidden treasures in the cellars of the castle, and the lords of Rochechouart themselves called them our cousins. They were, in fine, a magnificent family, this family of the Rancognes! Then came the evil days: through the whole country there was waged a war. It was at a period so remote that our grandfathers themselves are not able to recall it, It is not recorded in history, and the tradition is no longer rehearsed at the firesides of the villagers. The Rancognes, true to the creeds of their seigniors, were Protestants: but fate did not favor them. Noirmont was broken up. Rancogne, the fine castle, was razed and salt scattered over the ruins, and the old forests disgracefully levelled to the earth. The forest has renewed its growth, but the pretty castle of Rancogne does not exist even in the memories of its tenantry."

The old man heaved a long sigh. After a brief interval of silence, he continued:

"Joseph, death is approaching and I am very much exhausted, but I must tell you all. The time at length came that Rancogne had not an ally in the world. For some years before the great revolution those who had been the Kings of the country were poor noblemen. But misfortune had not diminished their pride. The old Count John was a truly noble lord, though in a few hours he could have traveled over his kingdom. Francis and William, his two brave young sons, though clad in coarse clothes, had two valiant hearts throbbing beneath them, and the old count could show with pride these two sons in an assembly of noblemen.

"Francis was the eldest. He was as strong as a bull; he resembled his father. William, the younger, on the contrary, was as gentle as a woman; he was like his mother.

"Ah! what an affecting sight was it, Joseph, to see the old count seated in his great oaken armed-chair between his two sons, who trembled beneath his glance, yet loving and venerating him as they loved and honored God.

"It was, however, one of these sons, William, the one so much beloved, whose face reminded one of saints and angels that had sinned, and given to his father this death blow.

"The Countess Madelaine, had adopted the daughter of one of his farmers and brought her up as her own child.

"They called her Jennie. At sixteen Jennie was so beautiful that one could not look upon her without emotions of pleasure, and sometimes the old count said with an air of pleasantry as he toyed with the ringlets of the young girl:

"'I shall recommend the young gentleman to marry this young lady.'

"Then Jennie would blush and William cast down his eyes and bite his lips.

"William and Jennie loved each other.

"They had been brought up together, together they had rambled in the woods, and gamboled on the lawn. William did not know anything as beautiful as Jennie and Jennie did not know anything as beautiful as William.

"Count John considered it the natural affection of brother and sister, and smiled upon the young lovers.

"When he awoke to the real state of affairs, it was too late.

"There ensued a terrible scene. The old count commanded, the trembling young man with his eyes riveted upon the sun, stood in terrified silence. One could hear, through the thick wainscoat of the door, the vindictive voice of the Count John, the voice of William, at first low and pliant, then firm, then free and vehement in his turn.

"'The blood in the veins of the lion's whelp rebels.' What was spoken between the father and the son during the hours they were shut up together? No person save themselves ever have known, no one save themselves will ever know: it was words that could not be uttered but once: suffice it that William went out pale, and that evening Count John sent he and Jennie from his table and refused them shelter, declaring that he had no longer but one son.

"From that day the health of Count John was obviously much impaired. He was no longer seen in the forest, riding upon his favorite nag; after a little, he did not walk in his garden, then he was confined to his chamber, and at the end of a month he took to his great armorial bed, from which he never afterwards arose."

Beasson made an effort to inspire his voice, which seemed enfeebled with emotion. Joseph passed him the cup, from which he drank with great avidity.

"My strength is nigh exhausted, Jose, but I shall have finished. There were many sources of consolation around the pillow of the old count. Two years before Frances had brought a young and beautiful bride to the fireside of the chateau, and a little child with curly hair sported innocently at his bed-side, but nothing: neither the affection of his daughter-in-law, nor the embraces of his son, nor the sports of his grand-child could compensate for the loss of the absent: the absent that he had cursed,—the absent that was no longer his son."

Beasson sobbed hoarsely.

"After the death of the King, Francis departed with his wife and little son George to rejoin the army of the Conde. For years he was not heard from, neither was William.

"Meanwhile there were still two Rancognes in some parts of the world: George the first born son of Francis, and Octavius his brother who was born during the sad exile."

Here Beasson, interupting himself, indicated by a gesture of the hand that he should resume his recital as soon as possible.

Second light.—In the chamber of Rosa, Octavius and the young girl were seated side by side.

"When I first came here," said Octavius, "you were very small, Rosa, and I do not know if you can remember it. Everything was like a festival at Noirmont. My brother George had learned that fortune was not altogether a heritage, but that it was intelligence and persistent toil in our generation that reinstates a noble family. The building was already in complete activity, Noirmont furnace began to acquire a reputation that had perhaps never justly belonged to Noirmont castle. The great industry which at first inspired George de Rancogne, without doubt distrust of his title, was restored with greater zeal to the young husband of Mlle. Helena Roumien.

There had been a grand festival in the manufactory, which was illuminated from the foundation to the turret. They danced in the great forge, which was planked for the occasion. The young Count George was radiant, his betrothed seemed happy, and as to myself, that evening I suffered all the torments of the damned."

The sweetly compassionate eyes of Rosa were veiled with an atmosphere of pity for the young man, who proceeded in a suppressed voice:

"I had returned to the chateau firmly resolved to treat my brother to severe remonstrances in consequence of his misalliance that I deemed unworthy of myself. I was a headstrong child then, but I have toned down somewhat since that time. One single glance of Helena subdued my anger; a second made me her slave. For six months, six long months, Rosa, I experienced this torture; the torture of loving a woman who belonged to his brother. I found even an eager joy in this grief, the more I suffered, the more I wished to suffer, and far from my own disinclination I remained there, contemplating with atrocious jealousy this two-fold felicity which scourged my very heart. One day, may the day be eternally cursed, I discovered that I did not weep in secret alone, the sighs of another responded to mine.

"From that day, upon my honor, my decision was made. I sought my brother, who did not question me, and took leave of him. Then I wandered in every direction, seeking death, which did not

come at my bidding. In three months the civil war broke out in Vendee. I engaged in it. I have risked my life twenty times. We have been conquered, and I still live. But to-day my decision is taken, as on the day on which I took leave of George, thinking never to see him again, I have come to give adieu to those I have so long devotedly loved, and——"

"And?" asked Rosa.

"We have been conquered," replied Octavius in an under-tone; "there is a price offered for my head, and there are gendarmes upon the road to Limoges."

"They no longer shoot conspirators," said Rosa, smiling.

"No," said Octavius, more to himself than to her, "but they kill the conspirators that defend themselves."

Rosa became deathly white.

"And do you defend yourself?" she cried.

He replied, simply:

"Yes, when I desire to be killed."

The young girl clasped her hands together, and her glance was full of entreaty.

Then she appeared to make a heroic resolution—

"Listen to me," she cried, passionately. "You may kill yourself afterward, if you will. Your brother George knows all."

Octavius made a brusque movement.

"He knows that you loved the Countess Helena and that the Countess Helena loved you, but he has faith in your loyalty, and faith in the honor of his wife. So painful is it to his existence, that he never spoke of this secret, which your conduct alone revealed to him. He was no longer more grave or impatient than was his nature to be, but it was a noble heart that Count George possessed."

"Everything prospered. My mistress, who had surprised the concealed grief of her husband, was won back by her gratitude for his superhuman generosity.

"The count, who made the best of everything, regarded the attachment as an illusion that had been mistaken for love. Perhaps his wife also imagined that she too had finally buried the fancy in oblivion. They were happy so far as they could be so. Count George took for a counter-master, a distant relative of my mistress, M. Hercules Champion. Misfortune entered Noirmont with this man.

"Hercules," cried Octavius, eagerly. "You have deceived yourself! It is to him that I owe my life. Recently he saved me from my pursuers, he procured me this disguise, which to-morrow will save me if I still wish to be saved."

"I did not accuse M. Champion," replied Rosa, "he may be, as you say, a true and devoted relative; be that as it may, misfortune and M. Champion came to Noirmont together.

"Without being able to tell you why, without being able to attribute it to negligence or any other cause, the affairs ceased to prosper. Day after day George came sadly to his family board. This sadness soon made inroads upon his constitution. He grew pale and thin in a few months, as after a whole year by sickness; and the feebler he became, the more need had he for his strength to superintend his interests, which became more and more involved in difficulties.

"Grief and ill health were brought to do their common work. He was constrained to depart, for the journey of life was only a protracted misery.

"He who would have been so happy, believing himself beloved, and loving in fact (for madam is a saint), watching at last, to see himself in a fair cherub. The poor babe will only know its father by the inscription upon his tomb.

"The day that your brother died, he summoned madam. We were in the ante-chamber, Joseph and I."

"Who is this Joseph?"

The young girl blushed up to the eyes.

"It is the little son of Jeanison, that poor woman in the neighborhood, who died the year that you came here. If ever Rancogne has need of a martyr, Joseph would be a willing victim. We were, as I said, in the ante-chamber, Joseph and I. M. George called us in a feeble voice.

"'Draw near, my children, and listen attentively to what I am about to say to your mistress. I know your fidelity, and if ever your testimony is called for, you will give it.' He turned towards madam, who wept bitterly.

"'Helena, my wife, you have always been to me a good and faithful wife. All that belonged to me will belong to you. See, here is my will, but I have added to the clauses that are here contained, a verbal condition which must be observed under penalty of nullity. You are still young, Helena, you will give birth to a child that I shall never embrace. I desire to give to my wife and child a protector and a father. Helena, you are my sole heir. I make over in your favor the interests of my brother Octavius'—he had a pallid smile upon his countenance, like that of the blessed Jesus upon the cross—'because I know this is the only

means of compelling your probity. Helena, I wish you to marry my brother Octavius. You hear this, Joseph and Rosa,' added he, turning to us, 'I require it.'

"Then he made a gesture and we went out."

Octavius de Rancogne had buried his face in his hands, and between his fingers flowed great tears. Rosa regarded him silently for some seconds, then, in a timid voice, she added:

"Monsieur Octavius, the hour has come; the child that your brother bequeathed to you—*your* child—*va naitre*."

The first light burns always. In the old bake-house, which served for a lodging, the old Beasson continued his story in a voice that grew weaker and weaker.

"The enemy of Rancogne is under the roof of Rancogne! He is nourished by its bread. Ere the year shall close, he will have triumphed, and neither you or I will have the power to prevent it. But the noble race cannot be exterminated thus, and I know a secret that will re-establish it more firmly and nobly than ever. I have wished to try it myself, but I am not able. I am old and feeble. When they wish to forget they drink of the eau-de-vie, and the eau-de-vie destroys the memory. This secret which returns to me this lucid hour because it is the time of my departure, and which they will remember, I wished to reveal to Count George, but, like every one, he believed me to be foolish, and mocked me. You alone have had faith in me: to you then I will disclose the secret that will save and enrich Rancogne.

"Listen: It is a country legend that I shall repeat to you—and round about the ancient dwelling of the Counts, not Noirmont, but the other Rancogne, the beautiful chateau which has been razed—every countryman will tell you the same, but I have often heard this legend from the lips of the old Count John himself, who smiled about it, as did every one else, and I know the road that leads to the treasures of Rancogne.

"It is at the bottom of one of the caves that extend under the ancient site of the chateau. The caves are like a city, and one might pass the coffers a thousand times without finding them. But I know where they are. One day, when Rancogne began to go down, and I began to divine the iniquitous baseness that will be achieved this night, I tried for eight hours to remember, and the ninth it came to me. I went down there. For one week they believed that I was dead: they searched for me everywhere. I was in the caves of Rancogne, and I searched and searched, and I found. Yes!" cried Beasson, rising up with enthusiasm from his pallet; "I found. This hand that you see was plunged into the coffers filled with gold! in the gold of Rancogne! When I returned I would have told all to M. George: he would have smiled and treated me as though I had been a fool.

"You alone have believed me; you alone shall know it." Joseph held his breath while listening to the old man, doubting himself if he had heard it and believing himself to be the victim of an illusion. Beasson seized his hand with force enough to have broken it and leaning his face upon that of Joseph, with his eyes peering into his, asked him by gesture, look and voice:

"But you, at least, will believe me, and what I tell you, that you will do?"

Joseph hesitated a moment, then in a decided voice, said.

"I believe you, and what you command me, that will I do."

"Then," cried Beasson, rapturously clapping his hands together, "Rancogne is saved."

He had sprung out of bed, and without stopping to put on his clothes, he bounded into the damp atmosphere with ferocious ardor.

"Rancogne is saved! Rancogne is saved!"

Joseph looked at him for a moment. He had believed in this chimera so strongly that the tone of the old man demonstrated the profoundest conviction. He had believed in the existence of these hiden treasures, concealed in the depths of the caves which were explored each year by thousands of the curious.

This was not the first time that he had heard of the coffers filled with gold. He had heard the history of more than one fool delving for these treasures, who had been found dead in some unexplored corners of the caves. But always, even in the wanderings of his variable inebriations, father Beasson had hitherto refrained from the remotest allusion to this discovery.

He had commenced this conversation in a tone so solemn and religious, so to speak, that the youthful heart of Joseph, susceptible, enthusiastic, and filled with devotion and a love for the marvellous, was perfectly enlisted in the recital, when he answered father Beasson:

"I believe you, and will do whatever you command me, but at this unlooked

for denouement he doubted, and as he thought of the victor-delirium that threw this enfeebled old man out of his bed, he said:

"This is folly! This treasure which is to be the saving of Rancogne exists only in his disordered brain."

Meanwhile Beasson knelt down in the corner of the place and with his nails dug a deep hole in the soft earth.

"It is the delirium," said Joseph to himself and aloud he added:

"Come, father Beasson, you will catch cold; let me put you quietly to bed again."

The calm tone of his voice struck father Beasson as the expression of unbelief and he turned upon him with defiance.

"You believe me to be a fool," said he; "you will not do what I shall tell you."

"Yes, yes, I will do it; but return to bed; I swear to you I will do it."

"You will swear it!"

"Foolish or not, I will do it. I swear to you that on my part your are safe."

"All right, then," cried Beasson swinging a porte-monie, still damp from the earth, above his head. "Rancogne is saved; yes, when even the Count Octavius shall fall into their snares; when even the Countess Helena, and the poor dear innocent that will be born, shall become their victims, Rancogne is saved, Rancogne is saved!"

From the blow, the old Beasson wandered. Beyond the Count Octavius and the wife of his brother George there was no Rancogne in the world.

"What avails it that he believes me," said he since he has sworn that foolish or not, he will do what I command him.

Beasson drew two papers from a heavy envelope that was carefully sealed, and a strait cloth, somewhat stained, upon which was roughly traced some kind of a plan.

The envelope bore the name of Joseph. Joseph would have opened it, but Beasson stopped him.

"Swear to me," said he, "that you will not open this parcel until you shall have the treasure in your possession."

As much as to say *never*, thought Joseph.

"Swear to me, that inasmuch as you owe to Rancogne your life, your intelligence and all that pertains to you, that you will not open this paper until the day that you shall restore to the house, riches, honor and deliverance from all danger."

In spite of him, the solemnity of this scene began to appeal again to the heart of Joseph. He was surprised to finding himself reinstated in the faith.

"I swear it," he uttered, in a voice of emotion. "Very well; then examine this other paper and listen."

"But the other, the other," asked Joseph, shaking the envelope which burned in his fingers.

"The other," murmured Beasson, "contains the reward and my reinstatements."

CHAPTER III.

THE FOUR LIGHTS.

WHILE Joseph gathered the strange confessions out of the old cooper, while the gentle Rosa strove to inspire the soul of Octavius with faith in the future, shall we not pass into the other illuminated apartments of the chateau Noirmont?

Third light.

In a hall on the first floor—the same which threw from the narrow chink of its closed shutter a ray of reddish light upon the calm surface of the lake—three men were gathered around a case of liquors.

We have already introduced two of them, who, despite of the darkness which rendered their countenances indistinct, would have been recognized as Hercules Champion and Doctor Toinon. Their companion answered to the name of John Baptist Matifay, the steward.

"Listen," said Champion, cavalierly, standing with his back to the fire; "it is to take or to leave."

"Twenty thousand, it is very little, my good Champion," said Matifay, in his flute-like voice.

"It is very little," Toinon would have reiterated, but a glance at Champion stopped him.

"If you hesitate," grumbled Champion, "I have it in my power to send you both to the galleys."

"You know that where ever we are we find ourselves in your company," said Matifay. Champion reddened to the nails.

"We shall see; explain yourself once for all," cried he violently. "What are your claims?"

"We are to discuss our little interests, are we not; you are a very intelligent boy, Hercules, and a good friend, but your brutality is a shame to you! Pardon if I wound you. It is necessary to be complaisant in the transaction of busi-

ness. You fail in complacency; positively you fail in complacency."

On that they shook hands warmly. Toinon, reassured, knew how to administer his elixir, was smiling upon them. It is beautiful to see two friends sincere enough to bear the truth from each other.

"The business is not so fine as we had apprehended," murmured Champion sitting down.

"Excuse me, Hercules," said Matifay, "possibly you do not comprehend all of its advantages: on the contrary, it is superb."

"Is it not attended with danger," asked Champion.

"Doubtless, for us, but not for you. Should misfortune attend us, which I believe to be impossible, it is not you upon whom suspicion will be cast. All would fall upon this poor doctor and myself. I do not complain—you are the legitimate heir, you have real rights.

"To divide them, it is necessary that we should gain them. But, my God, do not be parsimonious, we are all as brothers."

His voice was stifled with emotion. Toinon dropped a tear into his glass.

"Brothers: brothers?" said Champion, with the ghost of a doubt.

"How much is the building worth?" asked Matifay brusquely."

"Four hundred thousand francs."

"Yes, for latterly there has been some depreciation on account of the sudden death of our poor George, a great misfortune, and would be greater should they seek the cause."

"Death by grief, resembles that by poison," interposed the doctor in a dogmatic tone.

"Without doubt, the death of poor George was occasioned by the waning interests of Noirmont. He had not a strong mind; but in one or two years, our friend Champion, who is the most successful manufacturer in the country, will have restored Noirmont to its real value, eight hundred thousand francs."

Champion made a gesture in the negative but did not interpose any protestation. Matifay, who had stopped to listen to any objection, continued:

"There are fine forests above, on the crest of Apreval. I have examined them in passing. If they were felled what would they be worth on a fine morning. There is oak timber that I would not sell to the navy for five hundred thousand francs. Then there are meadows of the first quality around Noirmont, Metairies, Trompardiere, Barre, Broutilles and other places that I will not name. At what do you estimate Broutilles, Barre, Trompardiere, Metairies, the meadows of Noirmont and the forests of Apreval?"

"Humph; a hundred thousand francs."

"It is a bargain, I will take it. Nothing to lose, nothing to fear. It is not myself who would ever abuse the word of a friend. But put down two hundred and fifty, here's the rule, *item* then, two hundred and fifty."

And upon the corner of the table, with his finger dipped in his glass, he wrote in one line 800,000, and underneath it 250,000.

"Let us come to business."

Champion heaved a deep sigh. Toinon, like the ancient mask that smiled with one cheek and wept with the other, wept munificently upon Matifay, and turned to Hercules a face whose expression was completely neutral.

"Let us then to business," said Matifay. "We have nothing to conceal from this good Toinon, is it not so? but as this business concerns us more particularly, he is not to engage in the discussion. According to the account between myself and the manufacturer of Noirmont furnace, I have bought and received castings to the amount of two hundred thousand francs."

Toinon opened his great eyes naively, and asked himself what had become of the two hundred thousand francs.

"The castings retailed by me have netted only one hundred and ninety thousand; but it is always so. But the devil will be to pay if with good management twenty thousand francs cannot be saved. You will do better I am sure; but I will not be mean, put then two hundred thousand francs into the account.—*Item* 200,000. Then add:

"Five, eight and two are ten, and two are twelve. Sum total: one million, two hundred and fifty thousand francs.

He put a straight horizontal line underneath the sum total, as any careful accountant would do, and added:

"There is your cake"—

Champion did not undertake to reply. Astounded at the result of this prodigious sum, the doctor felt the beads of sweat starting from the roots of his hair. He repeated in a deliberate voice as though to engrave upon his memory this respectable number:

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs. The child that should have been born this evening would have been rich."

CHAPTER IV.

CHAMPION, MATIFAY, TOINON, ETC.

THE conversation became animated, Champion had emptied half of a decanter of brandy, as his empurpled visage would confirm. Doctor Toinon was a little wan, and left untasted the glass of Elixir de Garus before him. Matifay preferred the anniseed cordial, and his cross-eyes, shaded by two long tufts of dingy white eyebrows, looked cunningly at each other.

We will now introduce more particularly to our readers these three honorable personages. Honor to whom honor is due: we will commence with Champion.

People who are versed in conchology admit as a self-evident principle that the character of the fish may be known by the shell. If the same rule will apply to the characters of a romance, we will examine the exterior of M. Champion in order to form an opinion of the man.

At first sight he would be taken for a gentleman's companion. Above the fireplace there was suspended from the antlers of the deer a half-dozen rifles in perfect condition for use, and on the opposite wall a powder-horn and shot-bag were arranged with the skill of an amateur sportsman.

But the papers in the bureau were arranged in an order indicating M. Champion to be a man who did not sacrifice business to the pursuits of pleasure. In this half study, half drawing-room, everything was in its own place. The chairs were arranged symmetrically along the wall, the copper-colored candlesticks were arranged on either side of the chimney. Hercules Champion was a man of system and ballast, hence it will be needless to further enforce the idea that he sacrificed pleasure to business, or *vice versa*. Between the two he was able to establish an exact balance; *In medio stat virtus.* Neglect nothing, said the sage; not even virtue.

M. Champion was truly what could be called a sage. Even thus early in life had he proved himself to be such. Still young, he could not dissimulate the follies of youth. He did not refuse a revivifying glass before the faggots, after a long and fatiguing day at the chase. And at a desert he was not shocked at a jest: indeed, his merry eye told how well he enjoyed it. But he was moderate and temperate in all of his pleasures as became a responsible man.

His appearance was that of an overgrown youth of three and twenty. He had a handsome ruddy face, framed by a thick black beard. He wore an agreeable smile, and his voice was sufficiently euphonious.

He had, if we may be allowed to say it, the air of a French roue. His physiognomy, that was, at first sight, sympathetic enough, was entirely neutralized at intervals by an expression of cunning. One could read his nose, his mouth, his forehead, but there was something in his eyes wholly unintelligible. His clear grey eyes, when he opened them widely, which was rarely, destroyed in a second the favorable impression that had been awakened by the sonorousness of his voice and the energy of his clutched hand. This man was an artful person who played frank, which, as everyone knows, is the worst kind of artfulness in the world.

Finally, as those great comedians who identify themselves so perfectly with their roles that they continue, in spite of themselves, to play them even in private life, Hercules Champion had finished by acquiring with time part of the character that in the debut he had attributed to himself. A poltroon by instinct he had contracted energy which could, at any given moment, take the phase of courage, or at the least, to the rebellion of a hunted boar, which is only the bravery of the mean-hearted.

Every one knew Doctor Toinon. Every one has met with this impotent creature, equally skillful for the well or the sick: this neutral nature, whose heart would fail when the crime was to be committed, but that was equally guilty in not daring to resist it: this character of soft wax, that received all, but preserved no impression: without sincere passions, that is to say with neither great vices or great virtues. They say of such a person: He is a good boy. But when one has need of a true friend, they must not rap at that door.

Doctor Toinon was forty years of age. He was bald but covered his forehead with locks of his black hair and affected the figure of a dandy. He was considered *comme il fait* by the ladies because he dressed tastefully and always kept fine horses.

John Baptist Matifay, Steward and Perigourdiu, was a more powerful adversary, though his appearance was no longer formidable.

Imagine a precocious old man, or rather a medium between childhood and old age. One could not determine whether his soft face covered with unperceptible

wrinkles was that of an undeveloped youth or a shriveled old man. With no beard, and a voice at once shrill and clamorous, with the hair upon his forehead so pale and brown that it appeared to be white, he had, so to speak, a most equivocal physiognomy. His limbs were meager and piteously awkward. His eyes perpetually blinkling after the fashion of near-sighted people, and an inconvenient deafness, which furnished a good pretext to call for a repetition when he did not choose to hear, and a stammering which admitted of reflection when it was necessary, such was Matifay, Prigourdiere and Steward.

Champion, as we have said, was capable of carrying himself valorously when he saw himself brought to a stand. That could not be said of Matifay, he revolted at the outset of an attack and cried.

"All that is exact! What next?"

"Oh, Champion!" said Matifay, in a whining voice, "I never expected that on your part, an old college chum. Thanks to us and for us (because without us you could do nothing,) you are about to come into the possession of one million two hundred and fifty thousand francs, and you offer us each twenty thousand. You in whom I have had implicit confidence. One cannot any longer know in whom they may place confidence."

The good doctor raised his hands heavenward and repeated, as if in a dream:

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs! One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"Come, Toinon, come, we will show to this thankless fellow that we have hearts and will not accept the fee of a lackey. We will see what he can do when he shall no longer have us to disengage him from the snare."

"What do you wish?" cried Champion, insanely.

"Nothing," said Matifay, with dignity.

"Propose your conditions and we will discuss them."

"That is to the purpose!" replied Matifay, "I thought you would come to your senses."

He dipped his fingers in his glass, and making a vertical line on the side of his sum total, he murmured:

"Three in one, no times, three in twelve four times, three in five once, and two remainder; carrying out that, the third of twenty is six and two remaining.

"There will be then four hundred and sixteen thousand six hundred and sixty-six francs, shared equally. But we are magnanimous, are we not, Toinon? we will not exact an equal share, we shall be satisfied with four hundred thousand francs each."

"Four hundred thousand blows upon your back!" cried Hercules, exasperated by the coolness of Matifay. "After all if you refuse twenty thousand so much the worse for you. Twenty thousand francs is a pretty sum for you."

"My God! you are demented this evening; certainly twenty thousand francs is a pretty sum, but not as pretty as four hundred thousand."

"If my proposition does not suit you," said Champion ferociously, "you have only to say so, I shall do my work alone."

"As you please," replied Matifay gently, "if we take for our ally a certain fugitive that is concealed about here, it will scarcely be an evenhanded thing for you."

Champion bowed his head. He was vanquished. He could not suppress a cry that we can describe no better than as the harrowing heart-cry of a mother who has her child torn from her breast.

"The wretches wish to ruin me."

"To ruin you!" Matifay shrugged his shoulders. "You have your liberty; we do not wish to enrich you."

"You know very well that the doctor and myself are too reasonable to demand point blanc four hundred thousand francs. It would be bad policy and what is worse very imprudent. If the affair is a success we shall denounce it at once, and proclaim our entire ignorance of the business, but that we had an interest in the events that were transpiring here this evening. I am here myself to collect the money on this protested note, and it is understood that the doctor is here professionally. Our pretexts are perfectly plausible, which would not be the case if the public knew that we shared in the inheritance of the countess Helena. Do not fear then that we shall urge the payment of the debt."

"In the name of God! tell me what do you wish? it is the third time that I have asked it."

"Oh——nearly nothing. Acknowledge us as partners in the manufactory for a sum of four hundred thousand francs."

"In our settlement with the doctor we will give him some considerable interests that are no longer important to the place, and as to ourselves," said he, winking to Champion, "with your skill and decision, I venture to say that we shall gain millions."

"Well so be it." said Champion with a submissive sigh, he thought to himself: It will be unfortunate if I do not find occasion to rid myself of them when I find that I no longer have need for them.

"Then you will sign the contract," demanded Matifay, drawing from his pocket two stamped papers. "They are drawn up in proper form and post-dated because you are, as yet, only the heir apparent."

Champion approached the light to read the contract and Matifay studied him thoughtfully.

"The imbecile! he doubts not the time will come when I shall wish that I had returned it to him as the finger of an old glove: "Sign, sign, my good man! Gain the million of the company."

Toinon had put his nose in his glass and abandoned himself to his dreams. He murmured mechanically with his eyes closed with covetousness.

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs!"

CHAPTER V.

THE FOURTH LIGHT.

LET us enter the room that opens upon the garden. It is a vast apartment, all the windows of which, with the exception of one, are strictly closed by inside shutters.

Broad damask curtains, amply garnished, fall before the windows and around the bed.

On the bed lies a woman, who although asleep is evidently slightly agitated. Her fair head reclines softly on the lace pillows. She sleeps, and is doubtlessly charmed by some pleasant dream, for her slightly opened lips ejaculate at intervals the two names of: George!—Octavius! No child could enjoy a more chaste slumber. The regular heaving of her breast causes the silken coverlet to rustle imperceptibly; and her white arm, slightly bent, shows more rose-colored and more transparent on the dark-colored counterpane.

George—Octavius—these two names united in her dream, prove its innocence. She is doubtless talking to the friend she has lost, of him who now runs mortal danger, and some divine vision tells her to hope, for her smile tells the tale.

Yes, it is a smile, a mild and frank smile, that plays upon the pink lips of the Countess Helena. Let us leave her wrapt in a dream that causes her to smile. Her whose eyes, for such a long time, have known naught but tears.

Long ago! This long ago, for poor Helena only dates back some five years, but to her it appears so very long. Long ago she was about her father's house, a laughing child. But that father is now dead. Everybody spoiled the little dear.

Notwithstanding that she was spoiled, nothing had been able to change the candor and goodness of her soul. There was not one spot in that pure soul, that was not pure and unsullied by all sin.

The workmen in her father's factory knew her well.

All who saw her could not withstand a feeling of silent joy. The most savage could not refrain from softening their looks and murmuring a blessing.

One day, a young man, sad in his demeanor, came to the factory. He was scarcely twenty-five years old, but he was so austere and so serious that in appearance he seemed to be more than thirty. During the evening, while seated around the family board, Helena learned from the conversation between her father and the stranger, that the latter came to study the manufacturing process under M. Roumieur.

Young girls are all inquisitive, and Helena was anxious what had caused that fine young man to be so sad. He frightened her at first, but her heart yearned towards him.

Nothing is impossible to those dear importunate creatures, whose very question is a caress, and she soon held possession of Count George's secret. He had left two graves in the land of exile, those of his father and mother: that was the cause of his sadness. Scarcely twenty, he still had to raise himself a name and a fortune; this was why he was so serious. Helena's good little heart filled with compassionate pity, which gradually formed itself into a profound and devoted affection, and still Count George always caused her to feel afraid.

What she experienced was not a fresh young love of sixteen, that swells the breast, adds fire to the gaze and enlivens the smile: no, when she dreamed of her fine George she became serious. Her looks were overcast, and her heart closed as if in presentiment of some misfortune. The young count's austerity wounded her youthful frankness; extinguished the vivid flames of her enthusiasm: before him she could no more be a child. She loved him with the love

borne towards a very severe father; she adored him, but with fear.

Helena was still very young, and she thought that was what people called love.

Six months after George's arrival she felt very happy: on that day she had seen him smile for the first time.

A severe epidemic was raging in the neighborhood, and one of M. Roumieur's best workmen had died, and his wife was about to follow him.

None were left in the sad house where he had lived but a little girl five years old. Helena knocked at the door of her father's study during a private interview that he was holding with George. She trembled with fear, for M. Roumieur had strictly forbidden anybody to interrupt him when at work. With downcast eyes, she told him of the sad misfortune that had befallen the poor creatures, and humbly craved permission to adopt the little Rose.

Her request, in her mind, appeared so exorbitant that she dared scarcely to raise her looks in order to study the effect of her application. When at last she stole a sidelong glance at her father, she discovered tears on his gray eyelashes.

On George's lips played a good and frank smile.

Is it necessary to state that her wish was accorded?

During the afternoon she found herself alone with George for an instant. George took her hand, and murmured:

"How kind you are!"

But at the same time his looks expressed: How beautiful you are!

The day that Helena, the orphan, left her father's house to enter Noirmont-les-Fourneaux, was a bright phase in her bereavement. The old lodge was ornamented for her reception. She looked upon her husband almost as a divine being: when he knitted his dark brow, she trembled with agony: she considered his every wish almost a sacred law.

More and more she thought that such must be love.

But Octavius came, Octavius who resembled his brother, as the unwitting joy of first youth can resembled the indulging serenity of a man who has suffered much. Octavius, as good looking as George, and a mere child like Helena, who, not having known either his father or his mother, had as yet, not been called upon to mourn their loss. He had selected the easy side of life, and left the other to his elder brother.

In her dreams, Helena united the two names of George and Octavius.

Of all those who had loved the poor Countess, who now were left? Her father? dead. George? dead. Octavius? an exile! She felt some indescribable danger pending over her, and over the child she bore. Even her sleep, before so calm, is now troubled by convulsive starts and indistinct murmurings. Suddenly the door turns softly on its hinges, and this slight movement sufficed to interrupt her troubled dream. It did not exactly interrupt the dream, but appeared to materialise it, for the Countess, trembling all over, half raised herself, and her voice, weakened and terrified by fear, scarcely uttered the question:

"Who is there?"

"It is me, madam," replied the soft voice of Rose.

Helena heaved a long sigh of comfort, and, pale with her childish fear, again stretched herself on the white pillows.

"Is it you, Rose? Well then come here, my dear. I don't know how it is that I am so afraid in this dark room; come nearer and do not leave me again."

"But," replied Rose, with coquettish hesitation, "but I am not alone."

"Not alone?"

Helena raised herself on the bed. She was going to call.

"Octavius!"

But the youth was already kneeling close to her, his hand grasping the dear, faded hand that was held out to him.

A brief moment of silence followed. Then Helena regained her speech:

"Octavius! Octavius! Is it really you?"

"Yes, yes, Helena, it is myself."

And both, leaning towards each other, gazed with devouring looks of silent extacy.

The young woman's hand weakened in its pressure. Octavius felt it, as it were, dying within his grasp, and Helena softly withdrew it.

"Ah!" she muttered, "why did you return?"

"Why, Helena? Because the commands of the dying must be obeyed and because a child is about to be born to which I must be father."

"Father!" repeated the Countess with melancholy.

"Yes, and in that my duty, at least, I will not fail. Oh," added he sorrowfully, "I no more pretend to a happiness of which I blush to have had the involuntary thought. Believe me, it is no egotistical thought that brings me back

here. No, the clemency of my brother George, from the other side of the grave, imposes upon us both not to accept it. By accepting, it appears to me that we should be committing something akin to incest. My love, Helena, is quite as an end. Helas! it is dead without having lived! and I have piously consigned it, with my own hands, to the most secret corner of my heart; but, nevertheless, there is still happiness in store for us. We will both live, confiding and tranquil, for the sake of the dear innocent, bequeathed to us by the generous deceased. We will make him a man, great and noble like his father, or a woman, like its mother, chaste and pure. That innocent heart will be the refuge for our love. All our tenderness will be lavished upon him, because he will for ever ignore our struggles. You shall be my wife because George wished it, but you will always remain his widow, and I will be your brother."

Whilst Octavius was thus speaking with all the generous and ardent conviction of a self-exacting devotedness, Helena arose; a fierce blush rushed to her cheeks. Her eyes darted fiery glances. An ineffable smile played on her lips, like a divine butterfly upon a divine flower.

"Yes! yes!" she ejaculated. "So it is, Octavius. Oh! you are really the man that I dreamed you were, such as I loved, such as I now love! Yes, we will remain worthy of him who so loved us. In his name I accept your vow, and if, as I believe, his spirit is there listening to us and reading our hearts, I am sure that it will find nought but purity, worthy of us and worthy of him."

Her hand, but for a moment held as it were in defiance, fell into that of Octavius of its own accord, and when he raised it to his lips to impress an almost holy kiss, she did not withdraw it.

Then when he wished to continue.

"Silence," she cried. "I am happy, it seems that I can now see him contemplating and blessing us. Let me pray."

For fully five minutes no sound invaded the chamber except the solemn silence of prayer, that silence caused by the trembling of lips and the indistinct murmurings that fly heavenward with the flutter of kisses.

Octavius, still kneeling, clasped the Countess Helena's hand between his own. Suddenly he felt her shudder.

The noise of the great door slamming back arose from the yard—The sound of horse's feet was heard on the pavement.

It was Doctor Toinon making his official entry.

At the same moment a discreet knock was heard at the door.

"Who is there?" asked Rose.

"Me, Hercules," responded the voice of Champion.

Octavius arose to open the door.

"You here," ejaculated Champion, "Ah! that is what I feared! Quick, quick! we have not a moment to lose! I don't know by what fatality the police has been informed. The gensdarmes are tracking you. Now, how can we save you?"

He appeared to be quiet in despair, that good fellow Hercules, and tearing his hair out by handfuls, repeated:

"What a fatality! what a fatality!"

"Come, my good Hercules," said Octavius, smiling, "do not make matters so bad for such a trifle. It is not the first time, thank God, that I have escaped from these men, who, after all, only do their duty. Madam saw worse than that in the Vendee, before she allowed herself to be taken when hiding behind the chimney-board at Nantes. Only give me a good horse and I will show you how I will make them run.

"Moreover," added he gravely, addressing himself to Helena, who was sadly frightened, "from to day, henceforth, I have fresh duties devolving upon me. The unfortunate winding up of our prank, relieves me of my old companions, and to-morrow I will send my submission to the King. The King cannot possibly require the death of good citizens, who are not dangerous, and who are rendered innocent by their want of success. Be assured, Helena, I confide you to the care of our only, our best friend. Before a month has passed, I will return, then never more to leave you."

"Go then," said Helena, drawing a long sigh.

However, while telling him to go, she had taken his hand in her turn and held it. Large, silent tears streamed from her eyes, and notwithstanding the confident assertions of the young man, she could not refrain from thinking:

"Ah! if he goes, I shall never see him more."

"Quick," cried Champion, who had run to the window. "The gensdarmes must have been well informed. I think that I can hear the trotting of their horses on the road. In five minutes they will be here."

Octavius, tearing himself away from

Helena's nervous grasp, rushed into the corridor, without turning his head. Could he have the courage to leave, on seeing the poor woman extend her arms towards him, murmuring through her pale lips:

"I shall never see him again!"

Champion had followed him. They came up to each other near to a group occupying the centre of the yard. The Doctor Toinon was giving his orders to the grooms, who had already commenced rubbing his horse down.

"There is what we want!" cried Champion. "Mount that good steed and now, Octavius, for a gallop. Do not take the road. There is no time to muffle the horse's feet, and the noise of his hoofs would betray you. Go across the turf-pits, firstly because the route is shorter, and then the heavily mounted gensdarmes will never think of following you there. In your place I should simply go and hide among the farmers of Trompardiere. They are honest people, who will not denounce you, moreover I have already warned them against all chances. Once in safety, do not show yourself, let your friends act. But to-morrow morning the first thing send the farmer's little boy to remove poor Helena's fears. At the same time he will bring you back news from here."

While uttering these recommendations, one after the other, Champion arranged the bridle and the stirrups, and tried the saddle-girth to see that it was very securely buckled. Octavius leaped lightly into the saddle, and leaning over the pommel in order to shake hands for the last time with his cousin.

"Thanks, Hercules, you are a noble heart, and I go assured, knowing that I leave Helena under your care."

"Stop all compliments," cried Champion. "We have no time to spare. We will do all that can be done here, only think of yourself."

And on a motion of his hand, a manservant ran to open the yard door.

Octavius galloped off.

Toinon, quite stupefied, stood by as in a dream.

"And my horse?" he said at last, when he recovered his speech. "Where have you sent it to? When will it be brought back?"

"It will not be brought back," harshly replied Hercules. "But you will be paid for it, and I only hope that you may sell one as well every day."

Then, as the man returned, after having closed the doors as carefully as he had opened them, he added aloud: "My dear doctor, you will find fire and light in my house; I will go and prepare our poor invalid for your reception."

In Hercules Champion's house, in the same room where we saw him just now discussing his interest with his two honorable associates, Matifay was indulging in an occupation much at variance with his mild and peaceful appearance. He had taken a magnificent double-barrelled gun down from the chimney, and was in the act of withdrawing the charge. When he had succeeded in drawing the small shot and emptying it upon an old newspaper methodically spread upon the floor, he slipped in two bullets and replaced the wadding. Standing at his side was a man, dressed as a workman, the broad brim of his hat bent down over his eyes, who followed the operation with a visible interest. By examining him well, perhaps, he has been recognized as the spy formerly indicated.

When finished, Matifay carefully examined the caps, and handing the weapon to the workman, said:

"You have understood me, Limaille. You have been caught with your head in the bag, my boy, and I suppose it will not take you long to choose. The galleys or fortune."

"Well, well!" grumbled Limaille, "it is no use threatening."

"He will cross the turf pits!" simply added Matifay.

CHAPTER VI.

CURSED LOVE.

As he announced to Doctor Toinon, Champion had returned to Helena's chamber. She awaited him with almost feverish impatience, and he had to twice repeat that Octavius had left, and was probably out of danger. It was not till the second assertion had been made that she consented to take some rest, rendered indispensable by the imminent crisis. When the regular respiration indicated that she slumbered, Champion made signs to Rose to leave the room, without making any noise, and walking on tiptoe, he led her to the door.

"Go and get some hours sleep, my dear girl," said he, "you must be tired. Your mistress will, doubtless, require your services. When the time comes you shall be called. 'Till then I will watch in your place."

On Rose offering some resistance, he softly pushed her out of the room.

Fearing then to re-enter, but evidently uneasy, she remained standing in the passage.

In vain she listened, but no noise could be heard, and reducing her silly fears, she gained her own little room to throw herself on the bed.

For three days she had passed the nights with her mistress. Her devotion had been beyond her force: she felt broken with fatigue, and her pretty head had hardly touched the white pillow before she was sound asleep.

Meanwhile, Hercules, who felt gloomy for the first time during that eventful day, on which he played such a terrible part, had esconced himself in a large arm chair, near the fire-place, his gaze firmly riveted on the fanciful blaze of the log fire, and appeared to ruminate over some evil thought. Thrice he arose and approached the bed, but thrice he let fall the curtain, that his hand had grasped, and each time he returned to his seat more sad and pale.

Ah! all that he done so far was nothing. On his conversation with the Countess depended certain impunity, perhaps that conversation would serve to free him from the annoying complicity of the Doctor and Matifay, and at the point of commencing it, he was afraid.

He feared Helena's open regard, and her indignation after hearing the words that he had to pronounce—her despair and alike her tears.

However, those tears, that despair, and that indignation, had to be faced.

It had to be! For a full half hour Champion convinced himself that "It must be done!"—but he dared not do it.

Then, with a firm step, he advanced to the bed and abruptly raised the bed-curtain. Again he hesitated. Helena slumbered. His hand, already extended to awaken her, fell, and he remained standing, buried in savage contemplation.

What meant that singular look with which he glared at her? Was it love or hatred? Who can tell, probably a mixture of both.

But the formation of an implacable resolution was evident; by love or hatred, that man was bound to go straight to his goal, surmounting all obstacles. That look, at times as full of tenderness as it could be, like that of a cat stretching itself, became at times as clear and cold as the edge of a knife.

Helena moved slightly, and slowly opened her eyes. On discovering those two glaring eyes, as in a vision, bent up on her, she could not withhold a slight scream: but recognizing Champion, she assumed a smile.

"Is it you, Hercules?"

"Helena," replied Champion, in a voice strangled by emotion, "listen to me and weigh well your determination, for it will settle the fate of us all."

"What is the matter, what are you saying?" exclaimed the young woman, now really afraid. "Is Octavius perhaps——"

"It is nothing about Octavius," drily replied Champion, who became cool as he felt the impossibility to withdraw. "But of you and I."

"Of me—of you?"

"Why so many circumlocutions?" exclaimed Champion. "I love you."

"You love me! You!"

Aghast, pale as death, she had retreated to the back of the alcove, stretching her hands in terror before her.

"I love you," repeated Champion, and then adding more calmly, "I come to discuss with you the conditions of our marriage."

"Of our marriage?"

Verily, Champion must be going mad. The Countess was almost inclined to laugh at her first fears. It must be an attack of fear. At all events, Doctor Toinon ought to be at Noirmont. All these various ideas rushed simultaneously like a whirlwind through Helena's brain. Then thinking that she was alone, locked in, with a delirious man, she trembled violently.

"Well—well, my good Hercules," she muttered.

Champion caught her idea and commenced smiling, then, drawing a chair, phlegmatically sat down.

"Now you know the subject of our conversation," he continued, "and I hope when you shall know the motives by which I am driven to take this measure, you will understand the absolute necessity. Do not look at me in that manner, I assure you my mind is sane, and at least on that score you have nothing to fear. I told you, Helena, and I now repeat, that I love you. Oh! silently—you will acknowledge that till now, my passion was timid, respectful and nothing less than importunate. George stood between us, I was silent. Now he is no more; I speak."

Helena, with whom fear now gave place to the profoundest stupefaction,

opened her lips to reply. A gesture from Champion, however, stopped her, and he continued with the same immovable coolness:

"Take good note, I beg of you, that even without speaking of love, this union would be the wisest thing for us both. You are your husband's only heiress, Helena?"

At once the stupefaction marked on the Countess, lips gave way to a smile of inexpressible disdain. She was now quite herself; she thought she understood all.

Champion noticed the smile, but appeared to pay no attention to it.

"The inheritance is not so fine as you think, and ruin is not far distant, unless a firm hand supports the works. Now, and this I assure you, I am the only person who can accomplish this miracle."

"That is!" ironically replied Helena, "you offer me a business arrangement. Why speak to me of your timid love? Is it for the sake of politeness or joking?"

It is all very well to be Hercules Champion, there are certain words which if spoken in a certain manner by a woman, touch the vanity of any man to the quick. Hercules tore the covering of the arm-chair with his nails, but not a muscle of his face stirred, and, in the same tone of voice, he continued:

"Well, then, we will speak no more of my love, and suppose it to be plainly——"

"Cupidity?" whispered the Countess disdainfully.

"Cupidity," repeated Champion, with the same impassibility, "well, then be it cupidity that leads me on. The inheritance of George de Rancogne tempts me. I must have it——This is decided between us. And this is why you are condemned in all necessity to marry me. Yes, you are condemned to it!"

Hercules became animated as he spoke, and intoxicated by the sound of his own voice.

"Ah! you but little know me, if you thought that your repugnance or your feeble will could stop me!

"We have arranged not to speak more of my love, Helena. And still I must return to it, so that, by knowing all that I have done in order to conquer you, you may judge of what I am capable of doing."

"Do you recollect what I was, when I came here for the first time to solicit employment at Noirmont-les-Fourneaux? a poor wretch, in fact, badly clothed, awkward, ridiculous, and above all in want. Everybody suited me excellently, and at once I found myself placed at the head—of your servants. Who obliged you to take me under your roof? Nobody. You also were too generous! I had the right to sit at your table—at the lower end, and to eat the leavings from your plates. As a famished spectator, you allowed me to assist at the display of your luxury. The good-looking Octavius deigned to joke with me. The generous, heroic George, kindly threw whole weight of his affairs upon my humble shoulders. Why pity me? on the contrary I owed you gratitude, and working like an ox during all the day to enrich you, you deemed me too happy in the relief of your feasts and of your insufficient affection. But you see, there are minds badly disposed! that was not enough. I have a good stomach and a splended appetite. I am one of those, who seeing a table well served, want it all, and a piece, however great, will not suit them.

"From the first day of his coming to Noirmont, the little clerk said to himself:

"'I will have Noirmont.'

"As soon as he saw you, Helena, the humble young man said to himself:

"'I will possess that little woman!'

"He repeats it again, madam, and he will have them!"

Struck dumb by agony, supported by her pillow, the young widow listened to this cynical confession.

"This was the object," went on Champion after a brief silence. "These were the means that I employed in order to succeed. To acquire the works as they were then, full of advancement, and already prosperous? That could not be thought of. The dream was too ambitious for my strength; but if I could not raise myself to its level, it appeared to me that by lowering it to my standard, I facilitated the realisation of that dream for the future. Once the plan was conceived, I did everything within the limit of my power to execute it. What an undertaking! Like those insects, armed only with an imperceptible saw, an auger only rendered visible by the microscope, and which, however, aided by this miserable instrument perforate beams, destroy bone, gnaw steel, tumble houses down, I only had patience and my indomitable will at my service. First, I had to conquer George's affection, then his confidence. Then, when his bad health placed me in full power; I made fictitious contracts, found men of straw,

anything. And all without writing or speaking, without compromising myself. Did you ever see me else but smiling? Well, I risked the galleys every day, and I still smiled. But my littleness saved me. My plan had to appear so absurd, that no person would ever think of accusing me, and if any one had thought of doing so, I could have replied: 'What interest have I?' On that score I could have succeeded. George died, without ever suspecting that the bad luck that followed his enterprise was directed by me. And to-day Noirmont-les-Fourneaux is on the eve of bankruptcy, unless the spirit that conceived its ruin, employs the contrary means to save it, to those that he employed to work its fall."

Champion said all this in a calm voice, and with a kind of complacency, like a poet reciting the plan of his drama, and himself applauds the produced effect. He revenged himself for his long silence. He required a spectator to look upon his polypean work. He triumphed in the downfall of the countess. He rejoiced in seeing her convinced of her impotency. Evil, too, has pride. He even appeared to solicit approbation, and his smile of satisfaction appeared to say: "Now, am I not clever?" After a brief interval in the scene of his triumph, he continued: "All that was much, but still it is nothing. To commence with, the price of the works, however deteriorated it had become, was far beyond my means. And if I could have found means to acquire it, the mere purchase would have let some revealing light in upon my past conduct. And that sudden proof of ambition in a being till then so humble, so devoted in appearance to the interests of George de Rancogne, would doubtless have excited not only his suspicions, but also those of others. Now, one of the secrets of my success, was not even to be suspected.

"Therefore I had to become the possessor of Noirmont as the legitimate heir, which could only be done in one manner: through you and by marrying you. The altogether factitious ruin of Noirmont had only one object: to force your consent when you would be free: to place myself in a position to prove to you, as I do to-day, that there was no help beyond me; in fact to tell you, that on one side you have ruin, on the other, fortune. Choose!"

"I have already made a choice," murmured the Countess. But this interruption was not intended to stop Champion, and without appearing to have heard it, he added;

"This denoument, moreover, had the double advantage of satisfying my ambition and my love at one and the same time.

"My love! Just now, Helena, you doubted it, perhaps still you doubt it, and still I swear that it was, that it is, more than ever, sincere and vivid in my heart. Only the first wound has become gangrened, and now it is more akin to hatred. Ah! if you only had willed, if you only had known. There was a moment when you could have saved me, saved yourself, and for that, one look, merely one look, would have sufficed.

"Had I known that you sympathized with my troubles, and that you did not despise me, I should never have conceived the monstrous project that has been brought about this evening. I should have left like the last, I should have gone far away—I know not where—living on that one thought: She had pity on me. But no! haughty woman. You appeared not even to think that I could suffer. Can people of that kind be capable of love? May God help me! I believe that you would have undressed before my eyes, the same as before your chambermaid.

"And I swore that some day I would prove to you that Champion was somebody.

"I was never jealous of Count George. You did not love him, you never loved him: but the other! Ah! when the other was here. You ignore my sufferings by night and my tortures by day. You ignore how often I watched you in the garden, in the great saloon, when you thought you were alone behind the closed blinds; in the wood, everywhere. You did not then doubt that you loved each other, and that I was certain of it.

"That love was your condemnation. I could have resigned myself to not being loved; but to see you love another, was that possible? Till that day I had faithfully served your husband, because when working for him I labored for you. But to work for that other! I revolted against fate and acted well, for I vanquished him! There are passions, the mere essence of which is so noble that they cast a reflection of generosity and heroism even on the vilest crime."

The appeal of the miscreant was so rending and so sincere that Helena was almost moved. Woman's heart is like that of the Divinity, always disposed to pardon those who have loved well.

"If you had loved me," said she to Champion, in a soft, almost plaintive voice, "if you still love me, why impose this torture? Why make yourself the echo of reproaches, that till now have only been murmured by my conscience? Even George avoided them, and he, too, loved me! Go, Hercules, I know well the pain of hopeless love, because, like you, I have known it. Therefore, although you have harmed us much, I forgive you. Let us forget the past, that you should never have recalled, become what you ought always to remain, my friend. If the ruin caused by your manœuvres is irreparable, I will resign myself to it; if it can be remedied, you will help me. You followed up two idle fancies, love and fortune. Love, that is impossible for me to grant you, my heart is lost to love. Fortune, that you may yet conquer, if that be sufficient to console you. By not speaking to me to-day, you would have avoided much pain to us all, for my intention was to confide the management of Noirmont to you, making you a partner in half of the profits. And if you will," she added after a short silence and offering her withered hand, accompanied by a holy smile, "my intention is not changed."

"What!" ejaculated Herculus, rushing forward to grasp her hand, "then you consent?"

But he paused before Helena's haughty look, and recoiled as if stung by a serpent.

"You misunderstand, M. Champion. My husband is dead, and his widow will never change her name for that of a forger and a robber. You really are an apt comedian. You have moved me. I had decided to forget all, to pardon everything. But your mistake proves you to be more vile than I thought, and unworthy of any clemency. Go, carry on your underground work, the Countess de Rancogne prefers misery and ruin to seeing you one moment longer beneath her roof!"

Champion remained standing before her, his head bowed down, his teeth set: beaten. Large drops of perspiration fell from his brow, and in vain he endeavored to speak.

At last he muttered in a dull voice:

"Two years back, Helena, your pity was good. Then was the time, when by force of clemency, to make me your slave. Now it is too late. I am bad, bad, irreparably bad. The love that ought to have purified me has lost me. I have suffered too much, I must be avenged. I have desired too much, and I must have satisfaction. As I said; this conversation will decide the fate of us both. The decision is now already taken. Helena, by good will or by force, you shall be my wife."

"Really!"

"You shall be my wife, because your consent is the only barrier to be overcome—You shall be my wife, because I have gone too far to retract; because you know too much, and can ruin me by a word; because your consent, is not only fortune, but now that I have spoken it is impunity."

"Oh!" cried Helena, "you are a monster!"

"Well, then, you will be a monster's wife. As I told you just now: on one side misery, on the other fortune: choose! and now I tell you: choose, on one side honor, on the other infamy."

"Infamy! To obey your threats, that would be infamy!"

"Infamy," cooly replied Champion, "is the scaffold or the galleys."

"The galleys!—the scaffold! I!"——

"Do they not send poisoners to the scaffold or to the galleys? Within one month, if I wish, you will be accused and convicted of having poisoned your husband, Count George de Rancogne!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT CAN BE SEEN THROUGH A VENETIAN BLIND.

Joseph kneeling on the ground by old Beasson's couch, recites the prayers for the dead. The old man lies there, rigidly stretched under the coverlet, which marks the form of his long, stiffen-limbs.

The dull rattling that bursts at regular intervals from his chest and tears his lungs, is the only indication that a breath of life stills causes the corpse to palpitate.

Joseph is devotedly reading the service for the dead from the little prayer-book given to him by the pretty Rosa. Poor Joseph, his heart is broken, and large tears roll down his cheeks; by losing Beasson, he loses one of the only beings who has ever taken interest in him or shown him any affection.

When old Jeanisson died, who got him placed in Count George's service, who after that, treated him as it were like his child? The good man knew

more than people thought; he could have taught the schoolmaster. He taught Joseph to write, to reckon—that was all his science! Abrupt and savage towards all, to Joseph he always showed himself mild and indulgent, even during his worst attacks of misanthropy.

Joseph recollected all this, and he read the services for the dead, and the silence of the bakery was only broken by the alternate chants of the sacred verses and the rank sighs of the dying man.

The door was noiselessly opened and the dear face of Rose appeared in the dark opening.

The poor little thing was quite overcome, and her breast was moved by hurried sobs.

"Oh! my God! my God!" she cried, letting herself fall upon the large block of wood that served for a chair, "what is there going on to-night at Noirmont!"

"Noireau howled a death-howl in the yard."

Joseph had closed his book, after carefully marking the page.

"For God's sake! what is the matter, Rose?"

"I am," she replied, "that is I am afraid. There is surely some evil afloat, Joseph, just listen how Noireau barks."

"They say that dogs always bark in the house where a christian dies," said Joseph, casting a glance in the direction of the truckle-bed.

"Father Beasson, has had his time," murmured Rose, "but she, so young, so mild, so beloved. Now, look here, Joseph, I have had a horrible dream—can it be a dream? I was lying on my bed, wearing all my clothes, in case madam should require me, when suddenly I heard a scream—Oh! but a scream such as I have never heard before, as piercing as a call, as despairing as a sigh. It appeared to issue from madam's chamber and I arose in all haste and ran there. The door was locked on the inside! Still I was quite sure to have left the key there. I did my best to listen, but I could only catch the sounds of two voices, that of madam and of M. Champion. Madam appeared to be supplicating, the other commanding, than I became afraid and came here."

The fears expressed by Rose coincided too precisely with the sad predictions made by old Beasson, not to strike Joseph.

"There is the garden hedge," he muttered, rendered pensive by that strange coincidence, "by climbing up one might see."

"Yes! yes!" cried Rose, "Go there Joseph, hasten! and from what you see the door can be forced if necessary."

What a violent little lioness Rose became when her mistress had to be defended.

Joseph ran to the door of the bakery, but when on the point of leaving, his hesitating gaze turned towards the truckle on which lay the dying man.

This look appeared to express: "And he!"

Rose had already replied to that mute request, she had kneeled down on the same spot that Joseph had quitted, and opening the little book at the marked page, devoutly bent over, she continued the interrupted psalmody.

"Well, here goes," said Joseph, rushing into the dark yard, "and may God protect us!"

The explanations were still carried on in the room, between the Countess Helena and Champion. The menace by which he thought to overwhelm her, had by its own enormity, left her cold. Accuse her of poisoning, and that committed on George! She, on the contrary, whose devotedness had been notorious, she who had sacrificed all to her duty, even to her love, and she, therefore, only smiled and shrugged her white shoulders.

"You are out of your mind."

"Oh! no, my pretty Countess, in spite of your disdainful airs, the mine is ready, at my first signal it will blow up. It will not be me who will light the fuse. Oh, no, not quite so foolish. On the contrary, I shall defend you. I shall be enraged. I shall be indignant and so effectively that I shall be suspected of being your accomplice. Only, you will understand, that the proofs will be so numerous, that you will be obliged to give in and confess, overcome by their evidence."

"The proofs," she cried, indignantly, "and what proofs? The proofs that I poisoned George? Me! Nonsense. It really seems that I am a prey to some monstrous hallucination, and you talk with such assurance of your proofs, that I am inclined to question whether it is you that is mad, or whether I am going mad."

She had clasped her head between her two hands, and Champion regarded her with a look of pity that was not without a dash of disdain for such weakness, and pride for the effect that he produced.

"We are neither of us mad," replied he, "and you know well that you have to pronounce but one word in order to

break the charm. You ask me what the proofs are that will weigh you down, and I feel myself sufficiently strong not to hesitate in telling you. The labyrinth in which you are caught is too intricate to allow of any escape, my dove. Take your time in telling our conversation of this evening, and nobody will believe you. The indulgent will treat your revelation as a trait of romantic imagination. Others, and by far the most numerous, will accuse you of black ingratitude. Because, note well, that I shall be one of the few, mind you, who will appear to labor despairingly to save you. By the faith of a cousin, I will be the last to abandon you."

"Yes—yes—you will keep up your hypocrisy to the last. It is not necessary for you to boast any more of it, and now that I know you, I can fully believe you. But the proofs, the proofs."

"The easiest to produce is the proof that Count George de Rancogne was poisoned. The more so because George de Rancogne was really poisoned."

"By whom, by you?"

"It is for justice to declare that fact. However, who profits by the crime? To you, the heiress, to you, whom that death unites to your lover. What does Hercules Champion gain by it? Nothing. He only loses his employment, that is all."

"But every body is aware of the love I have towards my husband, the devotedness."

"Let us talk about that devotedness. What will become of it, when it is proved, I shall say *proved*, that you betrayed Count George under his very roof, with his own brother; that the day after his death that brother braved the dangers of being exiled in order to return here and renew his adulterous vows! Deadly guilty woman, what pity can you expect from your judges, when it shall be proved ten times over, twenty times, aye, one hundred times proved that, under your mask of angelic virtue, you hid both the unabashed lover and the poisoner-wife.

"Those are the moral proofs; let us turn to the physical proofs, as numerous but more overwhelming.

"You alone nursed your husband during his illness. Besides yourself and your servant, Rose, as blind as faith, no person approached his bed, and that husband has been poisoned! The chemists will declare so, and the poison will be found everywhere: in the powdered sugar that you sweetened his drink with, in your most particular and private places, even to the hems of your dresses. You stop me? That poison, where did you get it? I will tell you."

The Countess Helena, overcome, dumb with agony, listened:

"That poison you took out of the laboratory of the works, one day when you went there to attend to Francis Lamaille, whose finger had been smashed by a hammer. That Francis Lamaille saw you empty the half of a packet of white powder, into a box that he will minutely describe, and which he could not have seen but under those circumstances, and the packet as well as the box can be reproduced. Do you call those proofs? Do you require any others? Some months after I wished to discharge that man, Francis Lamaille, for some ill conduct. At your request I allowed him to remain. You only interceded for him on one account; that he promised not to mention anything about the white powder."

"An odious falsehood!"

"Which he will affirm. In case of need he will affirm it on oath, and I will state with indignation that the same Francis is a bad workman, intractable; that he is a mean scoundrel for calumniating you, and that, but for your warm prayers on his behalf, he should never have remained a week at Noirmont. You ask for proofs, I imagine there are some. Proofs? but they surround you on all sides, unfortunate woman. By every moment they have become denser, and ultimately their very logic will completely stifle you. The very people who will endeavor to justify you, and I am one, will only tend to aggravate the accusation. The facts are so arranged that those who defend you, will fatally become your most terrible enemies. Now, look here, Rose loves you and is convinced of your innocence. Will she endeavor to deny your liason with Octavius? She will do so in a clumsy manner; they will soon see that she is not telling the exact truth. Will she confine herself to plain statements of the exact truth? And as her attachment to you is well known, it will always be believed that she extenuates. In her endeavors to establish your innocent relations with your brother-in-law, she will prove your adultery."

"But the doctor, the doctor who attended George during the whole time of his illness, he well knows that I did not poison George—he knows well that I am innocent."

"That is true, I forgot the doctor.

Yes, the doctor knows that you did not poison George—for the doctor knows all. He, too, will be among your defenders, like myself. He even will go farther, he will positively deny the presence of all poison, and his learned colleagues of Paris, called upon to support the accusation, will call him an old fool. That is what you will gain."

This was more than the poor woman could support. At last she saw her position in all its terrible reality. Her innocence, that she was prepared to proclaim in spite of the most monstrous torture, but here, proofs were wanted, not protestations. Moreover, all presumptions, all proofs, arranged with an infernal premeditation, were against her. Then, no longer having strength to continue the struggle, she softly sank upon the pillows and burst into tears.

For some time Hercules Champion contemplated those tears so gently falling, and appeared touched with pity, then in a voice as bitter as he could assume:

"Helena, you now know the terrible arms that I possess. Is it necessary to state that I shall only use them at the last extremity? If you had not forced me by your obstinate insolence, you should never even have known them."

She gazed upon him with a wild stare, and appeared not to wonder about his meaning. Encouraged by her silence, he continued with warmth:

"I have made you fathom the depth of the abyss. You now know how dangerous it becomes not to join in my plans. In the name of your own happiness, do not keep up a struggle, in which you inevitably must break down. Give me the assurance of silence that I ask for, and the conversation of this evening shall remain but a dream, lost to memory on awakening."

While speaking he had drawn nearer and endeavored to grasp the Countess' drooping hand; but on feeling the contact, she drew back as if stung, and rendered beautiful by indignation and disgust combined.

"Enough of insults," she said. "Finish your work, miscreant. After killing the husband you can dishonor the wife, and kill her by the hand of the executioner, but spare her your pity and hypocritical lamentations. I desire nothing, not even that pardon that you so generously and nobly offer me. Only to let you hear my words, which you will often hear repeated in your dreams — 'Thief! poisoner! murderer!'"

And as he endeavored to silence her, she screamed to his face:

"Murderer!"

Then he lost his self-control. Mad with fury, foaming at the mouth, he threw himself upon her. Helena, hoping that he intended killing her, kept screaming:

"Murderer! Murderer!"

Suddenly the voice died away in her throat, her eyes, fearfully distended, became fixed, her arm as rigid as that of a statue, pointed towards the window, she drew a heavy breath of relief. Champion heard a murmur, rather than a voice, whispering through her lips: "Ah! we have been heard! We have been seen! I am saved!" And once more mustering all her force to keep him off, she fainted. Hercules turned round quickly, and covered with an icy perspiration, hurried to the window. He thought that he saw two glaring eyes shining through the glass. He opened the window, leaned out, looked along the dark foundations of the wall, but in vain, he could discover no one. Not a sound, only the regular dropping of the rain, which now commenced falling, and the last murmurings of the distant squall.

He closed the window, and, sad, his head bent forward, his hands nervously clasped together, he slowly walked past the bed, on which lay the fainting Countess.

"You willed it so, Helena," he muttered, then in a low voice, wiping his forehead with his sleeve, he repeated to himself: "Murderer!"

As soon as he saw the window closed, Joseph clambered out of the thick foliage, where he had hastily hidden himself. He, too, was pale, and still he had only seen the last gesture made by the countess, and had heard but the one word: "Murder!"

Joseph was a brave boy. Before he had reached the end of the path he stopped, retraced his steps, once more he climbed up the fence, and resolved, on the first gesture or cry, to break through the pane of glass with his fist, to force open the window and jump into the middle of the room, calling out:

"Ah! who has been murdered here?"

On once more reaching his post of observation, he could see nothing in the now silent room, but the Countess lying white as marble among the folds of the counterpane.

Hercules Champion had left.

If Joseph was brave, he was prudent. He soon understood that Champion had

left, doubtless to examine outside, what he could not discover from the inside.

If discovered by him in openly spying his actions he was lost. He could already hear the manager's soft tread, in the outside of the building below.

Joseph soon made up his mind; he pressed his head against the glass, resolved to break it if necessary.

By good luck, in his flurry, Champion had not fastened the window and it gave way at the first push. Joseph seized the sill with both hands, pulled himself up with a vigorous spring, and from there jumped into the middle of the apartment. Then he closed the window and waited. Soon he saw a door open on the ground floor and a man go out with a lamp in his hand, then followed another: Champion and Matifay.

Both appeared to be inspecting some steps on the sand covering the path, then as if their search had proved useless, they went in the direction of the pond, and the glare of the lamp disappeared behind the corner of the factory.

Joseph, then, on tip-toe, went across the room to reach the door. He had already grasped the handle and was about to turn it, when a long sigh arrested his attention.

Helena was sitting up in the bed and painfully called for help.

"Do not fear, madam, and do not call," said Joseph, "it is me, Joseph."

"Is it you!" cried the Countess, "ah! heaven has sent you! Save me! save us, go and join Octavius; run! tell him that an infamous trap has been laid for us, that he must not hide himself, that he must come openly and before all defend his brother's widow, defend his wife and her child."

"If we are alive to-morrow, madam," replied Joseph in a firm tone, "Octavius will be with you."

"Oh! yes! you are a brave heart! but quickly! Who knows but it is already too late? They are monsters, do you see, who are capable of doing anything. They have poisoned my poor George and now say that it is I who did it. I have no time to tell you all—Oh! but this fabrication must be crushed, when Octavius and myself, hand in hand, tell them: you lied! The judge will soon see whose looks will be bent downwards, whose brow will become pale and whose voice will waver. Go! go! Joseph, and be blessed."

She reached him her hand, which he grasped to press it to his lips, but she quietly withdrew it.

"Poor child: you are perhaps going to die for us to-night, perhaps I shall never more see Octavius. At least take him a souvenir from me," and softly drawing him to her she impressed a kiss upon his brow.

"Go now, Joseph, and if you can come up with him, tell him to take this death-kiss from the same spot. That will be the first."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TURF PITS OF NOIRMONT.

FIVE minutes after, Joseph was in the bakery buckling on long gaiters over his trowsers and telling Rose what he had seen and heard.

Beasson's death-rattle had nearly died out and dwindled to an almost imperceptible breathing. It would doubtless soon return more stifling than ever when his last agony would come over him.

Suddenly from the silence of the chamber, broken only by the whisperings of the two children, arose a tearing murmur, a plaint of powerless agony which soon became more distinct, and was transformed into a curious and mournful chant:

"Knight where goest thou so wild?
Some one waits thee. It is Death!"

Rose and Joseph lifted their fair heads.

"It is the old mad dreaming," said Joseph.

"They say that the dreams of the dying reveal the future," replied Rose, trembling.

The voice was silent.

"You must watch carefully, Rose," said Joseph. "Madam has only you who loves her, in the house, and who knows what they will attempt before I can join M. Octavius?"

Again the chant resounded; but now in a stronger tone and impressed with intense terror.

"Where dost thou go so hastily?
Death waits thee on the pond!"

"That is like an answer to what you have just said!" cried Rose. "It seems that M. Octavius has gone across the turf pits."

And as if fate would confirm the girl's exclamation, the chant immediately continued:

"Death waits to lure you to the pond,
Among the turf pits of Noirmont!"

"Oh! I am frightened! I am so frightened!" said Rose, huddling herself close to Joseph. "The dying are gifted with double sight, now I tell you!"

Joseph did not reply, but he too felt a chill creep into his very heart.

The withered members of Beasson now moved convulsively under the thin covering: it seemed that in his dream he was struggling for life or death with some invisible phantom. "Ah! ah!" he sobbed with a painful effort:

"Urge thy noble steed, turn tail,
For death awaits thee in Apreval!"

Her hair standing on end, her skin moist with fear, Rose rushed to the bed, in order to put a stop to that fearful dream, but the grating chant continued to resound throughout the apartment:

"All is broken, the bit and the rein.
The life-cord of Rancogne is snapped in twain!"

Beasson had risen, his face was livid, the pupils of his eyes dilated, his eyes still full of some horrible vision, then all was over, his limbs were stretched, and he fell back, his full length on the truckle bed.

Noireau was howling in the dark yard, still more lamentably than ever.

Rose had drawn nearer and, still trembling, leant on Joseph's shoulder. The two formed a frightened and striking group in the midst of that scene of terror and mourning.

"He has passed away!" murmured the young girl.

"No," replied Joseph, "but he soon will. Poor Beasson! he died to love me!"

He wiped his moist eyes on the back of his hand and continued in a serious voice:

"Rose, in the life of a Christian, there are hours that count for years. This poor fellow is dead, Rancogne has only two friends left, you and I. Till this morning I was but a child, but I feel that, before dying, he has inspired me with the courage and resolution of a man. My dear girl, we are very feeble and the others are very strong. By the help of God and our courage I hope, however, that we can save M. Octavius and madam."

He softly shook off the timid Rose, approached the truckle-bed and bending down piously kissed Beasson's forehead. But when he was on the point of rising a dry, convulsive hand grasped him. The old man stared at him with his large fixed eyes and in vain endeavored to utter a few words; then, with a painful gesture he indicated his pillow. Joseph lifted it, and the invalid nodded his head as if to say: That is it. From beneath it Joseph withdrew a belt, containing some dozen gold pieces. This he laid upon the bed. The old man's eye however showed such proofs of anger that he at once picked it up again.

"What do you want me to do with it, Father Beasson?" Beasson tried to reply, but his voice was lost in a confused mumbling.

"Is it for him?" asked Rose.

"Yes, yes, yes," nodded the old man.

And as Joseph still hesitated to buckle the belt around his waist, Beasson yelled out with such forced energy that he was obliged to comply at once. Still he did not leave go of Joseph's hand. Rose saw clearly that he wanted to communicate something, but could not.

"Is there anything else you require, Father Beasson?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"Some masses for your soul?"

The head nodded again slightly, but soon shook from side to side plainly indicating that he wanted something more.

Now Joseph thought he understood him.

"The treasure?" he asked.

Then Beasson moved his head furiously up and down, but his hand nervously clung to the young man's dress.

"Do not fear, Father Beasson, I will go."

"Yes," nodded the head.

"I will go before eight days are past," continued Joseph.

"No! no! no!"

"Must I go sooner? to-morrow? to-day?"

At the last word the old man nodded his head affirmatively and his eyes, to which the dying man's last spark of life had fled, seemed to say:

"If you do not go at once I shall curse you."

Joseph so well understood the glance from those sunken eyes, that he solemnly stretched his hand towards the figure of the Saviour.

"As true as I am a Christian," said he, "as soon as I have joined M. Octavius, without delay or rest, I will leave, and to-morrow, before sun-rise, I will be on the road to Rancogne."

Then those eyes, till now so full of anger and authority, assumed such a look of mildness, that Joseph knew it meant a blessing, and then Beasson let go his coat, as if to say:

"Now it is time to commence your work."

Joseph went out into the yard quietly, and gliding noislessly along the walls, hurried at his greatest speed towards the corner where he was accustomed to climb over. Warned by his experience of that same night, he took the minutest precautions, in order not to be seen, but Champion and Matifay, too, were on their guard. They had found traces of steps in the garden, too evident to allow of any doubt but that some one had been watching Champion, and, perhaps, overheard his compromising confession. That unexpected personage in their drama, seriously complicated their plan of action: he must be found at any cost, and his discretion ensured.

He was not hidden in the garden, that was very sure. The deep footmarks on the borders and on the paths proved that. They could not account for the. to them, fantastic disappearance, but whatever road he had chosen, he could only have gone by the pond or by the yard.

By way of the pond was hardly probable, the boat was still moored to its stake, and at this hour guarded by Doctor Toinon.

Then it must be by the yard.

All the gates were closed, therefore the spy must be hidden somewhere, under a bush or in some of the out offices; to search the out-buildings was out of the question. Besides the noise of such a search, at such an hour, would soon become a game of hide-and-seek, and the intruder would have every advantage. Matifay, who had plenty of good sense, proposed another plan.

"Our spy," said he, belongs to the house, and then to-morrow he will let on and we shall drop upon him without any trouble. If, on the contrary, he is from the outside, he must now be in a hurry to escape, and it is impossible that we can miss seeing him."

He carefully closed all the doors communicating between the yard and the gardens. Champion stood sentinel at the garden gate, the doctor took charge of the boat, and Matifay kept an eye upon the yard. In the meantime, Joseph and Rose were witnesses to the scene in the bakery, which has just been described.

Matifay was at his post when the youth left the death chamber, and he clearly saw him climb the wall, and clear the summit.

"The deuce," said he, "that is a nimble lad, I could not follow him over that road. But we must know where he is going to, and what he is going to do."

Matifay soon made up his mind. He ran as quick as he could to the nearest door, but on passing he unloosed Noireau, holding him by the rope. He had reflected, that while he ran round the building, the fugitive could get away, ten times over. He reckoned on the dog's scenting the track. Here again he was right. On arriving at the outer side of the wall, he could discover nobody. But Noireau commenced jumping about with joy as soon as he had scented the traces left by the climber, in the soft earth, and he threatened to break the cord.

"Ah! ah!" murmured Matifay, with an air of satisfaction, "so our game is an acquaintance of yours, friend Noireau."

And he obeyed the dog's impulse, at the same time nursing the stocks of two pistols that he had carried in his coat pocket.

The man-hunt had now commenced.

Immediately on leaving the yard, Joseph took to his heels, clearing ditches, and hedges, climbing over bogs, and ran with all his might in the direction of the road to Limoges. The night was dark, but he knew the ins and outs of the ground too well to make any mistake. The hidden pools of water into which he often sank to the knees, did not in any manner stop his vigorous course. Moreover, now that he was alone in that night and silence, he felt influenced by the impression of a feverish anxiety. The prophetic chant of Beasson recurred to his memory. He again heard it sounding in his ears, every minute seemed as years to him, each vibration in the leafless branches in the wind, seemed to him to be a cry of distress from the distant horizon. He ran on, ran on madly, and from time to time stopped to wipe the perspiration from his brow, he clasped his hands nervously towards heaven, and murmured:

"If I only do not arrive too late."

"Where? this he did not know. What to do? this he neither knew. What kind of danger threatened Octavius? Of this he had not the slightest idea, than what he inferred from the mournful song of Beasson.

"Death waits to lure you to the pond
Among the turf pits of Noirmont!"

That was enough. Rendered feverish by his rapid course, and by the terrors of that dreadful night, Joseph now thought like little Rose:

"The dying are gifted with double sight."

Once or twice during the rapid moments of stoppage in his wayward flight, Joseph thought he heard the sound of hard breathing and hurried steps, but to this he paid no attention, what could that matter, at the moment when Octavius, lost among the turf pits of Noirmont, was dying a horrible death.

And then, quicker than ever, they passed through ploughed fields, through grass and woods.

At last a deep sigh of ease escaped from his breast.

He was there: on the other side of the last hedge was the road, on the other side of the road were the turf pits.

But in the act of clearing it, he stopped, and huddled down silently among the branches.

The measured tread of two horses was heard on the road, accompanied by the jingling of swords on the brass mountings of the saddles.

They were the gensdarmes.

They were only two, the brigadier and one soldier. They were walking up the road and chatting.

"By my faith," said the brigadier, "he has escaped us, and I am not at all sorry. After all, that Cavalier Rancogne is a brave lad. And I should prefer that some one else but me, would undertake the nasty job of arresting him."

"In my opinion," replied the other, "he would have done better to allow himself to be arrested. He would have been let off with a promise not to commence any more; and the turf pits will perhaps prove less generous than the King's prosecutor."

"Yes," replied the brigadier, "on a night like this it is easy enough to get among them, but God only knows how a body is to get out again;" and then he added, philosophically:

"The canteen is far off, the weather is devilish bad. Let us go to bed."

The gensdarmes put the spurs to their horses, the swords clattered more violently against the saddles, and the sound of the horses, fast galloping up the hill, was soon lost in the distance.

"Oh!" thought Joseph, "Father Beasson was right; he is sure to have gone by the turf pits."

Now sure of his goal, the courageous boy prepared to jump into the road, when a hot breath touched his neck; he felt a warm tongue licking his face and hands, and he discovered in the dark a dark form playing around him.

"Noireau!" he muttered, astonished. Then feeling the dog's neck, he said to himself: "He must have broken his cord!"

He undid the cord and put it into his pocket. "Well, after all, perhaps it is for the best. At night animals have more sense than Christians; he can beat me in finding the paths among the turf pits."

The dog uttered a low growl.

"Silence! Noireau, my old fellow," quietly muttered Joseph, "the very hedges seem to have ears to-night."

A few paces only from the group formed by Joseph and the dog, a voice exclaimed with great precaution.

"Noireau, Noireau, here, sir! Where can that deuced dog have gone to."

"Ah! ah!" thought Joseph, quietly, patting the dog's head, "so they were hunting me, my poor fellow!"

"Here! here!" repeated the voice of Matifay.

"Now then, Noireau!" whispered Joseph, in an under-tone, "we must escape, my boy; and, above all, don't make a noise."

He commenced creeping along the hedge, and the intelligent animal, holding its breath, as if fully understanding the drift, crept close to him, whilst Matifay kept impatiently calling from the other side:

"Here! here, Noireau!"

Noiselessly creeping over the wet grass, like serpents, the man and dog came opposite to the entrance to the turf pits. To cross over it was necessary to come in sight—Joseph did not hesitate.

"Houp! Noireau, my good dog!" said he, "lively now. Once yonder! the devil himself would not dare to follow us."

As quick as lightning he jumped into the road, and clearing the embankment on the other side rushed into the bog.

Matifay, stupified, standing in the middle of the road, saw the youth and the dog pass him like a whirlwind. At first he attempted to follow them, but on seeing them enter the turf pits he held back. He took out his pistol and aimed at Joseph, but at the moment of firing the wind wafted the retiring steps of the horses, and Matifay returned the pistol to his pocket. The gensdarmes were not sufficiently far to prevent them hearing the report, and in a moment they could have been upon him.

Joseph first thought of attacking Matifay to call for help—but then he recollected that he would have to explain matters to the brigadier, perhaps taken be-

fore the magistrate, and in the meantime what would become of Octavius?

That is why he preferred risking the daring expedient that had so well served him.

Now, he was sure that Matifay would not dare to venture upon such dangerous ground, which was even dangerous for Joseph, although he knew every lump and hole. When beyond pistol-shot, the brave boy stopped and quietly commenced his desperate journey.

Here and there huge masses and weird clumps of willows interrupted the regular surface of the grayish green plain of the bog. For want of a better, Josepn cut off the stem of one of the willow trees to use as a stick.

Then stooping down, he collected all the reeds around him and tied them in bundles with slips of bark to his knees. Noireau, seated on his haunches, quietly assisted these necessary preparations.

When all was ready, he rushed off in front, as if he guessed that he had to act as his master's guide.

Before following the dog, Joseph cast a last look towards the road. Matifay had already left. Ten minutes ago he had given up all idea of following Joseph across the turf pits, and skirting the boundary of the bog, he rapidly made off.

The defection of Noireau, was a certain proof to him who was the mysterious spy whom he had so insatiably pursued all the evening.

The spy could be no other than Joseph. Matifay had no doubt, on that point, and if, in such weather, Joseph ventured to cross the turf pits it must be to warn Octavius of the risk menacing the Countess Helena, the same danger that threatened himself.

Octavius once warned, would ruin all Matifay's hopes, it was a loss to him and his two accomplices. Octavius must perish, at all risks; well Joseph must perish with him; and Matifay hurried on as fast as his short legs would carry him.

He calculated that, owing to the difficulties of the path across the turf pits, he could by making an enormous circuit, arrive half an hour before Joseph, and at least ten minutes before the horseman.

Francis Limaille once told that there were two victims doomed in lieu of one all would be right.

Nevertheless, rendered pensive by the ease with which he had got rid of Matifay's pursuit, Joseph shook his head mournfully and in a low tone repeated:

"The dying are gifted with double sight:

"Urge thy noble steed, turn tail,
For death awaits thee in Apreval!"

CHAPTER IX.

NOIREAU'S LAST HOWL.

THE turf pits of Noirmont, cover the entire surface of a long triangular valley, surrounded on all sides by high hills covered with wood. The right side of the triangle is formed by the hills of Trompardiere, the two others by those of Noirmont, bounded half way by the high road. The valley appears formerly to have been the bed of a pond, communicating with that of Noirmont in front and behind with that of Apreval. Now it is a desolate plain, covered with curious grass, nearly gray, here and there made green by bunches of diminutive reeds, osiers and lumps of ricketty willows. Those turf pits, even now but little explored, were not worked at all at the period of this narrative. Wood was far too plentiful, so that even the poorest were not forced to have recourse to the poor substitute of turf as fuel. The valley, half bog, half pasture land, served to feed all the cattle of the surrounding country.

In fine weather, after the long droughts of August, the whole could be walked over with impunity, with the exception of certain parts on the north point, that is Apreval. But in the heart of winter, and more especially after the heavy rains of November and March, it was very imprudent, even to take the most accessible paths, and utter folly to attempt any others. Everywhere the spongy soil gave way under the pressure of the foot, leaving a deep hole that rapidly filled with clear water. But soon the traces disappeared. The thin crust formed by interlaced roots, then float like cork, and not a single outward sign, on the even surface, indicates a sufficiently firm spot to support the weight of a human body.

In order to cross that plain, so innocent in its appearance, it requires more than care, only instinct can effect it. The mere pressure of the foot must tell what pressure it can bear, the mere imperceptible shade of the grass must tell the solidity of the soil underneath, every bunch of reeds must be used to account, in fact an unceasing lookout must be kept up; because the very spot that has

been walked over in the morning, may at night become, without any outward sign, a deadly trap.

Animals are naturally gifted with an instinct by which they can easier discover perils than man. It is quite miraculous to see the small native horses leaping fearlessly from mound to mound, to all appearance utterly careless, and safely passing over this ocean of mire.

It was equally marvellous to see Noireau trotting on before his master, tail erect, as quietly as if he were on the high road. Only at intervals he would take a sharp turn; then Joseph muttered: "Thanks, Noireau!"

Noireau thus more than once saved Joseph's life.

Now, the Knight of Rancogne scarcely knowing the plan, of this valley, full of pits, had taken the longest crossing, and when Joseph commenced to follow him, he had hardly gone over one third. He, too, trusted to his horse's sagacity, and had acted wisely; otherwise he had long ere that fulfilled the sad predictions of old Beasson. By way of the turf pits the distance from the road to Apreval is scarcely two miles. But the weight of the horseman hindered his steed, which was obliged to stop at every twenty paces for breath. Dripping with perspiration, foaming at the mouth, it stood on its outstretched legs to prevent its sinking to the girths. Then Octavius descended, and encouraging it by his voice and caresses, waited until it had gained its breath. Five or six times during those forced halts, he fancied that he heard a distant voice calling him.

But then how could it be likely that anybody should call him at that hour and in such a place? Each time he thought he must be deceived and continued his way.

That voice was Joseph's. If Octavius had listened to that voice he would have been saved.

"Turn your horse's head!"

The sky was dark. The last rain clouds were fleeing rapidly, carried southward by the gale, and under the darkened glare of the sky the plain appeared immense, even and grey. Those heavy dull objects, on the horizon, were the hills of Apreval; that bright strip like a blade of steel, was the pond or ditch.

A few more minutes of courage and patience, and the horseman was saved!

This he repeated to himself and to his brave steed, as if it could understand him; the animal, as if really comprehending, hastened on, putting its shoulders to the work, picking its steps impatiently and snorting the foam from its nostrils.

"Ah! turn your horse's head?"

Joseph felt that danger was at hand, and vainly called to Octavius, who did not heed him. At that moment they were not far apart; but the wind blew strong enough to tear up the trees, and the sound of the voice was carried away with the clouds.

A few moments later Joseph perceived a dark form about five hundred paces right in front of him, that stood out boldly against the dark embankment, and was gesticulating wildly. Then he threw his whole soul in a last cry:

"Turn your horse's head!"

That cry reached Octavius, who stopped and listened. But in front of him he saw a bright glare: he only had time to check the reins and make his horse swerve with a snort of pain. A report resounded, echoed by the surrounding hills, and the steed fell over backward with its rider.

"All is broken the bit and the rein,
The life cord of Rancogne is snapped in twain!"

Forgetting all prudence, Joseph rushed on, followed by Noireau. He could only discover a confused mass, struggling on the surface, into which it was perceptibly sinking. The motion given to the mire made it ripple under Joseph's feet and it was not only dangerous to proceed but impossible.

He however tried, but had to relinquish the attempt and stopped.

That stoppage doubly saved his life.

On the embankment stood Matifay, pointing him out to Francis Limaille, who was taking aim, but Joseph was beyond range and Limaille thought better not to fire.

Noireau, poor beast, had left Joseph's side, lighter in weight and more active than his master, he had advanced to the spot where the Knight of Rancogne was disappearing, and was tugging desperately at a corner of the cloak that floated on the surface. Whether Matifay and Limaille feared that the dog would succeed in saving the horseman, or whether they feared that he would secure some convicting proof, is a mystery.

Matifay growled out: "Kill the dog!"

A second report was heard, moaning across the hills, and Noireau, mortally wounded, let go his hold, and, raising his head towards heaven, gave a long howl—the last.

At that moment, the Countess Helena, safely delivered, pressed her little child

to her breast. The poor mother almost forgot the atrocious events of that evening. In kissing her child, she felt her confidence in God returning with hope for the future. Moreover, was not Rose at her side, telling her that Joseph was gone, that Joseph had sworn to bring back Octavius, and he was capable of performing what he had sworn to. What could they, what dare they, do against her, when Octavius was there? He accused, she would in turn become the accuser; the victim would become the avenger.

Champion entered.

To the Countess his presence was odious.

But at that moment she felt herself so perfectly calm, so completely reassured, that she did not even fear; and still Champion was very pale, very downcast.

Champion made a sign for Rose to leave the room.

She hesitatingly rose.

"Do not leave the room, Rose," said the Countess.

Rose only withdrew a few paces and remained standing in the embrasure of the window.

"Helena," said Champion, in a low voice, "Once more I pity you. Once more I come to implore you to save yourself."

Helena assumed a beautiful smile of disdain and pride.

"M. Champion, it is I who have pity on you. It is I who would pray you, for your own sake, to renounce your miserable plans, if it is at all possible to save you. Accuse me, somebody will be there to defend me, and your accusation will be the signal for your own conviction."

Champion turned pale.

At the moment of committing their crime, criminals are haunted, and pass through a sharp phase of madness. For two hours that he had soliloquized within himself, he had been seized with an idea of fear; a strange, impossible, absurd idea, but he could not shake it off. By announcing this mysterious avenger, that *somebody* who would know how to defend her, Helena had awakened this idea.

His idea was, that Octavius had not left the chateau, that he had heard his whole confession, that he had watched him through the window.

But he had accompanied him to the yard, he had himself helped him on to his horse, he had seen the great gate close behind him; he felt materially certain that since then the knight could not have returned to Noirmont. It was all very well to repeat this, but the idea still obstinately clung to him.

Perhaps it was another form of remorse.

Rose uttered a low scream.

"Did you hear?"

After a lapse of a few minutes, a second dull, distant report resounded. Hercules' face brightened, his breast heaved, as if a weight of a thousand pounds had been removed, and turning towards Helena, he only replied in these words:

"Octavius de Rancogne is dead!"

Noireau uttered his last howl, and in the hut, Beasson breathed his last sIgh. This sigh was like an echo of the words pronounced at the commencement by Champion.

"Rancogne is dead!"

Day was breaking, and threw a glare over the landscape, that assumed alternately the hues of violet, lilac and rose color. A heavy mist hung over the turf pits, but through that veil of fog, Joseph could discern the figures of Matifay and Limaille on the slope of the road, in the same manner as they could see him standing motionless.

Standing upright and motionless, he remained, until the last ripple of the mire had died away. Then only, feeling that he could render no help to the Knight, he thought of returning.

His situation was serious. There could be no doubt but the two assassins desired to make both the witnesses of their crime disappear. How to escape them until daylight.

To return by the road that he had come by? That was out of the question. Besides that path was too long, then would that not be throwing himself into the hands of his enemies?

Joseph was convinced that they would watch the only accessible outlets from the turf pits, and would not allow him to pass.

There was only one resource left: reach the hills of Trompardiere in all haste, the steep, wooded sides of which would render all pursuit difficult, if not impossible. But to reach those hills he had to cross the most dangerous part of the marsh; it is true that it was not very broad, but impregnated with the filterings from the pond of Apreval, in fact a pit of mire, that even the summer heats could not even render solid.

The plans of Matifay and Limaille were simple enough, and they thought they were sure of their prey.

The only practicable access to the turf pits was from the road. Joseph could not attempt to get out without one of them being ready to seize him. Neither of them had dreamed of the perilous route, on which the brave boy had made up his mind to venture. He, however, commenced his daring feat. Alas! at once he became aware of its impracticability. If he had not violently thrown himself backward, he would have been swallowed up on the third step.

Limaille and Matifay gazed upon him as he made for the edge.

"Let him go! let him go," said Limaille, laughing, "he will save us work; you will see him drown without any assistance!"

All at once to the great surprise of the two accomplices, Joseph bent his steps rapidly northward, towards the pond, and disappeared in the mist.

"Where the deuce is he going?" muttered Matifay, puzzled and pensive at a manœuvre that he could not understand.

A new plan had suggested itself to Joseph's inventive mind.

At one moment, rendered desperate at his failure, he had almost made up his mind to make straight for his foes, and perish on the same spot where his master had fallen. But suddenly he thought of another expedient, that, perhaps, would enable him to cross the turf pits.

The pond of Apreval, is daily receding before the encroachment of the marsh. The spot where Joseph now stood, was, thanks to the mist, beyond the sight of his two guards, and was formerly the bank of the pond.

Many years ago, hidden among the tufts of reeds and plants, lay a barge, abandoned to rot in the mud. Joseph had recollected this barge, and tried to tear off the loosened planks.

Soon, Matifay, who was rendered uneasy at his long absence, saw him return, holding one of those planks in each hand. Picking a spot that appeared more solid, and putting down a plank, he carefully advanced on his frail bridge. On reaching the end, Joseph put down the second and drew up the first. Thanks to this arrangement, which he successfully repeated some twenty times, there was no doubt of his reaching the other side.

As for Joseph, he was already climb the steep sides of the Trompardiere hills. On reaching the top. he made a slight diversion to the left, and went on through the underwood, till he reached the farm where Octavius was to hide himself.

Matifay uttered a scream of rage, and made a spring in pursuit of Joseph, but he halted on the edge of the turf pits; a cold sweat seized him, when he recollected, that to reach Joseph, he must pass over the spot where the knight of Rancogne had sank. He feared that the dead man would drag him down.

As for Limaille, he had seized the pistols, with a fearful oath, and running along the bank, commenced rounding the pond of Apreval. Even if he hurried it would take him full twenty minutes. Perhaps he could still get there in time to stop Joseph.

"Go on, go on, my boy," cried Matifay. "If you get him your fortune is made."

"Oh, never fear," replied Limaille. "You are not the only one who wants to keep his head upon his shoulders!"

Then Matifay threw the gun over his shoulder, and quietly walked in the direction of Noirmont, returning along the same road that he had passed over the previous night.

He went along in a homely manner, his hands in his pockets, trying to hide his weary mind under the guise of a good citizen, returning at daybreak, from shooting over the marshes.

The farmer's son was of his own age, and consented to change his clothes for a dry suit. Having finished dressing, Joseph ran off with all speed without resting for a moment; he guessed that he was being followed, and knew full well, that if caught, no mercy would be shown him.

Alas! What could he do for the Countess Helena, now that Octavius was dead? What could he do, but go and inform the magistrate what he had witnessed, and then would he be credited; would he not be accused of calumny? After all, what interest could Matifay, who was generally known as an honest man, have in the death of Octavius de Rancogne?

Poor Joseph tried everything, but could find no solution.

But what are the odds? At the bottom of his faithful heart he solemnly renewed the promise to give battle to the enemies of Rancogne, whoever they were, and, if necessary, to die in the cause.

Just then the sun rose, and Joseph recollected the vow made to Beasson. Standing on the brow of the hill, he cast a long look behind him. At his feet, the valley, filled with fog, stretched out like a sea; and the sun, apparently as a ball

of red hot iron, shone slightly through it, shedding many colored rays. Joseph pondered over the sad fact, that under the glittering undulations of those brilliant vapors, in a grave of black mud, lay forever, the body of the knight of Rancogne. Then, piously repeating one of the verses of Beasson's death-song, and slightly changing the wording, he murmured:

"Rancogne lies dead without a bier,
In Noirmont's pits of liquid mire!"

After which, turning his back on that marvellous landscape, he hurried on his way.

CHAPTER X.

ONWARD.

JOSEPH stepped lightly over the level road, already half-dried by the sun. The weather was splendid, not a cloud could be seen in the gray-blue sky, to which the last vapors of the recent rain had lent a vague and indefinite charm. Joseph stepped out lightly; the apprehension of danger had vanished with the night, and faith in the future had returned with the serene light.

It is true, that when the recollection of the sad events of the previous day recurred to his mind, his forehead became wrinkled and his pace slackened. The mournful echo of Beasson's chant sounded in his ears, the Countess Helena's terrible cry, "murderer!" and then the last neigh of the mortally wounded horse, as it sank in the turf pits. But soon his lips muttered "Onward!" and he brandished his knotty stick of white thorn with renewed vigor.

"Go on, Joseph! you shall save Rancogne," Beasson had said this, and he well knew what he said. "The dying are gifted with double sight!" did he not predict the disaster precisely as it had happened; why should he be wrong in reference to good doings?

Go on, Joseph, onward! find the treasure! punish the murderers! confound the calumniators! pay to the Countess Helena that kiss that you wear on your forehead, as brilliant as a star!

Oh! the generous, valorous heart of youth! What love for unexpected and chivalresque adventure! what supreme disdain of all obstacles! what faith in luck—that providence of the thoughtless—and of the generous!

Onward!

And Joseph went on. He left the hills and valleys behind him, he climbed their sides with a run. Still on he went, and to rest himself, when he felt fatigued, he sauntered for a short time at a two-mile gait.

Fresh air brings appetite. It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Joseph felt hungry, some breakfast had to be managed. There was no inn in the neighborhood, but Joseph was gifted with forethought. He drew a large lump of black bread, that he had obtained at Trompardiere, from his pocket, and ate as he went along.

No meal is complete without drinking. When he had swallowed the last mouthful, Joseph looked around, and to the right discovered a shady green hollow: there must be a clear stream. Joseph went down to moisten his breakfast there: after terminating his indifferent meal, he again ascended the high road.

He had not proceeded two hundred paces, when he heard a voice calling:

"Aye! young man!"

Joseph looked around him, but could only discover a road laborer, leaning with his two hands on his club.

"What can I do for you?" he politely asked.

"Nothing, only your comrade is looking for you. He asked me if I had seen a boy, so and so? I told him no, and then he returned."

"Ah!" said Joseph pondering, "I know what it is! A big, red-haired fellow, with a trimmed beard, you know, one of the fellows."

"That is it, as red as the devil's top-knot."

"Well if he comes back, I am on ahead. He will catch me."

"He'll have to walk like the deuce if you work your legs in that style!" called the man to Joseph, who was already some distance off.

"That is my opinion too," muttered Joseph.

On turning a sharp curve in the road, he entered a chestnut wood, and made for the fields, and followed as near as possible the direction of the white streak of the road.

He felt that from that moment the greatest precautions were indispensable. Limaille was on his track.

The ins and outs that he was obliged to make retarded Joseph's progress. He did not arrive at Montbront until five o'clock in the evening. Tired, exhausted from want of food he entered the first inn that he saw, called for a large basin

of soup, some fat, and a mug of the small grey wine of the country—a real feast, that cost him fully twelve good sous. But thanks to Beasson's legacy he had something to meet the outlay. With the change he bought a piece of candle and a flint and steel. He also took the precaution to provide himself with a large hunch of bread. One never knows what my occur.

Night fell before he had finished his supper. He grasped his stick firmly in his right hand, bid his hostess good-bye and left.

From Montbront to Rancogne the road is very picturesque, and for that reason well adapted for ambuscades. When it was quite dark, Joseph did not feel quite at ease. He kept to the middle of the road, avoiding the smallest bush, looking to the right and left, and holding his stick ready for a blow. Fortunately the moon broke through the clouds just as he entered the forest of Braconne, a corner of which is cut off by the road. On the clear track of the road, Joseph's shadow stood out as black as ink. He was certain, at least now, no one could pounce upon him unperceived; but then, on the other hand, this light was unfavorable to him as it showed him so distinctly. Who knew but Limaille were there, hidden behind that bush, pointing his gun at him!

At last he past the last trees of the forest, then he was near the object of his journey. The hills of Roche-Berthier and Rancogne stood out with their black forms clearly marked against the milky blue sky. Joseph turned to the left. Soon he heard the rippling of the Tardouere over its bed of small pebbles. He crossed the ford, rushed into the deep shade of high hills, clothed with stunted oaks and broom, and came before a black hole, one of the entrances to the grottoes.

Stooping down, for he was ignorant of the height of the passage, which at some places is very low, he followed a passage some fifty feet in length. Then turning into a side-cutting he lit one of his candles.

Here three or four galleries presented themselves to his view. Each one descended with a steep incline. Joseph selected one by chance, knowing that all of them, by a longer or shorter route, led to that great chamber or nave, so much visited by the tourists during the summer.

The clay soil which was more saturated with moisture the further he advanced, now rose to his ankles. Moreover he could only proceed very slowly and with the greatest precaution, as he risked stepping into some of those holes that communicated with the lower parts of the cavern.

The candle cast a narrow circle of light around him, and at times its glare reflected in patches on the slimy covering of the sides and the arched roof. All seemed to retire, the roof increased in height, the sides became wider apart, so much so that the feeble light cast by the carbonised wick was quite insufficient to reach them. It seemed to Joseph that he was ,n the midst of an indefinite darkness. At intervals only, by the wavering of the light, the brilliant coating of some gigantic pendant would reflect the glare in the distance, but soon again become lost in space.

He was in the nave.

In the middle of this area, fully as large as that of a church, arose an enormous monolithic monument; rounded and fantastically shaped by the action of the dripping of the drops of water continually falling from the roof, it assumed somewhat the rough form of a pulpit.

Joseph had no trouble in finding it; when arrived at its base, he fixed his candle in a fissure of the rock, and drawing Beasson's plan from his pocket, studied it minutely. In the centre of the plan, figured the nave, at the base of which Joseph was stooping. One of the points of the pillar was marked with the letter R., and opposite, on the corresponding point of the circumference of the chamber, was a letter A.; the sinuous passages all terminated at this A., and at each of their angles, in order to indicate the direction to be taken. Beasson had successively inscribed the letters N. C. O. G. N. E. At the end he had designated a sort of small saloon by a death's head.

After having duly fixed these indications in his memory, Joseph replaced the paper in his coat pocket, and holding his light at arm's length, slowly went round the chamber.

With what joy he discovered a gigantic R. drawn with charcoal on the face of the rock! The preserving power of the subterranean atmosphere is known: it seemed as if that R. had been drawn but the day before. Joseph could not suppress a cry on perceiving that letter so roughly chalked, and still he was at the commencement of his task. The reason was, that till then, notwithstanding the solemnity of Beasson's revelation, Joseph

had doubted, and that from the moment that he had found one fact of the dying man's recital verified he had no grounds to suspect the others. That R. was to Joseph the proof evident of the existence of the treasure. Accordingly, in the first moment of triumph he forgot all his fatigue, and running to the extremity of the nave, he inspected the sides as he had done to the pulpit. That search, although longer, proved equally fortunate, and the A. appeared to him traced on the rock exactly where shown on the plan.

Only—and Joseph, at first had not foreseen that difficulty—four passages, meeting at the same point, spread before him like the webbed foot of a duck.

Which to choose?

At the sight of the four passages, Joseph understood with what intention Beasson had taken the starting point of his indication on the entrance pillar in the nave. The two letters R. and A. formed an imaginary line and indicated the direction for him to take, in the same manner as the marks used by surveyors. Joseph retraced his steps, fixed a candle immediatelly over the R., the exact position of which now became invisible at a distance, then returning to the entrance to the passages, a second candle in hand, he did not hesitate to follow the route, which by these means, was as it were traced out for him.

The passage into which he entered, although tolerably practicable, was nearly horizontal. After walking for scarcely a quarter of an hour, Joseph found himself opposite the N. which was his third landmark. So he had not lost the right road. He, however, hesitated for a moment. He had recollected the light that he had left burning in the nave. He was on the point of returning in order to extinguish it, but in his haste to reach the goal as soon as possible, he disdained to adopt that precaution. The light, it is true, could serve as an indication to Limaille, in the event of his having followed Joseph through the meanderings of the cavern, but such a pursuit was very improbable. Then, again, the candle left by Joseph on the side of the pulpit, was nearly burnt out, and would surely be consumed before he could have had time to reach it.

The narrow, stone passage came to a sharp curve, and descended a slope that became steeper and steeper. He was continually brought up at intervals, by large pieces of rock that projected from the surface, like a honeycomb, and appeared to bar the way. He had to climb over these rocks, as slippery as ice, and, on reaching the top, commence the still more dangerous descent. At each step his troubles and difficulties increased. The passage became narrower, as if to stifle the audacious person who dared to brave so many obstacles.

The track became so impracticable, that a hundred times over, Joseph thought that he must have been mistaken, but at the moment, when having lost all courage, he was about to turn back, he perceived in front of him, on the wall, the third landmark, the C., traced like the R., A., N., with a piece of charcoal.

The fissure now became so narrow, that he had almost to creep. At certain parts, Joseph could hardly squeeze himself between the rocks, which intersected each other like the jaws of a monstrous mastodontes. He was forced to abandon a portion of his light baggage. His bread, slipping from his pocket, fell into the mud, and the courageous boy, feverish with the extraordinary success of his enterprise, did not even stoop to pick it up.

That gallery, if the name of gallery can be applied to such an irregular mass of rocks jumbled indiscriminately together, was almost horizontal. After endless endeavors, for each moment then seemed to last half an hour, Joseph could stand erect.

A path, almost cut, and ascending along an incline, steeper and steeper as it proceeded, presented itself to his gaze. At the commencement of this new path, Joseph perceived the letter O. There again he had to place a light as a mark, because numerous passages opened out to the right and left, intersecting the hill like a huge ant-hill.

The path became easier, the manner in which some of the rocks were propped up by rough walls indicated the work of the hand of man. And when he arrived at the G., Joseph saw that the sides had been smoothed by the chisel.

Then, sure of success, the brave boy, broken with fatigue, let himself fall upon a block of rock to take a few minutes of very necessary repose. A singular weakness came over him. It was not sleep, not even drowsiness: it was a fit of dreaming. He was not asleep, but it seemed as if he slept, and that in his dream, he went through one of those lands so terribly and so fabulously created by nightmare. At intervals he also seemed to hear vague noises reproduced

and multiplied by the sonorous echoes of the cavern. But he had the courage to rouse himself from that state of torpor, before it had deprived him of all pawer, and resolutely rising, he again went on his way. He then rapidly approached a clear ground. The surface had been levelled, as also the sides and the roof. The influence of the hand-work of man was felton every side. At certain points the walls were even constructed of masonry. At the end of that passage, the letter N., similar to the letters previously found, designated the first steps of a narrow, winding staircase.

The ascent was not void of danger: some steps were wanting, others were so insecure that they trembled under foot. But compared to those that he had just passed so bravely, these dangers appared trifling to Joseph. At the top of the stairs he found a narrow landing, on to which opened a low sculptured door, bearing the arms of Rancogne. On it he read their proud motto: *Qui se rend, grace: qui ne se rend, cogne!* (To him who yields, mercy: to him who yields not, perdition!) And over it, the last letter traced by Beasson, the E., which, following the others, formed the word *Rancogne.*

Having at last overcome so many toils, Joseph felt himself faint. He halted, dizzy, on the sill of the door, on the other side of which he would see and touch the treasure revealed by Beasson. If the treasure were not there! If some one quicker in action should have discovered the secret! If so much trouble and work should be useless! If, when on point of saving Rancogne, to realize his enthusiastic plans of the morning, he should find them unattainable. One step more, success or failure, all would be decided. But this one step, the easiest to take, was the one that retained Joseph the longest.

At last he took this step, and at first uttered a cry of horror. The death's head, that served as the legend to Beasson's drawing, was now explained to him. In order to enter the narrow chamber that opened before him, he had to pass over a heap of human bones, mixed in confusion with arms, broken swords, hilts of daggers, arquebusques covered with rust.

What fearful drama could have transpired on that dreadful spot? On this point, Joseph could but indulge in conjectures. Perhaps the last defenders of Rancogne had fled thither during the siege of the castle, and had long awaited help from the inside; help that it was never intended should come! Perhaps they had barricaded themselves, preferring anything, even that sad death in darkness, to the infamy of a traitor's gibbet. What rendered the latter supposition plausible, was that on a level of the landing the stairs had been violently broken, in such a manner as to intercept all communication with the castle, which must have been situated above. At a height of about ten feet, the traces could still be seen of stone arching, and the remnants of the torn arches tottered over the gaping abyss of the cavern.

Holding his torch at arm's length, on high, Joseph inspected as far as the feeble light would allow him, the interior of the chamber, which the heroic ruins appeared to watch and defend even after death. It was a kind of vaulted casemate, almost circular, that appeared to have no other outlet than that by which Joseph hesitated to enter. But he hesitated no longer, when a ray of the light, wafted by his breath, caused him to discover in the deep shade the vague outlines of several trunks.

This must doubtless be the treasure.

Joseph bounded over the bones, and plunged his trembling hands into Rancogne's gold. Here were one, two, three trunks filled to the brim! In the fourth, as in the Arabian tales, were heaped all kinds of ornaments and precious stones. Rings set with brilliants, pearl necklaces, heavy gold ornaments in the taste of the time, three ewers beautifully chiseled, heaps of silver plate, altar ornaments, goblets and chalices in massive gold, the spoils of churches and abbeys or the voluntary gifts of co-religionists. Joseph was not only in the presence of Rancogne's treasure, but also of the war treasure of the religion they professed. Now he could understand why those heroic defenders had condemned themselves to the agonies of famine, to the horrors of suffocation, rather than deliver the deposit confided to their charge, to the Catholic armies. Joseph knelt down and prayed piously for the dead. Then solemnly raising his outstretched hand:

"You have," said he, "bravely fought for the honor of Rancogne: your sacrifice will not have been in vain. You can, without anger, look upon me carrying off the gold that you defended to your last breath. By that gold Rancogne was lost: by that same gold shall Rancogne be saved."

He turned round. This time he was not deceived, it was surely the sound of a step that he heard, and the strong respiration of a man out of breath. Joseph grasped one of the heavy swords of one of those braves of former times, for who could have risked to pursue him, at such an hour and in such a place, but an enemy? However, the hesitation was of short duration. Almost at the same moment, in the opening of the door, appeared the dreaded face of Limaille, who was climbing up. He quickly drew back on perceiving Joseph on his guard, standing up, the sword in one hand, and the torch in the other. As for Joseph, when he knew with which enemy he had to deal, he dashed the candle to the ground and crushed it under his heel, in order to extinguish every spark that might reveal him, then clutching his sword with both hands, he held it raised ready to strike.

But Limaille was prudent.

Joseph soon saw a feeble light appear outside the door, that of a dark lantern half opened. The ray of light that shone from it was sent round the chamber and then fixed upon him. He jumped on one side but the ray of light followed each of his movements. Then Joseph saw some other object glitter, which he guessed to be the barrel of a pistol. Then the brave boy, raising the sword, threw himself into the full light, with the point in front. A stunning detonation filled the vaults and was re-echoed through the passages. A dreadful noise followed, the ground trembled. Joseph felt himself thrown down with his face to the ground as if by the blast of a hurricane. No candle, no light, nothing but inexplorable and dense darkness.

He felt himself all over, he was not wounded. By creeping upon his knees he reached the wall of the chamber and felt his way round. He passed his hand over the trunks, all intact, but when at the place where the door had been, he found nothing but a heap of rubbish. Joseph then shuddered to the very marrow of his bones.

"Ah!" said he, "I am lost. It is the stone that the vibration of the explosion has caused to fall; I am walled up in this cell."

CHAPTER XI.

NIGHT.

Joseph entirely gave way for the first few hours to discouragement. Moreover he was extremely fatigued; what spring can the mind preserve when the body faints? He remained lying on the same spot where he had been thrown by the rush of the falling debris, and let himself drop deliciously into a profound fainting fit.

"What is the use of struggling?" said he. "Here I am, buried alive; walled up in this tomb. How can I get out, when those of former times, stronger, more energetic than I can ever be, those who besides must have known all the ways of these caverns, could not find any way to escape from the death to which I am destined. Well, let it come! I await it. Oh! let it come at once if possible!"

It was not death that came, but a heavy dreamless sleep. How long did it last? An hour or a day? This Joseph never knew. On awaking, he found himself in such a dense darkness that he could not distinguish his hand even when it touched his eyes. But the repose had returned him his energy. There was no question of dying now, he had to save himself; but how to save himself? The most important requirement was to see. By continued searching, Joseph ultimately re-found the piece of candle that he had crushed under his heel. His efforts to light the damp wick however were in vain, so soaked was it in mud and wet. Then with his hands, feet and nails, as best he could, he tore some splinters of wood from the trunks and musket-stocks, and finally managed to contrive a little fire. This fire without flame, for the wood was too damp to burn with a flame, threw a lurid glare around, that Joseph kept up by continually blowing.

This work took him a long time to accomplish, but then when the first glare appeared as brilliant in the night as the eye of a savage chief, what a triumph! He brandished his primary torch, and his first care was to minutely inspect the walls of his tomb; not a trace of a door nor a passage of any kind. There was evidently but one resource left: to remove the rubbish. This was a work that would have taken any other man but Joseph, days to complete. However he did not despair to get through it.

Now however that he could see a little, for his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and the glow of the fire was sufficient, his work became easier, although the smoke greatly annoyed him. He made a chisel with the blade

of a dagger and completely pulled one of the trunks to pieces in order to keep his fire up.

This done, Joseph set to work. An empty space had been left above the door, towards there he directed his first efforts. With one of the thick oaken planks of the trunk he had constructed a lever, and the stones, lifted out one by one, rolled over the other side into space, bounding from rock to rock with a dull sound.

This giant's work occupied him for some long hours. He did not feel the fatigue, but hunger and above all thirst tortured him horribly. By good luck he had a small phial of malt brandy left that he had taken at Montbront: he took a drop from time to time, which served to sustain his vigor. But the contents of the phial were soon diminishing, it was necessary to husband them.

Then again the smoke from the fire, although the hole already made was more than sufficient to let it escape,—made Joseph giddy, his temples and heart beat violently, almost every minute he was obliged to pass his head through the opening in order to respire the fresh air from without.

Still this breach was too narrow to allow his shoulders to pass. One single stone, one large stone, an entire step of the stair, barred the way. This stone removed, Joseph could again penetrate the cavern, return by the same road by which he entered, and perhaps save himself.

During several hours, which appeared to him as months, Joseph worked at this stone, it moved like a half loosened tooth: he lifted it with his lever, he pushed it with his shoulder, gaining about the tenth of an inch an hour; at last it wavered, a last effort and it fell with a sound of thunder.

For the moment Joseph thought he was saved, and throwing himself on his knees he thanked the Lord.

The pure air, the healthy air of the cave, (any air would have appeared healthy and pure to him, after the atmosphere filled with smoke that he had been breathing as it were for centuries) stunned him. He staggered as if intoxicated. He had eaten nothing, had drunk nothing but some drops of brandy for more than thirty-six hours. At one draught he emptied the rest of the phial, seized one of the embers and agitating it rapidly, went to inspect the ravages caused by the explosion of the pistol on the outside.

The ravages were enormous: dislodged stones, suddenly tumbled down, were precipitated one upon the other, as by an avalanche. At the bottom they formed a confused heap. The hollow of the stair was left gaping empty like a well, with some fragments projecting here and there like the teeth of a broken jaw-bone.

This was the hazardous path by which he had to descend.

Whatever danger such a path presented, there was no hesitation. Joseph, who now knew the obstacles of his desperate attempt, fastened some strips of wood around his waist, in order to make fresh fires if necessary, then taking the best ember he could find, as a torch, he bravely commenced his perilous descent.

He found the task easier than he had at first thought.

Some stones here and there gave way under his weight, but he went on carefully, and did not rest his full weight upon any, until he had tried it several times; thus, clinging to every stone as he left it, with one hand, and brandishing his firebrand with the other, which he kept moving above his head, to increase the glow, he descended. A new disappointment awaited him below, for the fallen mass had blocked the passage, as above it had blocked the door to the treasure. It is true that Joseph could have worked his way through this in the same manner, but besides undertaking such a long tedious work, in his present weak state, which appeared impracticable, he would be obliged once more to ascend, in order to fetch the lever which he had left behind, deeming it too embarassing. He preferred bravely risking himself to uncertainty, to take at hazard one of the galleries that opened before him, and try his chance, in the meantime invoking the help of the kind Providence.

He now wandered, without any guide, without a light, in the unexplored regions of the cavern. Galleries succeeded galleries, crossing each other in all directions. From time to time, Joseph shook his ember, and with the burnt part marked the sides with a conspicuous mark. He now entered an unlimited chamber, a desert of silence and darkness. At first he thought that his good genius had led him to the nave, but in vain he searched for the pulpit. He then entered one of the galleries, and at once recognized one of his marks; he returned to the cavern, entered a fresh gallery and again saw a large rough

cross, one of the crosses that he had just made. He was always turning in the same circle, like a blind horse in a mill. Then a mad fit of discouragement seized his brain. In a moment of passion he cast away his burning ember, and falling to the ground, cried:

"It is here that I must die!"

He spoke aloud. His voice vibrated through the vaults like a blast, and frightened him. It seemed to him, as a voice from the other world. Then to this terror succeeded a listless torpor. This state lasted for some time. But as Joseph had no idea of hours, and what then appeared to him to be a day, was scarcely the space of a few minutes. His sufferings awakened him. His entrails were tortured by hunger, but that was nothing. What tormented him worst was thirst. His dry tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, his lips seemed to be live coals, he would have bartered his share of paradise for a drop of water.

He was stretched at full length, lying on his side, not only awaiting death, but praying for it. He again fell asleep, but now his rest was agitated and full of dreams: there were rippling streams, rivers, cascades, seas: in fact the usual dreams experienced by travellers, generally, who are prostrated by thirst in the desert, which they are doomed to perish.

Those flowing streams were evident to his gaze, he could touch them, he could distinctly hear the rippling sound, but as he approached them to appease his thirst, they fled far beyond his reach. He was awake and thought he dreamed. Still he heard the rippling of the stream over a stony bed. Creeping he advanced so as not to lose the sound for a moment, and as he proceeded the noise became plainer,—Oh! then it was no more a dream! At a hundred paces, at twenty paces, even at ten paces, there is perhaps a stream of running water; and Joseph, half revived, by that only hope, thought:

"Could I but drink, I could die!"

Yes, the stream was there, and he deliriously plunged in his hands, his feet and his head. He drank also, and never did any drink appear so delicious as that underground water, that had never been chafed by the sun's rays or polluted by the lips of of man.

Joseph was one of those whom defeat can not break down, one of those whose valor is revived by the least shadow of a chance.

Now for the third time since he had been in those dismal caverns, he exclaimed:

"I will not die!"

For the third time, he arose and pushed his way.

Again he commenced his journey.

After proceeding some twenty paces, he paused, then turned back. He was going up hill; simple reason told him to return to the level.

The stream of water above, where the rivulet took its source, was evidently on a level with the bed of the Tardouere. Therefore by ascending he would find it disappear, lose itself in the sands, and then that stream, his only guide, would no more exist, and he would again risk losing himself in the upper passages. By following the stream, however, he had a chance left. He could thus arrive at its outlet, or find a wide passage leading to the outside of the mountain.

And in fact the stream of water, that Joseph supposed to be the one that rises from the ground some five leagues further, a river at its source, widened as he advanced. Joseph could only follow it guided by the noise, for in his absence of mind, he discarded all means of kindling a new fire. After having walked on for about a quarter of an hour, the noise became so sonorous, that the vaults were filled with one continuous roar. At the same time a faint glimmer fell from above.

Then the roaring became like thunder, the glimmer became a ray of light. In the gloom, Joseph could not distinguish surrounding objects.

The gallery became narrower and narrower, scarcely allowing the stream to flow through, and in the vaults, at a dizzy height, there appeared a blue spec. The sky!

Below yawned the abyss, the unfathomable abyss, into which the cascade furiously rushed—No outlet but above—Below was death, above salvation.

Yes, up above, there shone the sun, the birds warbled, the wind toyed with the foliage of the venerable oak-trees—it was life. Below reigned the power of torror, the fatal toils of the whirlpool, the dashing of the waterfall on the sides of the cavern—it was death!

Oh! if Joseph had wings!—But how to approach that blue sky!—To have deliverance so near and not to be able to—To be able to exclaim: "I am on the point of reaching it," and in the same breath: "I am lost!"

But Joseph would not acknowledge himself conquered! clinging with his

feet, his hands, he attempted to climb the rocks. The least false step could precipitate him into the gulf; so much the better! To die thus, would be better than to die of hunger and rage.

This desperate energy, did it render his foot surer, his hold more tenacious? He reached a kind of platform where he could rest with ease. He had only advaced some ten paces. The clear opening to the blue sky was still but small, still far distant, but he had gained ten paces!

He had gained more, some wild plants, plants like men, require air and light to ive, grew in the fissures of the rock. Joseph plucked them by handfuls and devoured them like a wild beast: this savage meal gave him strength, and he commenced climbing with redoubled vigor. From time to time the rocks projected over each other in such a manner that it was impossible to hold on to them, in many places they were as slippery as ice, and Joseph was forced to jump across the gulf, which fortunately was narrow, in order to try his success on the opposite side.

A man of the coolest mind, even the ablest acrobat, would have been lost a hundred times over, but Joseph no more calculated, he was mad, and with what force, what agility does the primordial instinct of self preservation not endow the nerves!

His fingers were of iron, his joints of steel, his hands held firmer than spikes, at one glance his eye calculated the distances with mathematic accuracy. It was no more a man, but a being leaping, tenacious by clinging as if each pore of its skin were a cupping-glass.

As he advanced the blue opening became larger. But for a moment ago it formed but a point, and now it is as large as a handkerchief—as a cloth—as a sheet, —and as the light increased, as the air became more vivid, the noise of the gulf became more deadened. An hour ago, it was a hurricane, now, it was but a murmur.

Joseph had but twenty feet more to climb.

Above a voice was singing, that of a woodcutter, and the vibrating gushes of his song alternately resounded with the blows of the hatchet upon the trunk of the tree:

"As a dog
In the oak doth bite,
I drive this steel with all my might,
Ah! hi!"

"Help! help!" cried Joseph.

But no one replied to his cry of desperation.

The hatchet fell again and the voice continued:

"The tree is high,
Cut the roots,
Come, old axe, make the chips fly,
Ah! hau!"

"Help! help!" cried Joseph for the second time.

Nothing but the falling of the hatchet! then the voice:

"On the top-most branches,
Some fluttering wings
Make some a-do around a nest.
Ah! hi!"

"Ah!" thought Joseph, measuring, with his eye, the steep wall, that still separated him from salvation; "I am lost, he does not hear me."

Then the singer continued·

"I can have pity,
Not for the oak,
But for the ringdove's downy nest.
Ah! hau!"

Then another blow with the hatchet. The voice was silent.

A fearful crash was heard; and Joseph saw a dark mass intervene between him and the sky. The oak bent over slowly and covered the precipice with its branches, nearly sweeping the poor boy into the abyss, but what might have been his destruction proved his salvation. He clung with desperation to the long branches that hung over him. He had taken the precaution to clutch a number together, and, although but slender, they sustained his weight. In this manner he reached one of the bigger branches, then the trunk, and holding on by his nails, his feet and by his knees, he climbed to the brink of the gulf.

The woodcutter, leaning upon his hatchet, was mournfully contemplating his work. He was about to start off in fright when he perceived an almost fantastic creature, as pale as a corpse, as thin as a skeleton, and as sad as a phantom, spring from the abyss.

Tottering, Joseph advanced a few steps; he stretched out his arms as if to retain his balance, and then fell full length on the green moss.

When he recovered his consciousness, he saw the face full of compassion and sympathy, the face of a young man, bending over him and watching his respiration.

The woodcutter had raised his head upon a pillow of moss, which he had carefully covered with his waistcoat and frock, and then kneeling by his side was in vain trying to make him swallow

some drops of the contents of a bottle.

"Thanks," muttered Joseph.

"Good! good!" replied the woodcutter. "So you are coming round, my boy. Well you can boast of having come some distance, but in the name of God, how did you manage to come out of that infernal hole?"

"Where am I?" asked Joseph.

"Where?" ejaculated the other. "Why in Branconne, and near to the moving ditch of which no body knows the depth. Last year a watchman wanted to go down; and what followed? They let him have plenty of rope, but he could see no more than in the mouth of a dark oven, then he heard the roar as of a wild beast. He was seized with fear, and cried out to be pulled up as quick as possible; and see here, now, you come out of that hole as if you were a bat and not a good Christian!—All right! my friend," he added quickly, on perceiving that Joseph was going to speak, "You will tell me all about this bye and bye, now you must rest yourself."

"I am hungry," murmured Joseph.

"That's so! fool that I am! there can't be much food down among the devils! Poor lad! how pale he is!"

The young man ran to his bag and returned with a piece of rye bread and some nuts.

Joseph glared with avidity upon this coarse food.

"By St. Clement!" exclaimed the woodman with admiration, "why it seems as if he had not eaten for a week. Patience! patience! don't go on so fast! If you are but barely saved from the dead, as the priest says—and may the devil take me if I would not rather be in the graveyard than at the bottom of that hole—it is no reason why you should choke yourself like a duck that cannot get water to wash his food down. A mouthful at a time, my boy, don't eat the cheese before the crust, as they say at home, nor the meat before the cabbage. So, that's right! now a good drink on the top of it, and you will do."

Joseph smiled softly at the chatting of his new friend Clement. But when he had finished his meal, he in vain tried to get up, all he could do was to raise himself upon his elbow, then he could not long remain in that position, with a groan he fell back upon his bed of moss. His sight became troubled, a large grey cloud, like heated vapor arising from a furnace, rose between his eyes and the sky. Everything around him became confused, the outlines became indefinite, then all became as black as ink. A sudden spasm pierced his inside, his breast, in fact, all over his body.

His lungs wanted breath, air.

He had fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

A CURIOUS CASE BEFORE THE COURTS.

At that period all France was moved by the report of a scandalous criminal case that was being tried before the court of Limoges.

A woman, distinguished both for her mind and her beauty, belonging by birth to one of the worthiest families of the elevated burgher class, allied by marriage to some of the great names of France, the Countess Helena de Quisran-Rancogne, appeared at the assizes, under the accusation of having poisoned her husband.

For that crime she had no excuse.

Count George had always been to her, as she herself freely declared, the best of husbands, the most indulgent, the tenderest of masters.

What cause could have driven the unfortunate woman to the committal of this odious crime, and which could only be extenuated by prolonged torture or cruel disappointments?

This cause was silently whispered abroad.

Mention was made of two brothers divided on account of a love common to both, a violent passion, to which the existence of Count George presented the only obstacle.

That passion was confessed by the accused with all candor, but at the same time she protested her innocence.

But this passion once admitted, the motive of the crime became too evident to give credence to the denials brought forward without proof.

Many persons, however, stood by the Countess Helena's virtue, with such communicative warmth that the most doubtful were confounded.

First of all, it was her chambermaid, Rose, who would not allow herself to be separated from her, and who had been allowed by compassion on the part of the judge to accompany her, even in prison.

Then again, it was the honorable Hercules Champion, her cousin, who, during many years, had lived on the most intimate terms with the young couple, and positively denied the existence of all crime.

In fact, it was an entire body of working people, all the hands employed at Noirmont-les-Fourneaux, who unanimously declared Madam to be a saint.

Moreover, the touching state of the accused, but two months a mother, predisposed the benevolent instinct of the public in her favor. But, on the other hand, the charges raised against her were so overwhelming that it seemed next to impossible to overthrow them.

The dissection, made by Dr. Toinon, revealed the evidence of poison, notwithstanding his endeavors to act as favorable as possible on behalf of the accused.

The counter-examination made by the members of the faculty of Paris, proved it by still stronger evidence.

From that moment, their diametrically opposed opinions could only go to prove that: Helena was either a monster of crime and hypocrisy, or a victim to some infamous conspiracy, of which neither the object nor the author could be discovered.

Every one followed their own sympathies or instinct and adopted either the one suggestion or the other, with equal ardor. It was a remarkable fact that the women were rather in favor of the accusation, while the men generally pronounced for the prisoner.

The judicial chair was then filled by a magistrate whose reputation for integrity and impartiality has survived him; M. Maury Duquesnel, First President of the Civil Court of Bordeaux, since dead.

Duly considering the ardent sympathies that surrounded the Countess of Quisran-Rancogne, sympathies in which, by his own avowal, he participated at the outset of the trial, he was obliged to bow before the unfailing authority of the proofs.

His act of accusation was a masterpiece of clearness and conscientious analysis. In it could be traced the whole private and veiled history of that family, which although in appearance so calm, was in reality troubled by so many storms. He showed the existence of this family up to the arrival of the young Octavius, so happy, then suddenly disunited by a fatal passion.

"From that day George became sad, absent in mind; he no longer occupied himself with the various and so complicated affairs of the works, and let the whole weight devolve upon Hercules Champion. Gifted with an upright mind, although somewhat dull, satisfied by appearances, devoted to his cousin and her husband, as to a sister and a brother: Hercules had no reason not to seek the enlightenment of a mystery which would have lessened them in his respect.

"A fratricidal jealousy, an incestuous passion, could only lead to a disaster. Therefore, it could be plainly seen why young Octavius had embarked in a mad enterprise. Immediately after his departure, a reconciliation had taken place between the husband and wife, that all had hoped was sincere. Count George, (following the dictation of his intense love) pardoned his wife.

"And that wife, instead of rejoicing at that act of clemency, instead of meriting such an act of mercy by her submission and by her repentance, availed herself of that unrestricted pardon by seeking to rid herself of that burden that impeded her adulterous desires.

"Scarcely a few days had passed, before she commenced her murderous task. After a few months, Count George died, doubly torn by the gnawing of an incurable despair and by poison.

"It is very true—for the accusation had to mention all, even to render probable that which at first appeared improbable—it is very true, that at that moment a touching scene was about to transpire. A divine reconciliation between Count George and his criminal wife. During that last interview, Count George had imposed a marriage with Octavius upon the Countess Helena. A sublime dying will, and worthy of the high, chivalresque character of the Knight of Quisran-Rancogne. But, as the fact of that conversation was not proven, as it only depended upon the avowal of the accused, the suspicious testimony of Rose, and that of a certain Joseph, whom it was impossible to find, did it not prove that the husband, whose love for his wife never relaxed, had not labored under an illusion regarding himself and his brother? Oh! surely, if he had suspected that he would be poisoned, that an odious attempt was to be made on his life, he might have pardoned in a Christian manner, but he would not have allowed the criminal to revel in the fruits of her crime; he would not have sought to unite her with the accomplice in her criminal act!

"The truth is, that he imagined that he was being killed by grief and disease, whereas he really died from the effects of poison.

"Here arose a double question—Had Count George really been poisoned?

"How could this be doubted after the

eloquent results of the medical examinations.

"Who had administered the poison?

"Proofs of various kinds, all more or less coinciding, clearly denounced the criminal hand.

"A workman: James, called Lamaille, well known for his want of discipline in the factory of Noirmont-les-Fourneaux, had been discharged by Hercules Champion. On several occasions he had boasted before his fellow workmen, who have sworn to the fact, that they dared not turn him away. And in fact, Madam interceded on his behalf and Lamaille was not discharged.

Now, this Lamaille was secretly charged, so proved the books kept by the chemist Duzoux, to whom Lamaille was well known, and also his personal testimony, with the purchase of considerable quantities of arsenic, under the pretext of destroying the numbers of rats that infested the vast buildings of Noirmont-les-Fourneaux.

"James Lamaille, it is true, had disappeared in like manner to Joseph. By good fortune, the deposition of Mr. Duzoux remained intact and sufficed to enlighten Justice.

"But then, why hesitate to accept material proofs that were only too evident?

"Who could have an interest in the death of Count George, if not his widow, his sole heiress, and to whom that death would afford a liberty that she had long impatiently sought?

"Perhaps, on that bench where she now appeared alone to answer her crime, an accomplice should be seated at her side. But, although the public judge inclined towards the belief that Count Octavius, although eager to profit by the demise of his elder brother, ignored the monstrous means by which it was brought about, divine justice was prepared to inflict a punishment should he be proved guilty. Secretly returned by night to the country, prosecuted for his crime of high treason, he had, as by a miracle, escaped the vigilance of the police, in order to cast himself amidst the greatest danger, for in all probability he had met his death in the turf pits of Noirmont.

"Peace be to his ashes, now he had only to render an account of his life to the Supreme Judge, who fathoms the mind, the inmost thought, and cannot be deceived."

The pure moderation of this document increased its terrible import. Helena listened to its being read with the impassability of death. Her interrogation only served to reproduce the most striking parts. She acknowledged the exactitude of the facts, denying with vivacity that she had ever entertained the thought of a crime, the mere idea of which was horrible to contemplate.

The remainder of the testimony was a monotonous and touching succession of benedictions and wailing for so ill deserved a mishap. Unfortunately these testimonies, although most honorable for the prisoner, could but furnish presumptions in her favor. Not one answered to a single fact of the charge.

The poison exists, who can have administered it, if you did not?

At the same time they made a favorable impression upon the public and on the jury. The ladies shed tears as at a drama. The men could not, without their hearts being moved to the core, see that woman so noble, so elegant, so sensitive in her trouble, so simple in her protestation of innocence, so artless in her vows, that only tended to her destruction, seated between two gensdarmes on that bench of infamy.

This feeling of sympathy that was experienced by the court, would perhaps have caused a verdict of complete acquittal to be delivered, had not an incident occured, that completely changed the attitude of the Countess Helena, and consequently the drift of the pleadings.

This incident transpired at the moment of the examination of Hercules Champion, which was important and impatiently looked for.

Champion approached the judge's table with an air of deepest sadness.

From the commencement it could be remarked that he spared the prisoner.

But suddenly she started to her feet and implored him to tell the whole truth. It was no more in the calm and easy manner that she had hitherto observed: she stood upright, haughty, her eyes darting rays of fire, her nostrils dilated—in vain her counsel tried to silence her, still her voice rang clearer and more indignant.

And that voice now became the accuser in its turn, and it denounced Champion: "He it was who had done all this evil. He had deceived Octavius and sent him through the turf pits, where he must perish. He who had by some stratagem, doubtless equally as criminal, rid himself of Limaille and Joseph, for fear that their evidence would compromise him," she said this and many things besides. That he loved

her with an infernal love, diabolical as foul, and that he had the audacity to declare it to her, at the same time offering her impunity if she would become his accomplice.

Champion listened to it all without offering any interruption, he seemed to suffer under a painful stupification. When she had terminated, and had sank down on her bench, exhausted, and broke into tears, he did not even tender a reply.

"Mr. President," he said in a voice slightly moved, "I did not expect, I must avow, that on coming here to protest the innocence of my unfortunate relative in all my soul and conscience, to hear myself accused of a crime that I fain would justify. The position that I occupy in this case is so exceptional, that I am the first to demand that my conduct be submitted to investigation. The situation is such, that now I can no more doubt the existence of a crime. The criminal is either the Countess Helena or myself. I accept the challenge, feeling my power in my innocence."

Then the judge arose. He declared that it was true, that at first the prisoner had attempted that odious system of defence, that consists in endeavoring to throw the weight of the crime on innocent heads. The investigation invoked by M. Hercules Champion had been minutely made without his cognizance, and had led to results perfectly honorable to the witness, and then, better advised, the prisoner had renounced that course. At the same time he understood the painful attitude that that strange incident obliged him to observe. M. Hercules Champion might not be considered as a totally disinterested witness, therefore, if the gentlemen of the jury should not wish to hear him in evidence, he would waive his evidence.

This incident, thus turned altogether in favor of the justification of Hercules Champion, on the contrary was most prejudicial to the case of the Countess Helena. In her exaltation could be seen the despair of a woman feeling herself guilty, knowing that she can only save herself but by incriminating another. On the morning of that decisive hearing she was perhaps already acquitted, after that outburst she was certainly condemned, even in the minds of her most ardent partizans.

Her counsel, one of the young celebrities of the Paris bar, strenuously tried to reconquer the sympathies influenced by that imprudent outburst. He drew tears from his hearers' eyes, but he vainly endeavored to instil a feeling that he himself could not feel. He was more fortunate in the appeal he addressed to the jury. He pictured to them in a simple, eloquent and moving manner, the moral torture suffered by that poor woman, who yesterday rich, honored, loved, was to-day rendered infamous and vile. Oh! that punishment, if her conduct merited such, was it not far more terrible than any that a court could inflict? Did the gentlemen of the jury have before them one of those hardened minds, sensible only to the coarse and bodily expiation, was it one of those heads that can be made to fall because it lacks the rudimentary conception of good and bad, because unable to comprehend the extent of the crime, is incapable of feeling remorse.

The jury reported an affirmation verdict, instigated by extenuating circumstances, and Helena Roumieux, widow Quisran-Rancogne was condemned to hard labor for life.

She listened to the pronouncing of this sentence with an air of sad stupor. She uttered no cry, she did not faint; but as motionless as a corpse, cold as a marble statue, she appeared to have made up her mind from that moment; "All is now indifferent to me, I am indifferent to all!"

Her counsel in vain urged her to appeal, this she refused, declaring that unfortunately she had had the misfortune to cast too great a shame on the name that she had the honor to bear, than again to give rise to a new scandal. The lawyer had the imprudence to repeat these words, which were generally accepted as an avowal on her part. Moreover Helena's sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life, by favor, and a more special favor obtained for her the companionship of her faithful Rose. This alleviation was chiefly due to the intercession of M. Maury Duquesnel, who, alone, had still some doubts in his mind on the case in point.

There is an accent in truth that never deceives a righteous mind, and although all tended to prove the culpability of Madam de Rancogne, her purely resigned attitude had not failed to make an impression upon the magistrate.

The criminal suit was naturally fol lowed by a civil one. A settlement had to be made respecting the future of Blanche de Rancogne, that poor child, condemned never to know its mother, unless to despise her.

On this score Hercules Champion was all that could be expected. He did not let the least idea be remarked that he fostered any feelings of anger on account of the odious charge made against him by the mother, and showed himself the most ardent defender of the child's rights. Nevertheless, by a sentiment of delicacy, perhaps exaggerated, but for which he was duly credited, he blankly refused the guardianship of Blanche, and for that capacity, obtained the appointment by the court, of a man whose probity was notorious. M. Matifay, who moreover had some interest in the works of Noirmont-les-Fourneaux. Nor had Champion any trouble to prove that he alone could re-establish the affairs of the works which had become so sadly compromised by the negligence of George de Rancogne, the late proprietor, and notwithstanding his visible objections to take charge, he allowed himself to be named manager by the first president who protected the paternal interests of the minor.

And thus terminated the case that had caused so much public excitement.

Helena's attitude did not change in her prison: as she had been seen on the day of her condemnation, she could be seen now, without tears, without a smile.

She never quitted her cell, but to walk on the lawn, always reclining on Rose's arm, and, as if awed by a strange fear, the other prisoners always avoided her.

After sentence had been pronounced much sympathy was excited on her behalf. Some ladies visiting the prisons thought she was a good subject for conversion: Helena received them politely, coolly, and with a haughtiness that struck them, so much so that the good dames saluted her and then left never to return.

Soon the aristocratic inquisitive visitors, who went out of their way in order to visit the most celebrated criminal of the period, tired of always finding her door closed, and the poor woman was at least relieved of those uncalled for sympathies and that humiliating pity. Then her sole distraction was Rose, and the frequent visits of the prison chaplain.

That upright and prudent ecclesiastic always spoke of her with the greatest respect, and when some devout persons asked him:

"Come now, reverend sir, tell us the truth; is your prison penitent really guilty?"

He replied by a shake of the head:

"Who knows? whether formerly guilty or not, Madam de Rancogne is now a saint."

That declaration too passed for a tacit avowal, for what was the need of so much virtue, if not to expiate some fault?

The poor Countess, however, did not expiate, she had shed too many tears for those she loved, for George who she was accused of having poisoned, she!—for Octavius who was lying in the icy depths of the turf pits; for her daughter, her daughter was dead to her, for she would never see her! Yes, she had shed too many to be able to enjoy the serenity and consolation they afforded. Now her eyes were dry, but they were frequently fixed in contemplation when confronting her misery. Not a moment passed but what she meditated over it. At night she dreamed of it, and her petrified features had preserved a strange appearance of dread, as if she continually was assisting at some horrible spectacle, visible only to herself.

This however was not madness. At rare moments, when, either on account of Rose's tenderness, or a visit from the chaplain drew her from her mournful contemplation, the Helena of former times suddenly reappeared, as mild, as spirituel and as charming. But then it only lasted for a few seconds. For an instant she had left her prison, in her spirit she had been walking in the fields in the full light of the sun, in large tracts sown with flowers, under trees resounding with the merry song of happy birds. Her heart, her free heart, too, had left that jail, the incurable despair, in which it was for ever wrapt. Then the gates would close on the prisoner as a nailing down of the lid of a coffin, and then paying dearly for that moment of forgetfulness, she relapsed still deeper into the abyss of her grief and sadness.

Then she might be seen to pass on, mournful, with eyes fixed, gliding like a phantom on the surface of the lawn. The other prisoners silently whispered among themselves:

"That is remorse!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT MAN CLEMENT.

CLEMENT dwelt in an old watch house, almost in ruins, on the boundary of the forest of Braconne.

That hut, the walls of which were

roughly built with a red mortar, at first sight, could hardly be distinguished from a natural rock.

Nothing could be more sad than that spot, the stones barely covered with a slight layer of soil, it is intercepted by numbers of large projecting flints, that have the appearance of bones insufficiently buried. The moss grows gray, even the grass seems earthly and black.

However in this desolate valley lived the happy Clement, and having no parents he lived there alone.

This favor had been granted to him by the head-keeper, in return for good services and his willingness to work.

The furniture that garnished the only apartment of the hut occupied by Clement were the results of his own handiwork. Some blocks served for seats. Four planks, badly planed, nailed to fixed posts, formed a bed. Lastly a box roughly shaped by the adze, and a still more primitive table, shaking on its unequal supports, completed his stock.

In fact, Clement's dwelling was not in this obscure hut, but in the forest itself.

In it he passed his days from the break of day till the last gleam of twilight has passed away. Accustomed from his early youth to absolute solitude, he had made friends of the rocks and oaks, he chatted with the larks and robins, the squirrel was his friend and the rabbit his companion.

He knew the woods better than any one, where the violets embalmed the air, where the berries ripened, and the spots where to find the most savory mushrooms.

He too could read the murmurings of the winds among the trees; merely by the rustling of the leaves, he could tell it even on the darkest night:

That is an ash—or a chestnut—or a beech.

He could relate curious tales about beetles, ants, of all the animal creation, that frequented the plants.

All this had been taught him by nature, his only tutor.

The larks and the nightingales had been his teachers of music, and still the young girls would exclaim:

"For good singing or warbling there is none like Clement!"

Clement composed his own songs. He was the performer, the poet, the musician, and more than often the only audience.

He did not like to be disturbed, and whenever a stranger approached, the inspiration fled from his lips like a bird on the wing.

But when he was alone, at his work it was quite a serenade. There he would sing, sing without more interruption than the grasshopper in the grass or the linnet on the tree. All subjects alike. He spoke to his hatchet, to the tree that he was felling, to the bird that flew past him, to the flower whose odor pleased him, even to the thorn that pricked his hand. He gave vent to everything that occurred to his mind, and without any effort the words rhymed, the sounds harmonized, and the air, whether happy, sad, melancholy or sarcastic, adapted itself to the measure of his song.

It was wonderful! All the shepherds were aware of it. Whenever the hard, well-known strokes of his hatchet resounded on the skirts of the forest they hurried on, and hiding behind the bushes, would listen with delight. Sometimes the good woodman would discover them, but when he was in a good humor he did not care. On the contrary it sometimes made him sing the better, at the top of his voice, uttering sounds that acted as charms! The melody at first wild, would soften into artistic precision. The words adapted themselves to his strain, and as the sun shone on, the sky became cloudy, his song was joyous or plaintive.

But for some time the shepherds had missed their favorite airs, and filled with astonishment, asked each other:

"Is the winter coming upon us earlier than usual, that Clement has left off singing, while the nightingale still enlivens the woods?"

Clement never left his hut; with the tenderness of a mother or a Sister of Mercy he was nursing Joseph, his new friend, who for three long months was prostrated by a heavy sickness, and weakened by a burning fever.

Now Joseph was saved. Lying on the white bed, he gratefully gazed upon his nurse, crouched by the fireside, dexterously working osiers into fancy baskets, for, unable to work in the forest, the good fellow had adopted this new trade.

He was chanting a refrain in an undertone, addressed to the osiers, when suddenly he stopped both his song and his work. He nervously approached the bed in which Joseph had just painfully turned over; then, after having given him something to drink, he returned to his occupation, but his song was sad, and in it he mentioned the word "gold" in order to complete the rhyme.

On hearing the word "gold," the in-

valid shuddered, and raising himself, hurriedly cast off his covering. In the delirium of his fever, in the weakness of his torpor, he had for long weeks together forgotten, but now he remembered all, all!

Clement ran to the couch.

"Now then, my boy! what is it? just keep quiet. That is better! A little more patience, and in a few days you can romp to your heart's content, but now wait a little! You must keep your arms under cover, and be a good boy."

"What did you say then? what did you say? Did you not speak of gold?"

"That is good!" cried Clement, with a broad grin, "he is at his stories again! No, my little fellow, I did not speak about it, it is you who have done nothing else for months but talk of gold. May God bless us! we should be richer than the King if we had only as many tens as you have been mentioning thousands and millions! But silence on that score, or the fever will return, and then there will be a pretty kettle of fish!"

"No, my good Clement, no," replied Joseph, quietly; "the fever will not return; touch my hand, feel how cool it is, I am cured, Clement. I am not delirious, I am as sensible as you are, and by my faith I swear that if you will assist me, as soon as I can stand upon my legs, I will make you richer than the richest of the land."

This time Joseph spoke too collected, too calmly for Clement not to see that he was serious in what he said.

"Well, go on, my little fellow, I am listening."

"Have you," asked Joseph, "ever heard tell of the treasure of the cavern?"

"Rather," exclaimed Clement, "but who is fool enough to believe it?—to wit, old Potase, who was nearly famished when trying to find it."

"Well, then, if he sought for it," said Joseph, "I have found it."

Joseph had said, "I have found it!"

Clement opened his eyes, astonished, and listened with gaping mouth. Joseph continued:

"It is a treasure, a real treasure, I tell you so! There are more shining louis than this chamber can hold, and big boxes as full as an egg: jewels, precious stones, trinkets, and everything; but in order to gain possession of the treasure, Clement, you must have courage and go down the hole that I came out of."

"The devil take me," muttered Clement, "that's the work of a sorcerer, not that of a Christian!"

"You are wrong," quickly answered Joseph; and when he again rose up in bed, Clement did not attempt to make him lie down; "that grand, generous, good work! I speak frankly to you, for you have saved my life, and I have as much confidence in you as I should have in a brother. We will go, Clement, but there is nothing for us."

Then he repeated the history of Helena, as he knew it, the death of George, and old Beasson's will. And Clement drank in his words, and as Joseph described the terrors that he had surmounted, the perils that he had braved:

"Did you go through all that?" asked he, astounded, "did you do that?"

"Yes," said Joseph, "and unless you help me all my pains are lost."

"But I will help you, my brave boy! I'll help you," exclaimed Clement. "We will save your good lady. What, you went into that hole, and came out alone? If the two of us do not come out all safe and sound, it will be because God will prevent us!"

The two friends warmly clasped each other's hands, and thankful for his companion's promise, Joseph then entered into more ample details on the position of the cavern and the precautions to be adopted. As Clement observed they arranged their plans. They required ropes, then this, then that, and the woodman cast a sad look upon his basket-work.

"Hemp is dear," said he, "we may fell trees for months to come, we can never purchase all that is necessary. Well we must make the two ends meet, and for drugs, the chemist can give me credit as well as the baker for bread."

Joseph stretched out his hand towards the heap of clothes lying at his feet on the bed; there he found his belt, which the good Clement had not even touched, not even looked at, and then shook out the golden coins given him by old Beasson, that rolled over the coverlet in wild confusion.

"Is there enough here?" he asked.

From that day nothing was spoken of in the hut but the intended expedition to the bottom of the moving ditch. Joseph's health rapidly improved. The hope of succeeding in his enterprise, thanks to the courageous assistance sent him by Providence, helped to nerve his muscles. As soon as he could get up, the two friends went together to visit the hole, so as to complete their arrangements. The felled oak tree, the tree to

which Joseph owed his salvation, was still there, not yet stripped of its branches, barring the abyss, across which it was lying. In that position it formed an excellent support for a rope. The descent would thus be comparatively easy, but when once down below, how to come up again, and especially loaded with the great weight of the treasure.

"Bah!" very carelessly said Clement; "we'll see about that when we get there. God did not give brains to man merely to show him how to crack nuts."

Now that Joseph was so much better, although far too weak yet to undertake any hard work, the woodman could go away without fear. He was seen at the fairs or the markets, buying ropes, pick-axes, and bars of iron.

"What, Clement, are you going to dig a mine?" was frequently the question.

"Yes! yes! perhaps I am," he replied. The woodman carefully avoided giving further information.

In this manner he visited all the neighboring towns and villages, fearing that if he bought too much in one place, that it might cause suspicion to fall upon his actions. He was not idle even at night-time. As soon as Joseph fell asleep, he went out and did not return till daybreak, to snatch a few hours of hurried sleep. When he had collected all the necessary material he did not go out during the day-time, but was joining, nailing and filing as if for his life, then at night he left, and returned in the morning.

When Joseph questioned him he merely smiled mysteriously.

"Never you mind, my boy," said he. "What is done, does not want doing again. You only try to get better, and when I have time I will tell you my idea.

"Now," exclaimed Clement, throwing away the hammer after driving the last nail, "that is done, and now all is finished. You too are firm on your legs again, and if your heart is in the right place we can venture on our expedition at once."

While speaking he had taken the box that he had finished on his shoulders; a box light but strong with two handles on the sides like a hand basket. Joseph did not require much asking, and within half an hour's time the two friends were bending over the ridge of the moving ditch.

Nothing had changed in appearance. The withered foliage of the fallen tree still covered the greater part of the opening. Clement got astride on the trunk, and keeping his balance with his hands he crept up to the first branches, that is, nearly over the middle of the dark hole. Then all at once Joseph saw him disappear under the branches. His first impression was that he was lost, but then he reflected that if such had occurred Clement would have screamed out, so taking the same path he soon came to the spot where the woodman had disappeared.

This sudden disappearance was soon explained.

A knotted rope was fastened to the first prong of the oak, and covered from the outside by the branches, and formed an easy manner of reaching the lower platform of the rock.

Clement was standing there and made signs for Joseph to follow him.

This he did in less than two minutes.

Then Clement showed his comrade numerous iron spikes inserted at regular distance in the smooth face of the rock.

They could easily be reached by the feet and the hands, and by this means, difficult, it is true, but far from dangerous, a second platform could be reached, entirely hidden by the projecting rocks.

Here Clement's real work commenced, a gigantic work, when it is considered that he had accomplished it at night, without advice, without help.

The platform had been enlarged, the rock had been hollowed out, and all the necessary provisions were here as in a store. Nothing was wanting, flasks of brandy, chunks of bread, salt meats, boxes of candles, there was some of everything, even to some cloaks of the country.

The stock of tools was not less complete, there were crow-bars, chisels, pick-axes, hammers, ropes, and also the cold chisels that had been used by Clement to cut away the rock. There were also numbers of spikes, should any further quantity be required.

Lastly, a great beam had been placed across the gulf, like a bridge, fastened by solid iron clamps. At several points on this beam, strong enough to support an immense weight, pullies had been fixed, to act like a draw well, and around each, a rope was wound.

"And did you fix all this?" exclaimed Joseph astounded.

But without making any reply, Clement had already ascended some steps on his dangerous ladder.

"Look out for the box," he cried, "I am going to let it down from above!"

Night fell. Some farmers returning

from the fair at Laroche, heard a melancholy voice singing in the woods, and muttered as they stopped to listen; "Why that must be Clement singing at this hour."

But it was no use listening, for nothing more could be heard except the rustling of the leaves, and that was the last time that they heard Clement's song.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAGISTRATE.

It is about five o'clock in the morning: day is about to break: its first clear cold rays are penetrating through the folds of the heavy brown curtains, struggling with the dim lights emitted by the lamp.

A man is seated close to a bureau, covered with papers, and he appears engaged in deep meditation.

This meditation has doubtless been of long duration, and very absorbing, because he has not even paid any attention to the fire, that is fast expiring in the vast marble fireplace.

At intervals he gets up and walks about the room with long strides, then, wrapt up in his work, reseats himself, and feverishly turns over the sheets of paper. M. Maury Duquesnel, for that is the man now before us, was then some fifty years of age, but hard work and deep thinking had since long grooved his forehead with deep wrinkles. His whole youth, his whole force of life, which was great, seemed to have fled to his eyes. Smiling eyes, partially covered by projecting lashes, but which would open when least expected, and throw a glance so powerful that it seemed at one blow to enlighten the soul.

M. Maury Duquesnel had remained a bachelor, and when his friends mildly rallied him on this score, and tried to convert him to marriage, he contented himself with smilingly shaking his head. Like all bachelors, for whom solitude nearly always forms an innocent mania, this magistrate thought himself a skeptic. But there was no bitterness in his skepticism. He had seen the evil from too near, under every form, not to be able to look upon it as a disease. "Mad dogs must be got rid of!" he replied to all who discussed capital punishment in his hearing. But he soon added, for the benefit of the fanatics of that same principle: "But, still, no blow must be struck in hatred." He also often said: "We are not avengers, we are guardians! Let us protect society against those madmen, called criminals, but let us not judge them, for we too shall be judged!" Otherwise, that magistrate, who was really worthy of that title, entertained an artistic passion for his mission. Familiarised by study with all the moral failings, which he styled diseases of the soul, he reconstructed a crime on the minutest traces, in the same manner as a naturalist reconstructs the skeletons of the past eras. But, different from many of his colleagues, while recognising the primitive value of physical proofs, without which it would be impossible to condemn, he allowed his opinion rather to be guided by the moral proofs. When he had minutely examined his prisoner, his instincts, his passions, the desires that most influenced his mind, and found that they all respectively coincided with the case, then only was his conscience clear. It often occurred that he would only moderately consider the most terrible material proofs, because one of those moral proofs, according to his judgment, completely contradicted the others. He moreover had one theory that served to direct his conduct in very difficult cases:

When a string of evidence is complete, when a magistrate has coolly compared all the points, when his mind is convinced, and that a presumption is left, however weak, in favor of the accused, however terrible the proofs, that presumption is generally right in face of all the rest. Now, M. Maury Duquesnel had never experienced this moral doubt so strong as in the case of Quisran Rancogne. Forced to yield to the evidence of the force of facts, he however still doubted; and this is why we now find him, nearly six months after the condemnation of the Countess Helena, still perusing the numerous passages of the case.

The door of the study was softly opened. Laurent, the magistrate's valet, entered on tip-toe, bearing a huge faggot with which he re-kindled the fire, without appearing to be the least astonished at finding his master up at that early hour. He had long ago been accustomed to those nights passed in labor, and only interrupted by the break of day.

The noise of the sticks falling on the hearth, caused M. Maury Duquesnel to raise his head.

"Ah! is that you, Laurent. Has no one called?"

"No sir! no one."

"I have an audience this morning. Will you recognise that young man who called upon me the day before yesterday?"

"That little young fellow, without any beard?"

"That is the one. As soon as he comes bring him in: I am only at home for him."

"Very well, sir."

At the same moment two slight knocks resounded on the door.

"That must be him," exclaimed M. Duquesnel, raising. "Do not let any one disturb us, do you hear, Laurent."

Then with a clear voice he called out:

"Come in."

The reader will hardly have recognized that this visitor was none other than Joseph.

The last few months, without changing the youthful grace of his features had given the head of a man. How many serious thoughts had traversed that pensive forehead, as smooth as a piece of ivory! What sadness had clouded those dark blue eyes, what bitterness had passed those laughing lips!

He still wore the garb of the Limousin peasants, but the short jacket of thick wool, generally heavy and uncomely, had almost the appearance of elegance on that muscular, slim form. In his hand he held a low black hat, and shaking back his long locks, with an open look, a firm attitude, without effrontery, he advanced towards the magistrate:

"So you have come! At last you have come," cried the latter. "Oh! if you had only known with what impatience I have awaited you. Your revelations of the other day have nearly driven me mad! Can I have condemned an innocent person? I!——"

"Not only an innocent person," said Joseph seriously, "but a saint."

The judge had again seated himself at his bureau and nervously hurried over the leaves of the huge volume.

"And to say," said he, again starting up, "that all this is true, that the evidence does not fail in anything, and that this heap of evident proofs, incontestable, undisputed, for want of a ray of light to show it in its true color, has caused us to be guilty of an irreparable injustice!"

He turned towards Joseph, and covering with one of those looks previously alluded to:

"You, at least, are not misleading me!"

Joseph bravely withstood the exclamation and the look, not a muscle of his face moved, and in a voice free from all emotion and fear:

"Let you conscience judge whether I lie!"

"No," muttered M. Duquesnel, as if speaking to himself, "with such a voice and such a look, to lie is impossible! But then—then——"

He suddenly sat down.

"Perhaps I have missed some details of your narrative," he said coolly. "Re commence again. I have obtained these documents from the clerk so as to follow every detail. Proceed slowly and do not forget anything.

"I shall not forget anything," replied Joseph with the same simplicity.

And he commenced his recital.

Day by day, hour by hour, he initiated the magistrate into the most minute details of that mysterious drama, that had so terribly been unfolded at the bottom of the turf pits; and as he proceeded in his narrative M. Duquesnel, compared it with the minutes of the trial.

In the large chamber, the clear voice of Joseph was only heard, interrupted at times by a deep exclamation on the part of his hearer, and the rustling of the sheets of paper, that was all.

The narrative occupied some time. When it was finished, when the judge and the boy looked at each other, both were pale and perspiring heavily.

M. Duquesnel slowly walked round the apartment, and stopped before Joseph, who silently listened.

"Then you are the accuser in this case?" he asked.

"I accuse," replied Joseph, "Hercules Champion, Matifay, Toinon the doctor, and the workman James Limaille.

"I accuse Hercules Champion with having poisoned his benefactor, Count George, and for having falsely caused the condemnation of the Countess Helena.

"I accuse Doctor Toinon with complicity in this double crime.

"I accuse Matifay and Limaille for having treacherously assassinated Count Octavius in the turf pits."

"Oh, but," exclaimed the judge, "but the proofs! the proofs!"

Both were silent for a moment.

Then the judge continued:

"Yes, the proofs. I know they are not wanted between you and me, I believe your assertion, it is enough; but will it convince the jury! Already in the case of your unfortunate mistress I

was blamed for being predisposed and weak! What would be said if I were to be found prosecuting on a doubtful evidence, in order to justify her, the most respectable people of this locality? Madam de Rancogne has prevented any revision of her trial by refusing to enter an appeal; on the other hand, that unfortunate political business of Count Octavius, mixed up in that affair, compromises our case in the eyes of the authorities."

He feverishly paced up and down the apartment.

"Public opinion is now exasperated against Madam de Rancogne; I feel sure that by endeavoring to liberate her judicially, that I should perhaps invoke but a severer sentence. But what to do? What can be done? Say! WHAT do you want me to do?"

Joseph took his hand and carried it to his lips with a show of respect that almost bounded on veneration.

"Act according to the dictation of your upright conscience, judge," said he. "I have told you the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, according to my duty. I now place the fate of Madam de Rancogne in your hands, sure that she will find no nobler or generous defender."

"Yes! yes!" cried M. Duquesnel, "from this day I will vow myself to that task. But it is not generosity, it is my duty. Oh! if I had only listened to the voice that told me: You are being deceived! What a fearful calamity would have been avoided! But I will repair it to the extent of my power; yes, should I be forced to go to the steps of the throne!"

That day was a happy day to the sad, condemned woman. Joseph was allowed to visit her in prison, and bring her some words of consolation and hope. Not seeing him appear at the trial, she had thought:

"He must have died while protecting my poor Octavius."

Or perhaps still more discouragingly:

"He, too, has betrayed me; he, too, has joined the ranks of my persecutors."

Injustice renders the most generous minds, mistrustful and full of bitterness.

And now Joseph was not dead, and Joseph had not betrayed her! and kneeling at her feet, as before a saint, he covered her hands with tears, telling her that endeavors were being made for her deliverance, that she should be saved!

Joseph left the prison at four o'clock, according to the regulations, but he promised his mistress another visit on the next day, and many for the following days, until his efforts, combined with those of M. Duquesnel, should prove victorious.

Moreover, in the evening, after nightfall, Helena received another visit, a mysterious visit,—a visit from Mr. Duquesnel himself.

He commenced by sanctioning, as far as he was concerned, all the assertions brought forward by Joseph.

He had absolute faith in the innocence of the Countess de Rancogne. He did not call upon her as a judge, but as a defender, as a friend: not to subject her to more interrogations, but to take counsel with her as to the measures to be employed in order to repair, as much as possible the involuntary injustice.

To undertake a judicial vindication, alas! that was out of the question, for the reasons already stated to Joseph.

The Countess had not given notice of appeal; therefore, to re-open the trial, it was indispensable to directly prosecute the real authors of the crime. But against them there were no real proofs, nothing but the assertions made by Joseph, by the Countess, and by Rose. Champion and his accomplices would naturally be acquitted, and the situation of the condemned woman would not be improved.

The silence of the Countess proved clearly, on that point, how she participated in the disconsolate convictions of the magistrate. She listened to him with drooping hands and head, and large tears, the first that she had shed for months, rolled down her withered cheeks.

Alas! she had been foolish enough to hope.

On seeing Joseph return, on seeing her accuser transform himself into her most staunch defender, she had thought:

"God is just! Fate is tired of persecuting me; the unmerited expiation will be changed into a glorious martyrdom."

And all was but a dream, and the compassionate affirmations of her judge condemned her still more inexorably than his unrelenting sentence.

"May the will of God be done!" she at last said, stifling her sobs by a powerful effort of resignation; "but condemned to live forever more in this tomb of infamy, I shall at least have the consolation of being revindicated in the mind of one upright man. Thanks for your visit, sir; you have caused me much ill, but invol-

untarily and under the belief of doing your sacred duty: if my forgiveness be wanting to tranquilise your conscience, I grant it with all my heart. I even give you more," she added, but not without a shade of pride:

"I give you the esteem of a woman, that will not fail under the weight of an unmerited shame, that she did when honored and loved by the world."

She gave her hand, as cold and as damp as a piece of ivory, to the judge, who clasped it between his own.

On wishing to follow him, he softly held her back.

"Why discourage you and myself so hastily? No! no! madam, there may be yet a bright future in store for you, here below. The lid of your tomb is not so inexorably sealed, but that the efforts of an honest man may yet raise it."

"What do you infer, sir?" exclaimed Helena nearly fainting. "Oh! for pity's sake, speak! No false hope! Two such trials as those would kill me."

"Yes, madam," forcibly continued the magistrate, "That tomb shall be opened, shall be opened by me. But for that purpose, the difficulties of which I will not dissimulate, I want help,—a lever—and you alone can furnish it."

"What is wanting? Could you doubt but that I could give it freely?"

"You must simply sign this paper," said M. Duquesnel.

"At once! at once!"

And with trembling hands she tore the document from her deliverer's grasp.

But as soon as she had glanced over it she let it fall.

"A question for pity's sake," she muttered. "Have you considered this, sir? This would be acknowledging the crime, it would be ratifying by my own consent, the only sentence that condemned me. It is rehabilitation, justice, that I require not pardon. Oh! how could you propose such an act, and give me such advice?"

"And I still counsel you to do it," exclaimed M. Duquesnel eagerly.

"Oh! fear nothing! This demand, on my word of honor, is a measure to be used, nothing more. I will not settle any disgraceful act in your name: you will leave this cell as pure, as holy in the sight of all as you can be in the secret of your own soul, as honored as you now are by me! You desire a rehabilitation, madam, this you shall have, and a brilliant one, as solemn as the insult. But allow me, have confidence, sign that paper, give it to me as you would give me the order to defend you as your counsel, instead of unfortunately having been your accuser."

For a long time he continued in this strain, and, hesitatingly, Helena listened to him; the warmth of that conviction gained her soul. Duquesnel had picked up the paper and had placed it before her, he had placed a pen between her fingers, and weeping, begging, supplicating; on his knees, he took her hand as if to oblige her to sign, he became more urging, more eloquent.

At last she placed her hand on the paper and raising her beautiful face to the magistrate:

"On your honor, you swear to me, that by this mysterious measure, that you propose to use, I in no manner sanction the sentence that condemned me?"

"I swear it to you!"

"Well then, sir, be satisfied, I will sign it."

M. Maury Duquesnel eagerly seized the paper and placed it in his breast, as if afraid of its being snatched from him again.

"And now, madam, if I fail to save you, I will perish: I will lose esteem, fortune, all. And again I repeat this solemn oath, not to bring you pardon, but a complete acquittal."

On uttering this last exclamation, he rushed into the passage, flew down the steps, and passed the court like a whirlwind, leaped through the open door of the prison, and, without taking the time to call at his house, went straight to the stable, where a carriage and horses, all ready to start, awaited him.

Poor Helena continued her sad prison life; but from that moment a ray of hope gleamed through her mournful condition. At times she doubted, not the integrity of her unexpected protector, but his power: but then, his alternate expressions of discouragement and hope were life itself. Besides, was not Joseph there, repeating a hundred times over the enthusiastic assurances of the magistrate?

"If he promised it to you, madam, he will do it, do not fear!" said he.

"No, madam, do not doubt it, for Joseph asserts it," repeated the soft voice of Rose.

And madam, caressing the fair heads of the young people, seated at her side, was inclined at times not to doubt.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SUPREME ACQUITAL.

THE absence of M. Maury Duquesnel lasted for about a week. A century of doubt and uncertainty. The hours were no more filled with leisure, but were haunted by the idea of—can I be saved? Shall I be? And as the days advanced, this idea became more pressing, after participating in the confidence inspired by Rose and Joseph, she would frequently regret her former impassibility.

At last the magistrate returned. Rose and Joseph were there when the turnkey announced his visit to the prisoner. That moment was going to decide her destiny! That minute so long looked for, how she wished to forego it for ever! All the unfavorable chances pressed themselves upon her mind: she who, in the morning, had complained of M. Duquesnel's slowness, now exclaimed:

"How soon he has returned!"

A hasty step resounded in the passage, the door opened, M. Duquesnel entered. His face beamed with joy, and sinking into her chair, Helena thought:

"I am saved!"

Rose and Joseph, although they ardently wished to be present and know at once the news brought, were about to retire, but the judge motioned them back,

"Madam," said he addressing himself to Helena, "my efforts have met with the success that I hoped for. I obtained the honor of an audience with his majesty himself, and from this moment the doors of this prison can be open to you."

Guided by a feeling of enthusiasm, Helena has cast herself at his feet, and covering his hand with tears, she sobbed:

"God bless you, sir! God bless you!"

"Stop, Madam," replied M. Duquesnel, forcing her mildly to be seated; "here is your pardon, signed by the King's own hand. But I, in addition, promised you a complete acquittal. To-day I am here to offer it to you, not having the right to impose it."

A brief silence followed. Here as Helena did not reply, M. Duquesnel continued, slightly embarrassed:

"You were free, Madam, rich, honored. My fatal investigations robbed you of them all, and I feel it my duty to return them. The goodness of the king allows me to return liberty; as to fortune and honor, I can but offer you mine."

And as if afraid, she appeared not to understand, he added:

"Will you accept the moiety of my name, Madam? It is not brilliant, but I swear it is to be that of an upright man."

"Yes! yes!" she exclaimed, "the most upright, the most noble, the most generous of men, but I have vowed not to bear the name of any other man but that of my dear husband and brother. Besides, far from acquiting me, your generosity would but cause you to lose yourself with me. They would say: Who knows? Our action would be attributed to some shameful motive, although far be it from your and my thought. I regret, sir, that what I feared has come to pass. I am to leave here, sir, pardoned, but not for justice. God is witness that sooner would I remain here in this prison conscious of my innocence, than be free with the fearful conviction that by asking for pardon, I have, by that one act, acknowledged myself guilty."

M. Duquesnel was stupefied by that plaintive resignation.

"Yes, Madam, I own that I have been imprudent, but there was no other path of deliverance. Besides, I did not plead in your name. I spoke boldly. His Excellency the Minister was convinced by me. It is not an act of clemency that they have done, but an act of justice. However, I shall not endeavor to conquer the scruples, the delicacy of which I duly appreciate. Here is the other proposal that I submitted to your august protectors, and to which they have given their approval."

At this moment, M. Duquesnel noticed the presence of Rose and Joseph, who discreetly stood back. Joseph fully understood the look cast towards him, for taking Rose by the hand, he drew her towards the door, and signing to the warder to open it, they went out.

The second conversation between Helena and the magistrate lasted long. What passed has never been revealed. Joseph could only catch the last words spoken, when M. Duquesnel was about to take leave of Helena, never to see her more:

"Sir," she said, in a voice full of gratitude, "as far as concerns me, I ought not, nor could not accept the sacrifice you propose. But as you consented to give your name to the mother, allow her to let your generous protection extend to the daughter. That assurance will lessen the weight of my trouble, and it

is the only consolation that you can give me for the future."

"What," cried Joseph, "but then?"

"Well, then," sadly replied the magistrate, "that noble woman has refused the pardon that I brought her. That pardon was not yet known, and I have destroyed it."

From that moment, the last interview that she had with M. Maury Duquesnel, Madam de Rancogne allowed herself to be dragged down by the sad despair of former times.

From day to day the sadness spread like a fog, getting thicker and denser, and seemed to influence all nature.

Even Rose and Joseph, in spite of their devotedness, lost courage in urging their endeavors to dispel this horrible sadness.

Without communicating their impressions, their hearts were filled with mournful presentiments, which were to be realized but too soon. Every day Madam de Rancogne grew weaker under the weight of the incurable trouble that gnawed at her heart.

A week had scarcely elapsed since the visit of M. Duquesnel, when she took to her bed. The prison doctor designated her malady as one produced by languor.

Nothing was spared in order to save this existence vowed to misfortune. Doctor Ozam, one of the Parisian celebrities, was called in by M. Duquesnel. He, too, was struck by the simple grandeur of the invalid. As her life ebbed, a ray of light as if from on high, seemed to emanate from her.

At last Dr. Ozam was obliged to state that he had no hopes. The incidents of the disease were not so bad, but the general weakness was great. The very centre of life was being extinguished.

"I am sure I could save you," said the doctor, "if you only wished to live."

But she shook her head, and with a feeble smile, seemed to think:

"For what purpose?"

In the town nothing was spoken of but the saintly criminal. It caused a kind of celebrity to surround her name.

Some said: "She died like a martyr."

"Yes," replied others, "but how has she lived?"

As for M. Duquesnel, he was suddenly seized with a singular melancholy. It was not, however, on account of seeing his ambitious plans fail, (the only passion that he had ever been known to foster), for in the same year he was appointed First President of the Court of Bordeaux. But he only held this high post for a short time. He died during the following year, without any doctor having been able to account for the sudden dissolution of such a powerful organization.

One morning the prison chapel opened for the public. The whole town wanted to attend the funeral of the Countess Helena de Rancogne. Among the number, could be distinguished kneeling on the chairs, many of the fair faces that were present at the trial.

M. Duquesnel was present at the ceremony. He stood upright, pale and cold. It seemed as if he were there, to represent Justice to the last, and levy an injunction on the coffin.

The crowd, too, gazed upon Hercules Champion, in deep mourning, and his companion Matifay. Fingers were pointed at the little girl, dressed in black, borne in the arms of her nurse.

"That is her child," they whispered, "the poor thing!"

But the real mourners were doubtless Rose and Joseph. They wept silently behind a pillar, and their neighbors, astonished at such deep felt grief, exclaimed:

"What does this mean?"

Then, some well informed persons recognized Rose.

These two faithful servants, only accompanied the bier to the enclosure reserved for criminals. Not alone, however, Dr. Ozam was there to render this last duty to his patient. He addressed Rose on leaving the cemetry, and spoke lowly to her for a few moments.

What transpired is not known, but after that conversation Rose dried her tears.

During the following week, the papers announced that Helena Romieux, widow de Rancogne, was pardoned. A pardon that fell but on a tomb.

Scarcely two days have passed since the funeral of Madam Helena de Rancogne.

A carriage stopped before the chief hotel of Ambazac, it contained two travellers.

A young man in years, but whose pensive brow, crowned by fair long curly hair, shewed artificial age caused by profound meditation.

At his side, a child, whose deep eye contained a world of aspiration, disillusion, perhaps plans of vengeance.

The doctor Ozam and Joseph.

The carriage stopped and while the hostlers changed the horses, whose traces clattered over the stones, the doctor grasped Joseph's hand and muttered:

"Hope!"

He made a sign to the host, who hurriedly approached, and after a short conversation, carried on in a low tone, disappeared under the door of the inn.

Five minutes afterwards, the horses were harnessed, the postilion in his seat, two women slowly descended the steps of the inn, and took their seats in the carriage.

Joseph felt his heart close with a sudden pang.

One of these women was Rose. Her companion, covered with a long black widow's veil, who could she be?

He dared not ask, but the veiled traveller, opening a prayer-book that she held in her hand, read the following verse from the Holy Scripture:

"And Jesus bending over the edge of the grave, cried:

"*Lazarus arise.*

"*And Lazarus arose and walked.*"

The postilion loudly cracked his whip, the traces clattered and the horses started off in full trot.

In the carriage there was weeping and laughing at the same time.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MISERIES OF THE RICH—BLUE AND WHITE.

It was in a large court shaded by lime trees: the court of the Countess of B——. The scholars, in groups of five or six, were running about, playing and skipping like a flock of young birds, whilst the sister matrons were counting their beads, and sauntering beneath the trees.

At the bottom of the court, in a shady corner, two little girls were seated, lonely upon a stone bench, under the shade of a wild chesnut tree which already, at that early period, was green.

Although at first sight they resemble each other, a thousand differences exist between them, in their dress and also in their actions, which on closer examination would classify them under two distinct ranks of society.

The one bore around her neck the loop of blue silk, an indication that she belonged to the grandees; the other, although about the same age, wore only the white ribbon of the mediums.

The first one, the blue, was an adorable blonde of seventeen. The aristocratic fineness of her hands, her feet, and her long, undulating neck, were evident signs of blood. She was rich, and this was indicated by a silken dress, although of the greatest simplicity. The other, a brunette, fully as beautiful as her friend, but of a more vulgar cast, was plainly dressed in woolen serge, according to the rules; and the needle marks on her small white fingers plainly proved that embroidery and sewing were not merely a pastime, but furnished also the means of support.

Ursula Durand, in fact, while pursuing the studies of the mediums, paid for her board and instruction by doing the needlework of the establishment, while Miss Cyprienne de Penpais was the head boarder and the pride of the place.

The two, however, the daughter of the aristocracy and the workingman's daughter, chatted familiarly with the pleasant nonchalance of youth. They were intimate frieuds, and that was accounted for by the fact that no scholars were admitted to the convent of B——, above fifteen years of age. But Cyprienne and Ursula, either by negligence of their relatives or for some ulterior reason, had remained there beyond the period when wealthy families usually recall their daughters in order to give them an instruction at home, more complete and more suited to the world than that taught by the holy sisters. On this score Cyprienne lacked nothing, for masters attended her to complete her studies in those branches not included in the routine of the convent. As for Ursula, she doubtless belonged to some poor family, unable to afford the expense of a more luxurious education.

For this reason, as their elder companions had gradually left, Cyprienne and Ursula had become attached to each other. Two long years ago, the last of their first friends had bid them "Good bye," and they were left alone among that crowd of young girls.

The similarity of their destinies, although so wildly different at the outset, had to no small degree contributed to draw together two souls, so calculated to love each other. As to her family, Ursula only knew a married cousin who was called Madam Celina Morel. That young and beautiful woman, whose dress indicated easy circumstances, at least as far as could be judged during her rare visits to Ursula, seemed passionately to love her. Sighs, raptures and kisses abounded at each visit. But to these the signs of affection were limited: she had only paid the school-bills for the first years,

mentioning that as soon as possible Ursula would have to provide for herself. The Lady Superior was doubtless in the secret of Madam Morel, for frequently she would say to Ursula:

"You must pray for your cousin, my child, and love her!" Cypriene knew her parents, but was she any the happier? Rich, noble, occupying one of the first ranks in Parisian society, how could they have exiled their daughter so far from them? Why, during ten long years, had she like Ursula been doomed to pass the holidays in the humble court or the large garden of the convent? Did they not love her then? Alas! the poor child was obliged at times to avow it, when reading her mother's letters, so dry and so concisely cold. Ursula, at least, had a mystery attached to her existence. That word mystery, answers for all. But Cyprienne whose position was clearly defined could only find one reason for the silence and the negligence of her people, indifference or hatred.

Her father only came to see her three times a year in the parlor. He asked her if she wanted anything, if she was unhappy, then kissing her on the forehead, slipped a purse of gold into her hands, "To supply her whims or charities," that was all. How often, when hearing the door close behind him, had Cyprienne not silently wished that he had not come.

One day however, about a year later, she had been happy, she had received a letter, short and cold as usual, in which she was told to work well and satisfy the Lady Superior; but at the bottom of the sheet of paper, under the signature, Cyprienne had perceived a round white mark, the mark of a tear. Her mother had then shed tears when writing that brief note! Her mother loved her then! Oh! how often since then had the poor girl kissed that mark! how often had she and Ursula held counsel over it! and how much more was Ursula loved when her ideas about that mark coincided with those of Cyprienne!

From that day, during the long chattings when at leisure, Cyprienne's mother was the only topic of conversation. God only knows what thoughts were suggested to those childish minds. by that mark and the apparent coolness.

Then it was Ursula's turn, she spoke of the renowned married cousin, they were utterly at a loss to account for the similiarity of situations, and the dear girls gave way to fresh outbursts of love and friendship.

Now, but little was spoken on the stone bench, some tears were shed. During the morning Cyprienne had received a letter from her father announcing his arrival. According to the letter the hour had come, when Cyprienne was to leave the school, return to the affections of her parents and enter the world. Tomorrow he was to come to carry her back to Paris.

Cyprienne was sad, but Ursula still more so. What would become of her, now that they were to be seperated, perhaps for ever, seperated from her only friend? But Ursula had a brave heart, she dried her tears and was the first to smile.

"Why be sad," said she, "are you not going to rejoin your mother?"

"Yes," said Cyprienne, with a heavy sigh, but I shall lose you."

"Oh! nonsense," replied Ursula, carelessly, "you will have your balls and your soiries, grand dresses, music, and all of that! Here are reasons enough to make you forget poor Ursula."

"Never! never! I swear to it."

"What, you say never, and there I see your feet, going at the bare idea of dancing. Oh! the world must be so beautiful?"

"Yes!" artlessly said Cyprienne, "that must be so nice!"

"And then you are rich, noble, as pretty as an angel. I should like to see you dressed for the first party. How pretty you would look!"

"I don't know! but I know that I should be so afraid! Only think, to be stared at by every body!"

"By every one," muttered Ursula, "and to be loved only by one!"

Then again they were silent, and only indulged in side glances and smiles. Because, why not avow that all the chattings were not solely about Cyprienne's mother or Ursula's married cousin. If tears was plentifully shed on the past, some sighs were devoted to dreams of the future. Oh! sweet dreams, chaste love! How beautiful they are, how pure, how poetical are the heroes created by those dear girls in their hours of melancholy.

As through the railings of the court they view the outside world, full of love, sunshine, unknown enjoyments. I will have him fair, cries Fanny, and Rosina replies, I rather prefer him to be dark! But this is said so chastely, so artless, as if they were speaking of their dolls. Often, after long arguments, it had been arranged between Ursula and Cyprienne that *he* should be dark and melancholy,

with eyes as large as that, little moustaches, and a little smile, rather sad, noble, of course. Wealth was not at all made a question of. Cyprienne was rich enough for two. No discussion was entered upon the subject of Ursula's choice and she felt angry whenever her friend attempted to broach it.

"Now look here," she would say, "I love you so well, Miss, that it seems as if we both had but one heart. You shall be the happy part of my soul, and knowing that you are beloved, rich, admired, I assure you that I will resign myself without regret to obscurity and silence. You have but to be beautiful Madam the Countess; as for me, do not forget that I am but a poor girl without fortune, without name: poor girls have no time to be loved. Now, as fair sixteen must have a romance, let us dream yours, Cyprienne, because dreaming it together it seems as if I enjoyed it with you."

The recess was over, the bell rang, and arm-in-arm the two scholars went towards the schoolroom, but on their way they met the sister teacher who conducted them to the Lady Superior.

"Both of us?" asked Ursula, astonished.

"Both!" replied the sister.

The Superior awaited her two children, for so she called them in her true and loving manner, in her little oratory. "The doors of this convent will be open to you to-morrow, and on the same day I shall lose my two brightest doves. You, Cyprienne, have received a letter from your father; I, Ursula, have received one from your cousin, who is coming to fetch you. New duties will open for you my dear children, and I know you enough to feel easy of the manner in which you will enter upon them. I therefore have but one thing to recommend to you. Troubles, pains, perhaps cruel ones, and widely different, await you both. Submit yourselves to them with patience and courage. Let your friendship be your support. Many social conventions separate you, do not endeavor to break them: but although separated in act, remain united in heart. I have not, in any manner, influenced your friendship; at first, I was even startled to find you so intimate, to-day I bless that friendship. Whenever you should want counsel or consolation, seek it from none but each other. Cyprienne, to you I confide Ursula: Ursula, to you I confide Cyprienne.

"And now, adieu: my children, embrace me."

The two young girls threw themselves around the saintly woman's neck, whom they were never more to see, and she had to employ mild violence to remove them. As soon as the door of the oratory was closed upon them, Cyprienne and Ursula burst into tears, and in one long embrace pledged a lasting and eternal friendship.

The recommendation of the Lady Superior, the vague hints at suffering and trials that she threw out, changed what at first had appeared to be the caprice of two frank hearts seeking affection, into a sincere devotion. What, could Cyprienne be of service to Ursula, Ursula of service to Cyprienne? Could they be called upon to devote themselves to each other?

Alas! the calls of life separated them. At the door of the convent one would go to the right and the other to the left—for one the giddy life of the world, the revels of luxury, nights passed in the glittering light of halls; for the other stern labor by the calm light of a lamp, the trials of poverty.

What odds! Though reclining on silk and velvet, Cyprienne would still think of Ursula; while Ursula, work in hand, bending over some embroidery, destined for another to wear, would dream of Cyprienne.

They, moreover, vowed never to lose sight of each other; to keep each other duly informed in the future of their great joys and their great griefs, in the same manner that they had confided to each other, in the convent, their lesser thoughts and pleasures. And as the familiar interviews under the old chestnut tree would be rendered impossible, they determined to replace them by writing to each other daily, and exchanging their most secret actions and their innermost thoughts.

During the whole day, employed in making preparations for their departure, they could speak of nothing but this one great plan.

Cyprienne, as a surprise, gave Ursula a diminutive diary, in white parchment, bearing on the cover the word *Friendship* in golden letters. Notwithstanding her remonstrances, Ursula would insist upon spending her last coin in the purchase of a writing-book covered with blue velvet, as a gift to her friend.

"In this manner," she said, "we shall always remain White and Blue."

On the next day many tears were shed in the parlor. M. de Puisaye was there: although he rather frightened them by his cold air, his presence could not stop

the effusion of the feeling of the young girls. When Cyprienne had already taken her seat in the carriage which was to bear her away, Ursula, standing on the steps, still held her clasped in her arms.

At last M. de Puisaye seemed visibly to be impatient, she alighted, and the door closed with a dry sound that went to Ursula's very heart. She however still stood on the door steps and did not enter until the carriage was fairly out of sight.

She could not leave before the evening, accompanied by a stout lady who had come to fetch her. That woman, of such a vulgar appearance, badly dressed in a pretentious red shawl, had never before visited the convent, although she called herself Ursula's aunt. With a benign smile she informed her, that henceforth they would live together.

"At all events, my dear, we are not rich, but a heart No. 1, you can rely upon it! we will do our best to make our little chick as happy as a butterfly; we have our faults, like everybody else, by Jove. But at the bottom I am a good soul and so is Gosse, too. Gosse is my husband, at your service, and your uncle, my dear little pet. Madam Morel has, therefore, entrusted you to our care, and don't fear but you will be in good hands."

The same monologue was maintained, in the same tone, during the whole journey. At first Ursula merely replied to the protestations of the stout lady by monosyllables. Her thoughts were far away from the lumbering vehicle. At last she gave way and tried to think that, after all, Madam Gosse, in spite of her vulgarity, did not seem to be a bad soul. She surrounded her "dear chick" by a thousand attentions, and pressed the contents of a well filled bag of provisions upon her.

After the lapse of three or four hours, Ursula had become accustomed to the unsupportable chattering kept up by her aunt, and she then asked for some particulars of the plans laid down in her respect by Madam Morel.

She then learnt that she had to support herself by working, which eased her of the thought that she should be under any obligation to the Gosses. Madam Morel had already secured her a place in one of the first establishments in Paris, with Madam Rosel: a nice little room had been prepared over that occupied by M. and Madam Gosse; in fact all was provided for. This information was obtained without much trouble. Madam Gosse anticipated all these questions, but when Ursula endeavoured to gain some particulars respecting Madam Morel, the stout lady obstinately sank into a profound and mysterious silence. Even after two or three attempts, she plainly replied that she could not satisfy any inquisitive questions respecting her "married cousin," all that she knew, was, that beyond herself and her husband, Madam Morel was the dear little pet's best friend.

Ursula, like young, inexperienced people, relied upon herself, and to a certain extent this mystery caused her some uneasiness. Against her will, she could not forget the last words of the Lady Superior, the grief, the dangers and the pains that she had hinted at, in the future. But people are not young for mere nothing. The curious position in which she was placed rather amused Ursula. What odds if the future should appear rather cloudy, when young, courageous and especially on the road to Paris? The life there was sure to be gayer than that in the convent, especially now that Cyprienne had left. Then, again, Cyprienne was going to Paris, and they would be near each other.

Indulging in this thought, the young girl leaned her head on the cushions of the carriage and gradually fell asleep. She did not awake until the wheels rumbled over the hard pavement of the huge city. Three quarters of an hour later the coach drew up in the yard in the Place de Notre Dame des Victoires, and stupefied by the rushing of the people and the noise, poor Ursula, hanging on Madam Gosse's arm, understood, in terror, that although two loving souls may be in the same city, they can be separated as if by a hundred leagues.

Standing by the side of the coach, stood a sharp-nosed, round-bellied man, clad in a long blue coat with gilt buttons, and short pants; a stick under his arm, a high white hat upon his head. He seemed to be expecting some one. On the other hand Madam Gosse was rolling her eyes about, evidently trying to discover a known face. As soon as she perceived the little man she flew towards him, dragging Ursula along with her.

"Come, come quick! There stands M. Gosse."

Adding the deed to the words, she threw herself upon her husband's breast.

"Good day, my dear boy! Here is Mlle. Ursula, our niece."

The dear boy saluted politely, then in

a gruff voice, without the least emotion, he mumbled:

"How d'ye do, my adored Bebelle."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BALL AT THE MANSION OF THE COUNTESS DE MONTE-CRISTO.

In the beautiful winter of the year of grace 18——, the queen of the season was Madam de Monte-Cristo. The celebrated novel of Alexandre Dumas, (The Count of Monte-Cristo), was in the height of its vogue, and naturally gave a name to that great anonymous lady who cast her gold broadcast with a regal prodigality, and surrounded herself with a truly romantic mystery.

Whence she came, none knew: noble she must be, her distinguished bearing left no doubt on that score, worthy of all respect she really was, and whispers went around about some high protection that had transpired on several occasions. People who pretended to know everything, and there are many such in that small city of Paris, had each their own tale about Madam de Monte-Cristo! Some asserted that she was a Moldavian Princess, travelling after the style of Christina, Queen of Sweden: others that she had come straight from Constantinople and that she had married the Sultan. Others again stated that she was merely a friend of the famous Lady Esther Stanhope, whose name was then in every one's mouth! The most mysterious version, propagated by the knowing few, whispered about some wonderful political legend, which would fain prove that Madam de Monte-Cristo was but an adventurer of the upper class, a kind of Duchess of Lamothe Valois, charged by the Tuilleries with some important political mission.

However it might have been, and the reader can assume which version he pleases, but during that season Madam de Monte-Cristo was the star of high life, in the first degree.

Her hotel in the Champs Elysees, could vie with the most luxurious dwellings of Paris, and her equipages were unique! No one could estimate the value of her jewel-case, and to be fashionable it sufficed to be admired by her.

Planets are but stars borrowing rays from the sun. Madam de Monte-Cristo was known to have many acquaintances, very many, but very few intimate friends.

Her servants had been hired in Paris, and none knew the antecedents of their mistress, a good remedy against indiscretion. One man, however, could tell, and was it sure that whatever he knew was on good authority? At all events he never spoke.

That man who appeared to stand highest in the good graces of Madam de Monte-Cristo, was called Count de la Cruz. He pretended to be a creole from the Spanish colonies, which his pale dark complexion did not belie. The women thought him a fine man, but rather sad. The men eagerly sought his friendship, but rather feared him. There was however nothing mysterious about M. de la Cruz, but his relations with Madam de Monte-Cristo. He openly allowed that he had forty thousand francs a year and a house on the corner of the Chaussee d' Antin. He was a bachelor and did not care to talk about the date of his birth. Some mischievous tongues asserted that he dyed his hair. In fact it was next to impossible to guess his age, even on close scrutiny. At certain moments, when inspired by some sweet thought, he would sink into an adolscent state.

His fine black moustache, the curly mass of his beautiful hair, fully set off the whiteness of his skin, and the red tinge of his lips, around which played a soft, fine smile, the smile of a youth of twenty. But perhaps a minute later some importune or sad idea would strike him, and then he looked, not like an old man, but like a man in the prime of life, laboring under deep thoughts, ironical as a being knowing all, good and bad, above all the bad.

This man, whose secret, if he had one, was enveloped in a triple coating of impassibility, disdain and indifference, was known to have but one weak point: and even this weakness had its romantic side, which not only made it acceptable, but lent it an inconceivable and original attraction, This weakness bore the name of Aurclia, and lived in the house of the Chaussee d'Antin, on the first floor of which marvels were spoken. All Paris, knew, by sight at least, that charming young person, who owed her primary success, as said by many, to an extraordinary likeness, although vague, to Madam de Monte-Cristo. The liason betweeen Aurelia and Count de la Cruz, appeared sufficiently to account for the strange melancholy of the Creole gentleman. People thought that they could discover a platonic love, without hope.

One evening Madam de Monte-Cristo

held a grand reception, in fact, a grand ball. All the diplomacy, aristocracy and millionaires of Paris were convoked, for the salons of the stranger-lady had the rare privilege of being neutral ground on which all Paris could meet alike when not positively hostile. The carriages passed one by one under the portico, depositing grand ladies, carefully wrapt up in heavy pelisses as white as down, high dignitaries decorated from the waist upwards, superior officers, glittering with gilt lace, and young girls, crowned with flowers. In the principal saloon, Madam de Monte-Cristo, as imposing and calm as a queen, received her guests; saluting one by a gesture of the head, another with a smile, according a word to a third, a word that rendered one happy and a hundred jealous.

When the Count de Puisaye was announced, it was remarked that she half rose from the velvet seat of her arm-chair.

The Count advanced towards her, the Countess de Puisaye leaning on his arm, and Madam de Monte-Cristo, on perceiving the Countess, rose from her chair and stepped forward to meet them.

"How kind of you," she said, "to have come. I did so fear that I should not see you. Not only for you, I own, but on account of that dear child that you have so long hidden."

And she pointed to Cyprienne, hanging by the arm of Colonel Fritz an intimate friend of the Count de Puisaye.

"The dear child," said the mother, smiling with joy and pride, "is much moved, it is the first time that she has left her convent."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madam de Monte-Cristo, "but she must not be afraid, can any one with such beautiful eyes as those be afraid? Look at us, my dear child, and allow that we do not look so dreadful as to make folks fear us." Cyprienne slowly lifted her fair eye-lashes, and on the countenance of Madam de Monte-Cristo she read such a benevolent interest, so frank, so cordial, that involuntarily she went towards her.

Madam de Monte-Cristo took her by the hand, and drawing her closer, with almost maternal affection, softly impressed a kiss upon her forehead.

"Well! do I make you afraid of me now?"

"Oh! no, Madam," quietly responded poor Cyprienne.

"Well then it is settled that we are friends; you will stop by my side this evening so that I may make you known to our little circle."

Then turning to the Colonel:

"So much the worse for you, dear colonel, I have taken away your partner—I also perceive Baron Mattay, who is looking for some one, and I should not be astonished if it were you."

The latter portion of this phrase was spoken with such unmistakeable irony that the Colonel shuddered, and threw a look of defiance at Madam de Monte-Cristo. There he was only met by a joyous and frank smile: and gracefully inclining himself, was soon lost among the group, where soon the Count de Puisaye went to seek him.

Count Loredan de Puisaye was about forty years of age, and without doubt, was one of the most perfect gentlemen that could be found, notwithstanding his short stature. His thin face, imperceptibly wrinkled, added grace to his bearing, and what would have been ugly in another, only seemed to render him more graceful.

A man of the most refined wit, he lacked a great mind, which had much tended to curtail his diplomatic career, for he maintained that no second rank could do for a de Puisaye. He frequently said in mild irony, in which lurked a bady masked regret, that the family devise was "*Conquiers, puis, Aye!*" The ancestors conquered, the posterity possesses, and, God forgive me, by the help of my vices, the day may yet come when I possess no more. Count de Puisaye had not always been as we now find him. Many recollected having seen him, young, arduously at work, ambitious, and destined in all probability to the highest fortune. Millionaire and Peer of France at twenty-six, his marriage with Mlle. de Boismont Simeeur had placed him in a position to aspire and obtain every thing. One day, however, without visible cause, he found all his hopes destroyed, all his enthusaism extinguished, and the ardent young man was suddenly become from one day to another, the premature old man, who, had but retained the whims of youth, and so sceptical that it might be styled a mania.

As soon as he had joined Colonel Fritz, the Count hastily drew him into the embrasure of a window.

"Well!" he asked.

"Well?" asked the Count, in his turn.

"Well then," replied Fritz, "he raises difficulties."

"Will he break his word?" asked de Puisaye turning pale.

"No!" brutally replied the colonel, "but he swears that you will not keep yours."

De Puisaye, swallowed this, almost an insult, without winking, and if anything turned a shade paler.

"Ah!" said he, "money lenders are all the same. This is a doubt that M. Matifay shall pay for."

"And dearly," added Colonel Fritz, smiling.

"However," continued Loredan, after a brief silence, "I must have that ten thousand francs to-night—she will have them."

"Well, then, they must be had," coolly said Fritz. "Let me get hold of the old fox. But I warn you that his patience is at an end. It is now a month since your daughter returned, and you have not said one word."

"I will speak, I will speak," murmured de Puisaye, impatiently.

"Doubtless you will speak," replied Fritz, "but when? After all, you are wrong to hesitate so long. Good God, I know that is bad enough to give a de Puisaye to a Matifay, and to cross your coat of arms with a banker's pen. But it must be done! Besides you are not the only one. Marriages below one's station are all the thing now-a-days. Matifay belongs to the industrial nobility, the greatest, the only power, since a citizen reigns over us. The dear Baron is thirty times over millionaire, and what is more, is what the papers call a 'character.' After all, what the deuce does it amount to. You secure an heir to the peerage, and by duly and liberally publishing this marriage, he will perhaps make you a minister."

During all this dialogue, that was conducted in an undertone, but precise and accentuated so that not a word was lost, Loredan was evidently very impatient.

"That is all very well," replied he, "and I have weighed the advantages to be reaped as well as you, and also the disadvantages. My daughter who is the daughter of a ruined gentleman becomes a millionaire, by Jove, and nobody can say but that I am the best of fathers. But look at her, my dear friend, look at him."

For some minutes he remained sunk in profound meditation, and then carelessly snapping his fingers:

"Ah! well!" he cried. "For me the hundred thousands francs—that is the most important."

And without waiting for the Colonel's reply he hurried off towards a friend that was passing by.

Though all the while, when chatting with Madam de Puisaye and Cyprienne, who, rendered quite at home by the display of cordiality, was commencing to show the loving candor of her soul, Madam de Monte-Cristo never lost sight of Loredan and Colonel Fritz. From time to time an unmistakeable smile of disdain appeared on her lips, as if a superior prompting was telling her all the minutest details of the conversation between the Count and his friend.

When Loredan and Fritz seperated she slightly shrugged her beautiful bare shoulders, and the look that she gave on turning towards Cyprienne, was either one of unlimited love or pity. Meanwhile the looks of the two men from opposite ends of the saloon, seemed to converge towards Cyprienne as to one centre. Both showed the same enthusiastic admiration.

The first of these men we already know, it was the Count de la Cruz. The other, of whom it is necessary to say a few words, was the Baron Matifay.

We have already seen this pliant figure on which years have passed without leaving any trace. Those fair light curls that cannot turn gray. Those winking eyes, formerly protected by steel spectacles, but now by fine gold glasses. Only our man has grown, his genius has developed its wings, and his being bears the all powerful assurance of success. His long hair, falling on his shoulders, gives him the vague appearance of a patriarch; his gestures are carefully rounded, his voice, formerly lisping, is now set, and his bearing as dignified as a statue. Baron Matifay is not only the richest banker of Paris, the orignator of fifteen or twenty institutions of Credit, the constructor of seven or eight canals, the possessor of an intelligence alive to all initiatives of services to his country, but the Baron is, as Colonel Fritz just now remarked, in reality "a character."

In his person it is not alone to the millionaire that homage is paid, oh! no! It is because he is a species of Franklin in a black coat. An upright mind endowed with a large heart. He is not the man to tell his mind to the powers, with all due respect. He is never seen to trifle with his conscience, all his past life proves this: a life of labor, of self-denial, a life entirely devoted to his duty, and so pure, so concise, so transparent that it was beyond all, even calumny.

An ancient sage wished that all men could live in glass houses. This wish has been realised by Matifay, in all that concerns him. He has done still better, by dint of adroitness, he has rendered his life one of crystal.

There are some moments, however, during which those intimate with him pretend to have discovered some traces of a lying imposition, and anxiously watch for any hints that may lead them to decypher their suspicions. But he always got the better of them, and his innermost soul appeared to rise clear and visible through the deceptive mask of his face.

Matifay is now in one of those phases of distraction. His look glares with an inextinguishable desire, a mad and brutal desire. His soft lips are contracted by a vicious smile, repugnant to look at. The appearance of this smile destroys at once the respect imbibed during long series of years. That man has sacrificed all to the building up of a huge fortune and a spotless reputation. But now the brute appears, he will be satisfied. Satisfied quietly, peacefully, legally. For legally is the motto of Baron Matifay. He has inscribed it on the front of his colossal work of patience and hypocrisy. He has stolen his millions legally, he stole his reputation for honesty legally.

In some cases the brute is superior to man, instinct warns it of coming danger, when our intelligence but shows us how to guard against its effects. Matifay's look, as fiery as a hot iron, repugnant as an insult, but the habitual smile still held sway. Carried away by the unknown joys, now for the first time opened to her, Cyprienne, hanging on the very words uttered by Madam de Monte-Cristo, listened in extacy. Her hand in that of her mother, she felt supremely, deeply happy, so happy that she looked still more beautiful, and the Count de la Cruz then actually muttered to himself:

"Good Lord! is it possible to be so beautiful without forming part of your paradise?"

Suddenly Matifay started up as if awakened from a dream, a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Ha! Baron," murmured the insinuating voice of Colonel Fritz in his ear, "is not your bride a beauty?"

"My bride! my bride!" grumbled the Baron.

"Your bride from to-morrow," coolly replied the Colonel, "and your wife within a fortnight. But, come along, this is no place to chat in, and I must speak to you."

The Baron made a sign of acquiesence, and they both made their way, among the groups, to a small room situated between the card and dancing rooms, an open room that every body passed by without entering.

At this moment Madam de Monte-Cristo made an imperceptible sign with her fan to the Count de la Cruz, and cast a look that he doubtlessly understood, for he at once advanced towards the three ladies with hurried strides. Madam de Monte-Cristo presented him, after which the Count begged the favor of a quadrille, which was at once accorded by an approving smile from Madam de Puisaye.

Madam de Monte-Cristo did not understand it in this light.

"No! no!" she said, laughing, "I am here too this evening. I am the chaperon of Mlle. Cyprienne, and her education is not yet finished, although she is as spirituel as an angel, I must hold her at least for another quarter of an hour. It will be for the third, if you are agreeable, dear Count."

The Count de la Cruz bowed his assent.

"Let it be for the third," he muttered to himself. During this short dialogue, a look had passed between him and Madam de Monte-Cristo which had evidently satisfied both, for with a look of assent the Count at once directed his steps towards the card-room, and from that moment Madam de Monte-Cristo, for a time pensive and absent, became more amiable than ever.

CHAPTER XVIIII.

THE BLUE WRITING-BOOK.

"You doubtless recollect, my dear, Sister Gertrude, who gave us French lessons at the convent. Whenever we had neglected our duty there was always a stir. Search was made in our books, among our papers, in fact, everywhere where it could not be found. Then she would say, in her soft, indulgent voice: 'Own your *mea culpa*, Miss, own your fault, Miss.'

"And on acknowledging the blame, the good creature forgave.

"I have acknowledged *mea culpa*, Ursula, and I feel sure that you, too, will forgive me.

"It is true that I am already eight days in Paris, for eight days the blue book that you gave me has been on my table, a love of a table inlaid with mother-of-pearl; for eight days I have made up my mind to blot the first page to you, but the page remained still untouched.

"But to-day I have made a great resolution. My father is at his Club, my mother is out, and I profit by the occasion to have a long chat with you.

"With you, alas! Where are you, my dearest dear? I do not know. But I have a strange superstition that these lines will be revealed to you at the moment that I write them down. Although separated, we are always together, and my soul is so linked with yours that nothing can occur to me, pain or joy, without your feeling the same immediately.

"Let us commence from the first day.

"When I was quite alone before my father, and when bending out of the carriage window I could no more see your dear face, I felt very sad and disappointed. M. de Puisaye, for I still call him Monsieur, was all I could desire. But this was just what annoyed me; any one would have taken me for a stranger to him; it is true, of his own class, but still a stranger. He observed all manner of exquisite precautions towards me: Was it not too warm for me? Not too cold? Would I dine here or there? Had he been the knight-errant of a princess he could not have observed a more minute etiquette, which is generally adopted by men of his class towards women. As for me, I allow that I would have preferred a hundred times over a good kiss on the forehead, but I dared not throw myself round his neck, as we used to do, and tell him plainly: 'Papa! I am not Miss, I am plain Cyprienne!' I gravely replied to all his questions: 'As you wish it, sir;' or, 'As you please.' He evidently must have taken me for a stupid; so much the worse for him! At last, tired at this *tete-a-tete*, I feigned to fall asleep. I think that he perceived this stratagem, and gave me credit for it —I did not forget that. He made himself comfortable, and threw himself carelessly into a corner, but I looked at him, and I think that he watched me too. Do you know that my papa is a charming man, when he feels like it? Only at the corner of his mouth he has some wrinkles that I do not like. Neither do I like his jeering manner; he seems to laugh at everything he says, and before I became accustomed to it, it gave me much annoyance. I thought he was making fun of me. The journey lasted two days—we made short days in order not to tire us. On entering Paris, my heart beat quickly. 'This is then Paris!' I exclaimed, and I looked out of the window, but I saw only long narrow streets, dark, muddy, and full of people. My father could not stand this, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"'Do not look out so, Cyprienne, you will be taken for a country girl.'

"'Well, sir, am I not one?'

"He suddenly became very serious, a cloud passed over his lively countenance, and I perceived that I had spoken foolishly.

"'You, must,' said he, 'forget your convent. Yes, your younger days have, perhaps, been somewhat lonesome, a little neglected. Is that not what you wished to tell me?'

"'Oh, no, certainly not, sir; I was very happy in the convent, but I am sure that I shall be happier with you.'

"This time I threw myself round his neck, which he took with good temper.

"'That will do! that will do!' he muttered, quietly, pushing me back.

"'You are a charming country girl, and I am sure the Parisians will duly honor you.'

"The carriage went on in the meantime.

"'Here we are in Varenne street,' said my father. He drew out his watch. 'It is ten o'clock, your mother will be waiting for us at the hotel.'

"Those words 'your mother,' moved my very heart, and turned all my blood back. It was the first time that my father had pronounced it in my presence. But before I could recover from my confusion, a heavy gate opened, the carriage entered a large paved court, stopped before a portico, and a foot servant, in full livery, came forward to open the door.

"'Is Madam at home?' enquired M. de Puisaye, and, without awaiting a reply, he entered the vestibule, and called to me: 'Come here, Cyprienne, come quick!'

"At not finding my mother to receive me, my heart felt like bursting. Oh! how I longed to throw myself upon her neck, to see and embrace her. Perhaps, however, she did not experieuce the same impatience! Alas! she had never longed for me, she did not love me! This thought made me cold, and pale; hesitating, trembling all over, I followed my father up a narrow side staircase.

Then a door opened silently, and I perceived a lady standing, leaning her elbow on the white marble mantel.

"'Madam,' said my father, 'see here your daughter Cyprienne.'

"Then only did she lift her head, and turned her mild, pale face towards me, Oh! my dear Ursula, what joy! She was weeping, she opened her arms, and, sobbing, I rushed to her embrace.

"My father walked up and down the apartment, evidently deeply agitated.

"'That will do,' said he in a dry, almost hard tone, 'you will have time enough some other time to embrace each other; for the moment, the first thing to attend to, is, some dinner for that child, then undress her and put her to bed, she must be dying of fatigue.'

"I fain would have protested, but one look from my mother, a supplicating look, arrested my action.

"'Just as you like, Loredan. Cyprienne's room is all ready, and if you wish to conduct her to it yourself——'

"My father made a gesture as if ashamed of his ill temper.

"'No, Hortense, you look after your own little cares, better than I could. You are aware of our intentions respecting Cyprienne, prepare her to do her duty like a good child. She is no fool, I assure you, and when set off a little, will be very presentable.'

"Whilst speaking he had pressed a bell.

"A footman entered.

"'My letters?' asked M. de Puisaye.

"When the servant had brought them on a tray, my father examined the envelopes with a rapid glance, picked out one of them, broke the seal and gaily added:

"'Well, now there is just a letter from the Colonel—It seems as if that dear fellow, Matifay, is getting impatient. It is very likely that I shall dine at the Club; so you will have all the evening to yourselves?'

"And kissing me on the forehead:

"Au revoir, Mademoiselle la Parisienne."

"When left alone with my mother, I again commenced crying like a little fool; that seemed to relieve me. She had made me sit by her side, and holding my hands between hers, she could not refrain from gazing at me and embracing me: she wept, too. Oh! how I repented having doubted her! She not love me! Oh! Ursula, if you but knew! Alas! you will never know, poor dear, you are an orphan. You have the great misfortune to be an orphan! I, too, have been one, but never till now could I realize the magnitude of such a misfortune. A mother, Ursula, is a second self, a heart that beats in unison with yours, eyes that weep when you shed tears, lips that smile when you smile, and then a mildness, a sincere indulgence, a confidence that fills the soul. Something like we felt towards the Holy Virgin, but more tender, and with less veneration. You see, Ursula, veneration is always colder; when I confessed my faults to Mary, I had some fear that she would not forgive me; as for my mother, I feel sure that she would be the first, while scolding me, to justify me and endeavor to seek some merit even in my fault.

"After passing a long time in this position, weeping and embracing:

"'Now, Cyprienne,' said my mother, 'I must show you your domain.'

"Oh! Ursula, we never dreamed of anything half so fresh, half so pretty, or more coquettish. My mother smiled at my delight, my admiration and remarks. She plainly saw that my expressions of gratitude were not addressed to those pretty and costly trifles that can be bought for money in any furnishing store, but to the care and thought displayed in their arrangement. It seemed as if the person who had arranged them had foreseen all my wants, my tastes, all my caprices: she had even chosen the colors that I love the most. And, at last, what was my joy, when on opening a door in the wainscoat, she made me descend a side door that led to my garden. Oh! Ursula, my own garden, that is mine and hers. You can comprehend the extent of delicacy and exquisite forethought when I tell you that the garden was but an avenue of linden and chesnut trees, like that at the convent. My mother tried to make me believe that pure chance had guided her choice, but her assertions could not dupe me, and I pointed out to her the new fence that had but just been put up to separate my garden from that of the house.

"At the moment when writing these lines to you my window is open. The air is delightful. The tall chesnut trees balance to and fro until their violet and white tufts touch my window.

"Here I am, leaning on the balcony and looking at the playing of the rays of the moon, as they fall upon the sandy path of the alley. Then I think of you. I fancy we are still at B——. I can almost hear the rustling of your white dress on the grass. But I turn round

and find myself in a nest of satin, quilted with blue flowers, my naked feet buried in the thick carpet: the light from the lamp discreetly plays upon the varnish and crystal, the palace supplants the cell, and then, dearest, I look upon those two objects so different, that recall all that I love: for that alley is the convent, that is your good self, and that delicious boudoir, I owe solely to my mother, and then, happy at finding myself so beloved, then I sigh at the thought that I cannot unite those two loves, in reality, as easily as the kind forethought of my mother united their image, by separating for my use that monastic corner of the garden.

"'Do you think, Cyprienne,' said she, 'that this will please you?'

"'Would it please me!' You can easily imagine that she had not to wait long for my reply.

"'And will you love us?' she again asked, looking fixedly at me with her large black eyes. 'Yes,' she continued, after a short silence, 'I can see that you will love us, and still, poor child, how much evil have we not caused you. And who knows how much may fall to your share in the future!'

"This melancholy soon passed away. By the time dinner was half finished, it had all vanished. A real school dinner, as gay, as full of fun as we could have been together. Mothers have the privilege, Ursula, to become young when they like. A mother loves, she is a child; when she nurses, a little girl: when she wants to be amusing, a young girl; when she wants to raise a smile, a mother is always the same age as her daughter.

"After dinner, and then only she became not altogether sad, but serious; she presented me to Postel, my femme-de-chambre, but merely for form sake, for she would wait upon me herself that evening; then when I went to bed she came and sat upon the foot of my bed.

"'Cyprienne,' she said, seriously, to me, 'we have not yet spoken of your father. What do you think of him?'

"'I think, mama, 'that I greatly respect him, and love him as much as I can.'

"'You are right, Cyprienne,' continued my mother, "love him much for he has some love for you, and respect him still more, because he is of a nature, perhaps, more noble than you will ever again meet in the course of life. If you discover any faults in him, and with your sharpness, you will doubtless discover many, do not be in haste either to condemn him or even to judge him, for who knows that the condemnation and judgment you pronounce may not fall upon the shoulders of another, who is still dearer to you? Obey M. de Puisaye in all, my girl, because he is truly, he is doubly the arbitrator of your destiny. He has the right to rule it, for he is your father, but he has further the right, because since long I voluntarily placed all the authority that I possessed over you in his hands. I will not, I must not command you, for me! I will but be——'

"Here she suddenly stopped, and then continued:

"'I will but be beloved by you!'

"Here lay the mystery, the vague existence of which, we guessed when in the convent. It lay between M. de Puisaye and my mother. Ah! could I ever desire to be between them! No, it were better to ignore for ever, should any discord have convulsed their union. Is it not a more natural duty on my part to endeavor to bring them together, by making myself beloved by both? As regarded my mother, it was already effected. As regarded my father I had an innocent coquetry to think that it was not impossible. I, therefore, inwardly determined to besiege him in due form, and to obey him until the time, when, in his turn, it would be he who obeyed me.

"When on the point of retiring we heard a gentle knock on the door, which she quickly opened.

"'Is that you?' she cried quite astounded.

"'Can I come in?' enquired the voice of my father. 'What, gone to bed already! so much the worse, I will break orders, and surely I have the right to one minute, when you had held her during the whole evening.'

"My mother, stupefied, aghast, confused, grateful—for all these sentiments were expressed in her gestures and her looks, could not sufficiently regain her calmness to reply to him.

"'After all,' continued my father, 'she is my daughter as well as yours, is she not? And he sat down by the bedside. 'Well! how do you like this? Better than your convent, I should imagine. How shall we manage, Madam, to make her forget the Sisters? I suppose the needle girl will soon come, too?'

"'From to-morrow, Sir,' replied my mother.

"'So much the better,' exclaimed M. de Puisaye. 'Do you see, little Cyprie, it is all very well to be as pretty as an-

gels in the convent; in Paris one must be as beautiful as the devil, always remaining an angel as near as possible, let it be understood.'

"In this strain he spoke for some time, with great animation, in a very affectionate tone, but rather too light for my liking. I preferred the languid manner of my mother than those spirited gallantries.

"At last he perceived that my eyes were shut, and withdrew with mamma. I was already half asleep, and the words spoken by M. de Puisaye were agitating my brain.

"'How shall we manage to make her forget the convent?'

"Then only did I dream that I had really forgotten it! I had not said my prayers! I jumped out of bed, knelt on the carpet, and I prayed for you, Ursula; for the good sisters out there; for my mother, so melancholy, for my father; and alas! for myself, too; for when I was alone in my unknown and dreary room, I experienced all kinds of sad apprehensions flying about in the night, like bats.

"'Ah!' I said, on going to bed once more, and shaking my head, 'that will bring me bad luck, having, on the first night of my return, forgotten to thank the good God!'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MOST UPRIGHT AND THE RICHEST MAN OF FRANCE.

(THE BLUE WRITING-BOOK.)

"It was Pastel who awoke me the next morning. At the moment when I opened my eyes she was moving about the chamber, putting everything in order, without making more noise than a shadow. She thought that I was still asleep, and I took the opportunity to examine her at my ease. I liked her very much. She was a little woman about forty years old, as active as a squirrel, and as clever as a fairy. But what attracted me more towards her, was her appearance of perfect goodness, and I afterwards learnt from mama that, in that respect, she possessed more than the mere appearance. Till then, it appeared that her life had been very unfortunate, but as mamma absolutely prohibited me from questioning her on that score, for fear of making her sad, I took care not to do it.

"I heaved a slight sigh in order to let her know that I was awake, and Pastel ran towards me.

"'Does Mademoiselle want anything? Will Mademoiselle get up? Shall I open the curtains?'

"Mademoiselle bravely jumped out of bed, as at the convent, and without any ceremony, made her toilet. But she must have her hair dressed, and Pastel was very apt in that line. While curling my hair, the good soul spoke to me about mamma, and you should have heard all the good that she said.

"'Madam was a saint, an angel of God; everybody adored her, and venerated Madam!'

"You can imagine how Pastel's manner of speaking pleased me, and she pleased me still more when I learned to know how she loved mamma.

"I was scarcely dressed, when a discreet knock was heard at the door. Pastel went out and returned at once.

"'The Count would like to know if Mademoiselle can receive him; he awaits Mademoiselle in the drawing-room.'

"I ran down quickly, and found my father before the window, looking at something through the glass. On hearing the rustling of my dress, he turned round: his forehead was singularly wrinkled and his look preoccupied. But all cleared up at the sight of me, and I saw the smile of the day before return, that smile so amiable, at the bottom of which, however, there was a curious presence of unpleasantness and irony.

"'Good morning, Cyprie;' advancing towards me with open arms. 'I came to ask you to go to breakfast. Will you have me for a companion?'

"'Certainly, sir, if you wish it.'

"My father rang the bell, and Pastel came in, bringing in the breakfast on a tray—a real fairy breakfast—some milk, some biscuit, and some chocolate in old Sevres cups.

"Pastel placed the tray upon the table and waited.

"'We are going to have a breakfast to ourselves,' said my father, smiling, 'and we will wait upon ourselves or, rather, I will wait upon her myself, as I want to talk to you.'

"This conversation was addressed more to Pastel than to me and she went out, after making a curtsey.

"'My dear Cyprienne,' continued my father, after Pastel had left, 'you find yourself all at once transported into a style of life to which you are an entire stranger, and I must prepare you to en-

dure that trial, without showing too much awkwardness.

"'It does not apply to how you carry yourself or how you arrange your ribbons, Pastel is there for that, and moreover young girls do not take long to learn that science: but you must know those with whom you live, so as not to deceive yourself on their score. As to what appertains to ladies and young girls of your age, your mother will instruct you better than I. In speaking of themselves, women have a special language, which they know by instinct, and which expresses more in two syllables, an expression and a smile, than a portrait of La Bruyere: I will only therefore speak of the men you will habitually meet here, that are the persons who are intimate with us.'

"And now, after this fine introduction, my father was off.

"Ah! my dear, you should see how witty he is and what sharpness there lies hidden in his raillery."

Just now he spoke to me about the language of women, I assure you that he can hold his own against the cleverest. He caused a whole line of diplomatists to defile before me, generals, dandies, artists, and so on. It was enough to kill me with laughing. Sometimes he would interrupt himself:

"You see, Cyprienne, what I tell you there is what everybody should know, but what no man must repeat. Saloons are full of those characters and those traps. You are too sharp, not to be able to know them and to avoid them alone; in the meantime draw your own inference from what I tell you.

"Among the sketches, some of which were limited to a single phrase, there are two which singularly struck me, because my father had entered more fully upon them. They consisted of Colonel Fritz, his most intimate friend, and Baron Matifay, who it seemed was known to everybody. 'This one', said my father,' is an illustrious banker, and his life demonstrates the possibility, that "Probity is the cleverst trick of all." This phenomena, this man of business, *the most upright and richest man of France*, comes to us straight from Limoges, nothing more or less than M. de Pourceaugnac, only, this time M. de Pourceaugnac has genius, therefore he does not amuse Paris but conquers it.

"M. de Puisaye continued for some time in this ambiguous strain. I should think, at the bottom, he has not much love for the Baron, but I think he holds him in great esteem, that kind of victorious esteem that forces its own way. In fact there is only one thing that he cannot forgive him, his birth and his too lately acquired title. His jeering nearly made me lose my temper, a heap of trifles, one less than the other, launched at a man in whom he recognised almost genius, that millionaire to whom he applies more praise than can be applied to any other man.

"'He is the most upright man of France!'

"But here I must tell you one trait in Baron Matifay's life. Every one has heard mention of the name of Madam Quisran Rancogne, that monster who poisoned her husband, and whose name, during her trial was in every one's mouth. M. Matifay, who then commenced to make his fortune, had some interest in the works of Noirmont-les-Fourneaux. Madam Quisran Rancogne had a little daughter, over whom Matifay was appointed guardian by the Court. Now it turned out, that the works, conducted by a certain Champion, a relation of Madam de Rancogne, lost money either through negligence or dishonesty, this latter was declared a bankrupt and left the country, leaving immense defalcations.

This flight was absolute misery to the little Blanche, for Matifay it was almost complete ruin, in one moment he lost the fruits of twenty years of work.

But this brave man was not to be discouraged, this good-hearted man did not abandon the orphan confided to his care by the law, and which the flight of Champion caused to become his child. Audacity causes the weak to perish, but saves the strong. He had the courage to invest the remnant of his funds in the same works. He bought that neglected, that lost concern, and placed half of it under the name of his ward, and then bravely faced his work. What activity he displayed! He even excited the envy of his rivals. Besides every one took an interest in the success of his efforts: from the first year he divided a dividend among the creditors of a failure, of which he could easily have relieved himself of the responsibility. Moreover, although this failure had all the appearance of fraud, the circumstances did not seem sufficiently strong to condemn Champion.

"On finding the works in the hands of such a clever man, and so delicately honest that it amounted almost to scrupu-

lousness, confidence was re-established, and with it credit. Noirmont became a first class establishment.

"It was in the midst of their prosperity that a great misfortune befell M. Matifay.

"M. Matifay became as attached to little Blanche, as if she was his own child. The child was languid and delicate, and weakened daily. A fatality seemed to burden her brow, perhaps that of her mother's crime. The doctor who was consulted, was astounded to recognise the fearful symptoms of arsenic. The secret of her despair was only learned at her death bed. Notwithstanding the minute precautions adopted by her guardian, the unfortunate child had learned the fearful crime committed by her mother, through the imprudence of a servant. It was the soul that was wounded, and that wound was too deep for the poor frail frame to bear.

Care, nursing, every attention was employed, but nothing could arrest the dissolution that every one expected. Matifay called the ablest physicians to his assistance, among others Doctor Ozam, and offered them heaps of gold if they could but save his darling. Alas! the doctors could but advise a journey to the south, the last resource of all incurable invalids.

"M. Matifay abandoned everything—confided his business to a sure man and left with his dear invalid. His absence was to be but of short duration. At first the change appeared to act favorably on the patient. The fresh air, the warm sun, had a marvellous influence, it seemed as if a miracle had been brought about, it was, however, but the last ray of the light of life. A sad weakness followed this improvement and they were forced to stop at Naples, where the child breathed her last in her guardian's arms.

"M. Matifay, returned alone and sad from this journey, commenced under such happy auspices, and he endeavored to drive away his suffering by untiring activity. But he tried in vain; all around him recalled to his mind the little angel who had forever flown away. He sold Noirmont-les-Fourneaux, now rendered insupportable by the recollections of the past. but with infinite delicacy he would not profit by the death of such a dear ward, and employed all the fortune that he had destined for her to the foundation of a charitable institution, placed under the patronage of St. Blanche de Castille. He then turned his steps to the northern provinces and started a new work, undertaking stupendous operations, from which arose the enormous fortune, now so well known.'

"'And now,' said I to my father, when he had finished his narrative, 'that is the man about whom you jeer so much!'

"I was really indignant, for the story of that never failing devotion had appeared to me so touching: my father listened to me smilingly, and when I had finished:

"'There, there, our mad brain is off again! Bear this in mind, Cyprienne, enthusaism is annoying in these lower regions. To admire anything with such ardor, is to allow that you are not capable, and the first virtue of the circle in which you are destined to move, is not to acknowledge being inferior to any one, either in beauty, wit, fortune, or virtue.'

"But while addressing this slight admonition to me, my father appeared to be thoroughly satisfied with me.

"'Come then! As you like your Matifay so well, we will not joke any more about his being a baron.'

"Breakfast went gaily on, while we chatted, when the arrival of mamma and Pastel interrupted it. They were accompanied by a needle-woman, as they told me, from Madame Rozel's, one of the first houses in Paris, and a world of boxes. This invasion fairly drove my father away.

"'I have given you your first lesson in worldly affairs, Cyprienne; see here the second, which I feel sure will please you still more.'

"It did really please me. There were dresses to be tried on, bonnets, examine stuffs, select colors, in fact, a muddle of things that I did not understand anything about, but which I soon learned, I think because it amused me, and mamma tells me that my good taste is wonderful. I must still speak to you about two persons, and then I shall have said all; first about Colonel Fritz, my father's intimate friend, then about a great, strange lady, that all Paris is now speaking about this season. It is in her salon that Miss Cyprienne has to make her first step in life; and this is why so many dressmakers have been called upon.

"My father had only said two or three words about the Colonel, but their intimacy made me the more inquisitive, and I could not refrain from speaking to mamma on that subject.

"She seemed to be much perplexed, and simply replied:

"'He' is your father's friend, Cyprienne.'

"I inferred that my father's friend was not my mother's, and that led me to minutely examine him during dinner; he dines at the hotel nearly every day, except when my father dines at the Club, which frequently occurs.

"Colonel Fritz seems to me to be a good fellow, but so cold. He is tall, thin, dressed with much elegance, and appears still young; although, in truth, he has passed forty. He is said to be the best judge of horse-flesh in Paris, and also is a connoisseur in carriages, furniture, colors, and, in fact, everything tending to good taste and comfort.

"No livery is started nor a room furnished without duly consulting him. He is said to have but one fault. The gentlemen pretend that he is not of much account at play, but I find him very agreeable. When he plays he always loses, but in the most graceful manner possible. Report says that he has some thirty thousand francs a-year, but where are they derived from? On lands situated in the sun or the moon? or from the fabulous regiment, whose Colonel he is supposed to be? Nobody knows. But all acknowledge his perfect rectitude of life, and excellent education.

"Don't you think that I take some interest in Colonel Fritz? The fact is, he interests me and makes me uneasy. Besides his intimacy with my father, and my mother's cold behavior towards him, which alone would suffice to excite my curiosity, it seems that there is something more between him and me. Towards me his manner is extremely cool, although rigorously polite. Well, now, just fancy that I have caught him once or twice slily looking at me with curious glances. Was it hatred, or pity, or disdain, or did his looks indicate jealous affection? I cannot tell, but I think there was a mixture of all, and that that man either adores or detests me—perhaps he does both.

"My feelings towards him are equally difficult to explain. He oppresses me, annoys me, and fascinates me. There is an attraction, but it is both stifling and painful. I think his countenance good, but he chills me: his melodious voice, but so fearfully concise, seems to cut like the blade of a sword. It is not necessary to see him when he enters. No! even without looking in the glass, I can feel his presence, and my heart shuts and closes more as he approaches.

This man, I feel sure, has great influence in the trials foretold me by our good mother the Superior.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INVITATION TO A WALTZ.

"Ursula! Ursula! the good sisters were right! The world is a fearful thing! Oh! how much better it would have been to remain out there, under the solitary shade, far from temptation and suffering—or rather——But will you comprehend what I am going to tell you? Your life will pass far from these intoxicating scenes. The humility of your destiny will protect you, but me! Oh me! Well now that my eyes have been burnt by such brilliancy, my ears charmed by the music, my heart agitated by both, I feel that to go back would be impossible: and still I fear from the bottom of my soul.

"It is generally thought that the pretty white-winged butterflies, are caused to sing their wings in the flame of the candle by giddiness or folly. No! no! Nothing of the kind! They hesitate, they whirl round and round for a long time; in vain they try to tear themselves away from its fascination, but the moment, when their eyes, made for the simplicity of shade, have felt the unknown charm of light, they are lost. All struggling is in vain!

"Now that light, that brilliant and fiery torch, life, that was so dangerously depicted to us, I have seen it, to-night for the first time. My eyes retain the glittering shine of the lustres, silk rustles around me, diamonds sparkle; with extacy I listen to the distant melody of the orchestra, and I write the sentiments of a head crowned with the faded flowers of a ball. Ursula, you cannot imagine how beautiful it is!

"At first I thought that I was entering upon enchanted ground, one of those lands only seen in dreams. Everywhere flowers, everywhere garlands of crystal, the ladies looked like goddesses with stars around their necks. I leaned with all my weight upon the arm of Colonel Fritz who acted as a cavalier, I was afraid that I should faint. Then, through a fog that seemed to consist of the dust of the sun, I saw a woman advancing towards me, more imposing than all the others and with that so majestically simple and good, that, invisibly attracted, I went to meet her.

"That was the lady of the house, Madam de Monte-Cristo.

"She took my hand. What did she say? I think, not to be afraid—and really I was not afraid. I dared to raise my eyes and I perceived those of my mother, smiling and quite moved at my own emotion.

"Madam de Monte-Cristo was kind enough to let me sit by her side, between my mother and herself. My head was too much troubled to recollect exactly what she said further. I only know that she complimented me upon my toilette, my graceful bearing. But I who do not exactly shine, on account of my modesty, and who, frankly speaking, think that I am passable, I was ashamed I found her a thousand times more beautiful than myself. All eyes were fixed upon us, she charitably remarked that it was on my account, and she repeated this so often, with such good grace, that I must own that I became excited, my self-conceit got uppermost, and I let myself believe her words. Vanity is an evil sin, my dear, but I assure you that it is very pleasant.

"The crowd defiled completely before us, and Madam de Monte-Cristo had an amiable word for each. Afterwards, she presented me. I stuttered, and my mother blushed with pleasure at my success.

"All around me was radiant, all glittered, all was rendered harmonious by the strains of the orchestra.

"'See here,' said Madam de Monte-Cristo, in a melodiously mild tone, 'how those little feet dance; they want wings.'

"In truth, I was beating time without being aware of it.

"'Well,' she continued, 'then we must find a partner.'

"It was of little use my telling her not to do so, that I was afraid, that I could not nor would not dance; she called a young man, who was leaving after greeting us, and presented me:

"'The Viscount de la Cruz.'

"He pleased me altogether. He is very fine-looking, and seems not to be aware of the fact; a little sad, which, however, well agrees with his dark features, but not so sad, however, but that an indulgent smile lurks in the depths of his large black eyes, which is rendered still more charming by his melancholy.

"Do you not think that I have pictured him pretty well after one simple presentation. To that I must reply, that a glance from between the lashes of downcast eyes must be enough for a girl, and then, I had all the time to analyse the perfections of my hero, having had the honor to dance with him.

"Yes, my dear, I have danced; and, really, it is not so difficult as I thought. You have only to let yourself be carried along, and you slip along as easy as the swallows fly. In truth, Madam de Monte-Cristo was right, young girls' feet are unconscious wings.

"But I did not dance at once.

"Although Count de la Cruz's invitation was accepted, Madam de Monte-Cristo, who doubtless discovered my embarrassment, allowed me time to gain self-possession by imposing her authority to defer the order of the dance.

"He bowed deeply, as a sign of assent, and walked away with the gravity of a Cid.

"As soon as he was gone, I severely reproached mamma and Madam de Monte-Cristo, which only made them laugh, especially the latter.

"'Now look here, my dear child, acknowledge that you are going mad for a dance, and that false shame alone held you back. For that reason I selected one partner from the many. You cannot be timid with him, you can yield him your white hand with as much confidence as a brother. Would you believe that there are many both young and old ladies who would envy your good luck!

"'M. de la Cruz is too serious to frolic about like a lively young attache of eighteen; this is the first time that I have seen him commit such an infraction upon his dignity, and you can boast of having been the first, at least in my house, who has induced a hero to lift a foot.'

"'A hero, Madam?'

"Madam de Monte-Cristo spoke in a half-serious, half-light tone; then she suddenly became serious.

"'A hero, yes, my child. Perhaps, some day, a poor woman, who has been sadly tried, and who is very old—now, do not be jealous—will be able to tell you, as well as the world at large, what M. de la Cruz is, and what a noble heart beats within his breast. For the present I can but repeat what I have just now said: He is a hero!

"'If a being, good even to the most extreme devotion, devoted even to the fullest abnegation, courageous even to madness; if a knight-errant, a saint and a man, moulded together, can produce a bronze that can be called a hero, then M. de la Cruz is one!

"At that moment M. de la Cruz return-

ed towards us, he was very pale, but not a line of his proud and calm countenance was troubled. He doubtless came to demand the promised dance.

"I arose.

"'But it is not your turn yet, Cyprienne,' said my mother, 'you promised a quadrille!'

"'What are the odds,' replied Madam de Monte-Cristo smiling, 'a quadrille or a waltz? In that manner Miss Cyprienne, who is a novice, will not run any danger of confusing the figures. M. de la Cruz, with the tips of his finely gloved fingers, grasped the points of mine. The orchestra played a slow and measured tune, that you have often heard me hum on my piano in the Convent: "The Invitation to the Waltz." As the tune became more impressive the waltz fell into its regular measure; I leaned my hand upon his shoulder, he encircled my waist with his arm, and we flew through the throng.

"I looked at him, that is I peeped at him through my half closed eyes, you know how. His fine face remained calm and impassible, not a hurried breath flurried the frills on his bosom. He seemed not to touch me, but yet he carried me along like a leaf. As for me I made several false steps, but then without any sensible pressure, I am at a loss to know how, he held me with a grasp as inflexible as iron.

"To be held, defended, protected by a strong arm, by a valiant heart, I felt at that moment that it was the most perfect happiness that a woman can conceive. It is true that just then M. de la Cruz was displaying his protection upon some pretty object, some scratch on the loosening of some miserable stitch of lace, what was it? what did it matter! His heart was valiant, his arm strong; I knew that I could lean upon his shoulder in all confidence. I was happy!

"It is true that the throng of the dance that carried us both onward, was not a very inviting phase of the world, as it had previously appeared to me. But such is life; we go on our feverish path in life, unknown one to the other, perhaps enemies; and I thought then, that to pass through the storms predicted by our dear mother at B——, the support of such an arm was what I wanted.

"A hero, my dear, only think, a hero!

"For a time this hero did not open his lips, but I felt that he had something to say to me. What? I trembled at the question, but still I wanted to know it. I was angry at his not telling me, and I was grateful at his silence. I felt that it was a delicacy and a show of respect on his part—who knows? Perhaps if he had spoken to me, he would have fallen from the pedestal on which the mysterious assertions of Madame de Monte-Cristo had raised him. He would have become plain M. de la Cruz, and I rather liked my Cid Campeador.

"But he did not speak; and, only, when conducting me back to my place, after the music had finished, he pronounced in a low tone, close to my ear, a few words that almost made me faint—'Be careful, Mademoiselle, a great danger threatens you.' And when, trembling, I halted ready to fall, he firmly grasped my wrist, and added:

"'Your friends watch—help them.'

"We had returned to Madame de Monte-Cristo. Without adding a word, M. de la Cruz made a deep bow, and left us. 'M. de Puisaye,' said Madame de Monte-Cristo, 'is taking a stroll with your mother; will you allow me to be your guardian during their absence?'

"I had scarcely time to reply in the affirmative before mamma returned, leaning upon my father's arm.

"His brow was knitted, he seemed dissatisfied—I could only catch the last part of their conversation.

"'It must come to an end; as you will not speak to her, I must.'

"On perceiving me he stopped, and at once resumed his habitual smile. Can presentiments then exist? If not, why did I imagine that they were alluding to me, and that the conversation which he referred to was not altogether unconnected with the warning given by M. de la Cruz: 'A great misfortune threatens you!'

"A great misfortune! coming from my father, the natural protector given me by kind Providence—what foolishness! I soon banished that idea, which I considered impious. But I might well try to drive it away—I do so even now—but it returns like a song engraved on the memory, that will hover on the lips, even in moments of the deepest sadness.

"The hour of departure had struck, when with mamma under the portico, arranging our furs, I saw Colonel Fritz pass by. He too appeared to be sad and menacing.

"'Await me a moment,' called my father; 'I will join you at once.' He only accompanied us to the carriage, closed the door himself, and called to the driver:

"'To the hotel!'

"He then ascended the steps, and before the carriage moved away I could see him accost the Colonel in an animated manner.

"'It is about me, I am sure that it is about me that they are speaking!'

"Mamma sank into a corner of the coupe; I dared not question her, neither mention the singular remark made by Count de la Cruz. It would doubtless have been my duty, but when about to speak, a secret instinct prompted me to remain silent. Mamma had her handkerchief to her lips, and twice I thought that she wept.

"'What is the matter? what is the matter, mamma?' at last I exclaimed. She did not reply, but merely softly pressed my hand. On arriving at home, she hurriedly kissed me on the forehead, and I felt that her face was bathed in tears.

"'Cyprienne, Cyprienne, you must obey your father!'

"That was all she could say, and instead of accompanying me as her wont, she immediately closed herself in her apartment. What could be the drift of all these mysteries? why that threat? why those tears? what to do? who to confide in? My mother orders me to obey, but does she weep when she orders me? Then M. de la Cruz is right, and this is the danger, the great danger that I am running! My instinct, my heart, my whole being tells me that I must confide in him, and my duty forbids me.

"Ah! Ursula, why are you not here? why are you not with me? Your friendship would enlighten me, you could advise, support and defend me!

"In one night passed in the world, I have seen all its pleasures and its hidden dangers, and here I am alone to protect myself against them all.

"My heart is so full, I fear that it will break. The house of my birth, to which I so confidently returned, is full of snares. I fear that my father is my bitterest enemy; my mother suffers fully as much as I do, but she lets them act; and the only one in whom I feel that I can confide, I feel convinced, the only one that can help me is a stranger.

"Oh, if I am deceived, if I blaspheme! forgive me, good Lord; I am so unhappy, so sad, I feel so indifferent to all around me, so tired! Good Lord, let me be wrong, let me have blasphemed, let my father but study my happiness, may my mother's tears be tears of joy.

"May M. de la Cruz's threat prove false, and I will bless Thee, and from my sad heart I will raise to Thee a song of gratitude. I am surely going mad: I had just closed my little blue writing-book, and somewhat consoled and strengthened by prayer, I was about to go to bed. I was already half undressed. I had just opened my jewel-case, of which I only have the key, in order to put by my rings and eardrops, and what do you think I found there? A note, open and not signed, a note that only contained one line:

"'A great danger threatens you. Your friends are on the watch; help them!'

"How could that note have gotten there? Who are those mysterious and terrible friends, who can penetrate even into my room, and there write the same words pronounced only to my ears by M. de la Cruz? My friends, ah! but are they not perhaps my worst enemies themselves, who assume the mask of friendship, in order to deceive me the easier? But then, my mother's tears, and the embarrassment and discontent displayed by my father! Oh! really, I do not know what to believe, what to hope, what to fear!

"I feel sure of M. de la Cruz; such a countenance, such a look cannot lie, cannot deceive. Then why should he deceive me? What interest can he have in so troubling my conscience, my heart? Oh! if he should lie, if this fear that crushes my soul should be a calculation on his part, he would be the least, the most despicable of men!

"'A great danger threatens you. Your friends are on the watch; help them!'

CHAPTER XXI.

A LITTLE HOUSE IN 18—.

At the same moment that Cyprienne was jotting down her modest confidences in the blue book, which our privilege of a writer allowed us to copy from over her shoulder, a scene of a very different nature was being performed in a little house near to the Pigalle Gate.

This neighborhood, now completely built over, was then but a mass of waste lands and large bushy gardens.

It was at the bottom of one of these gardens, the most shady and the most retired of all, that we again meet with Colonel Fritz and his friend the Count de Puisaye, after the ball at the house of Madam de Monte-Cristo.

There were about ten or twelve guests

of both sexes, the fine flower of Parisian gallantry.

The supper is about finished, and the classical champagne sparkles in the crystal cups.

The ladies try to say witty things, and the gentlemen endeavor to find them funny.

After all these are sad pleasures, which are put on the stages of minor theatres a thousand times over; low comedies, the men hide their secret disdain, and the women their deep disgust, under the appearance of a shameful physical earnestness, in which both are convulsed with laughter; the one in order to drown thought, the other to prevent a gaping fit.

The queen of the feast was Nini Moustache, one of those celebrities whose name lasts as long as the color on their cheeks, that is, a few months or a few years. A matter of health.

M. de Puisaye, who was madly smitten, who had discovered Nini at some public ball, and before a day had passed, had placed upon her brow the crown of that ephemeral royalty.

Among a class where beauty forms the only title, Nini Moustache could not be doubted. It would be impossible to imagine a more bewitching and delicious creature, moulded like an ancient Venus, in living marble, as lithe as a snake, and as corrupted as Vice itself.

Her only rival, if such were possible, was the fair Aurelia, called the Monte-Cristo.

Mention has previously been made of the great resemblance, to which she owed this surname.

Now, on this evening, Aurelia, doubtless kept back by M. de la Cruz, who was allowed to be her protector, did not appear, and, therefore, from that fact no comparison was possible. Nini Moustache triumphed over her companions as the sun triumphs over the stars.

Besides, Aurelia and herself had already since long understood that all struggling against their equal charms would be in vain, and were, therefore, staunch friends. This friendship at first was founded on their common interest, and which had become sincere by degrees: they had concluded a treaty, which among courtesans is as faithfully kept as among thieves.

The gentlemen were quite intoxicated and the females half drunk. In the same manner as the supper had degenerated into an orgy terminating in a debauch. There was no more licentious allusions, heavy coarse words fell. Champagne had given away to brandy. Some one even proposed to burn a punch in imitation of the mad freaks of grisettes and clerks. Another broke a saucer to make castanets.

The princess hummed all kinds of airs, picked up at random.

It is however a fact, that whether titled or not, poor or rich, witty or foolish, man is always the same, and the spirit that lurks within him is not awakened in vain. At a certain point, the intoxication of a prince greatly resembles that of a rag-picker.

Loredan arose from his seat disgusted.

"Come away," he said to Colonel Fritz.

The sight of that revel of the delirious senses, commanded by him, paid for by him, made him feel sick at heart, an indesirable feeling of loathing stole over his brain, not only for the guests but for himself.

The more they sang, the more they screamed, the louder rang the mad laugh, the more he became depressed, perhaps it was a sentiment of remorse.

At times, by dint of drinking, he had succeeded in sinking to the level of his companions in the debauch, to-day it was impossible, the more he drank the less fitted he became.

Between him and those degraded women, livid with the flames of sensuality, and whose eyes darted rays like sparks from hell, an image arose, vapory and pure, like the image of Cyprienne, who at that hour was lying in her white virgin bed, and doubtless had prayed for him before falling asleep.

And then, casting a savage glance on Colonel Fritz, who never dreamed of what was passing in his soul, he muttered between his teeth:

"If he has deceived me! if Cyprienne were really my child!"

The cool Colonel feigned not to have heard Loredan, and fell, rather than sat, down upon his chair, and stared at his glass with a vacant stare.

"Come away!" repeated M. de Puisaye, violently shaking him.

The Colonel turned upon him like a wild beast just awakening, and cast a fearful glance at the person who had dared to disturb him. For a minute the looks of these two men crossed each other as provokingly as the crossing of swords: for one minute they could each read the inveterate hatred hidden under their apparent friendship.

"Come away!" cried Loredan, for the third time.

The Colonel rose painfully, without any remark, and followed the Count, who went round the groups without their even noticing his departure. He uttered two words of adieu over his shoulder to Nini Moustache, and went down the steps, four at a time, and sprang into a plain carriage that awaited him.

Nini had long been too accustomed to these fits of humor on her master's part to pay much attention to them. This girl was as full of disdain as she was weak. She ironically pouted her lips, shrugged her shoulders, and muttered:

"Why leave? He will return to-morrow!"

Then, with a deep sigh, she added:

"Oh! why does he not go forever?"

Under the gateway M. de Puisaye's carriage passed another, just arriving; and a few minutes later, the beautiful Aurelia made her appearance in the supper room.

The resemblance of that beautiful creature to Madam de Monte-Cristo was self-evident on the first look; but on close examination a thousand minor differences could be observed between the two, so widely separated in life.

Both were blonde; but while the fair ash-colored hair of the high lady softened her mystic features, as if by a luminous mist, the flowing tresses of Aurelia seemed interwoven with threads of red gold, and seemed to cast a reflection of wildness and passion on the disdainful lines of her mouth, and in the cold depths of her blue eyes.

Doubtless both possessed the same sovereign beauty, but the one had the style of the first Christian Empresses, so majestic, so calm; the other involuntarily caused one to think of Faustine and Messalina.

The same similarity and the same differences were remarkable in their voices.

The voice of Madam de Monte-Cristo was more harmonious and undulating, that of Aurelia more sonorous and energetic. However, both possessed a very strange intonation and so alike that it seemed but the same music under other tones.

On seeing Aurelia enter, Nini Moustache ran to her: "Ah! so you are here at last! I feared that you would not come."

"Why should I not come?" replied Aurelia, in a low tone, "when you wrote me: 'I am suffering.'"

"Oh, you can speak aloud," replied Nini, with a bitter smile, "they are incapable of hearing or understanding what we say. Look at them."

And with her outstretched hand she pointed to her companions, who looked but the images of bestiality. The songs terminated in hiccoughs, some were fallen asleep with their heads resting on the table, others had rolled upon the ground. The man with the castanets, at intervals accompanied the snoring of the sleepers, but his music sounded more like the clattering of bones than anything else.

"Come," said Nini to Aurelia, "the sight of these brings my heart into my mouth."

A servant was sleeping on a bench in the outer chamber. Nini awoke him.

"When those gentlemen ring, call their carriages round."

The room into which the two women entered was a large bed-chamber, faintly lighted by the fitful flame of a night-lamp. Heavy curtains fell with thick folds down the walls and over the windows. A thick carpet deadened the sound of the footsteps, in the same manner as the dark hues seemed to stifle the rays of light. It was sad and sumptuous, a striking image of its occupant, a splendid form but an absence of soul!

Nini Moustache had fallen, at full length, upon a divan, and with set teeth, sobbed convulsively.

Aurelia stood unmoved, contemplating her.

"Ah!" at last cried Nini, starting up suddenly, "that is what we do with those we love! fools or idiots! Ah, poor foolish flies, with what spiders you have to deal."

She cast a long look at Aurelia.

"You have never experienced this! You never bled the wounds that you made! You have never wrung your hands at their sufferings! You have never cursed your own fate?"

Aurelia slowly shook her head from side to side.

"Never," she replied.

"Ah! you are strong," murmured Nini, with an artless and cynical tone of admiration, "I wish I were so!"

For a moment she was silent, then violently throwing back her brown hair, like a horse in the act of rearing:

"Well, after all, you are right; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, suffering for suffering, dishonor for dishonor. They make our life a hell, let them enjoy it with us.

"They have defiled our bodies, we will defile their souls. No more coward-

ly pity—and while their love is disdain, let ours be hatred!"

Aurelia made no reply to this savage outburst, she calmly approached her friend, who had allowed herself to fall upon the divan, and placing her cold hand upon Nini's arm:

"What did you want to tell me?" she asked.

"I,—nothing. Ah! yes, I recollect! I wanted to tell you that I am suffering! What can I do?" (here her voice became singularly bitter.) "I am not courageous like you. I have tried, and I cannot. Against my will, there is something here which I cannot entirely drown. I go to work coolly, like a surgeon. I try to appear merciless, I smile when they buy my favors; when they sob and sigh I burst with fits of laughter; but the comedy is painful, and you see how I pay for it!"

Aurelia gave way to a slight motion of impatience.

"If you have nothing to tell me, I will go away."

"No, no! I pray you, stop," and taking her hand, she forced her to sit down again. "Do not leave me alone. I want courage, advice, some consolation at least. Oh! if you only knew what infamy they are causing me to commit!"

"An infamy?" ironically repeated Aurelia, "really!"

"Yes," courageously replied Nini Moustache, "an infamy! After all, what harm has Loredan done to me? When he first knew me I was already lost; on the contrary, he kept me from falling still lower. He has made me rich, and it was from his lips that I heard the first respectful words that have been addressed to me for many years. He almost tried to persuade me that I was a woman like others. And in exchange how do I requite him? By a feverish love which kills him, an unceasing struggle by which I exhaust his energy and his will; extravagant caprices, for the satisfaction of which he is ruining himself—by which he is ruined. By Jove, I am good, for his ruin is already completed."

"Well, and then?" coldly asked Aurelia.

"Well, and then," continued the unfortunate girl, "M. de Puisaye has a wife, whom they tell me is a saint, and a hundred times prettier than we are. That is all the same to me; his wife is my enemy, I am jealous of her; for, do you understand me? I love that being that I am destroying; that being that I am killing; I love him for his weakness' sake; I love him on account of all his sufferings, of which I am the author! He has sacrificed his wife for me; he was wrong; she is better than I am: but I am happy that he has sacrificed her for me. But then, he has a daughter, a girl of sixteen, and he will sacrifice her to me to-morrow!"

Aurelia shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, I understand! What are the odds! That is what you want to say! And really what are the odds? At first I spoke in the same strain! I was sold, why should she not be? But I wanted to see her, I was foolish enough to have her pointed out to me in the Champs Elysees. Oh! my dear Aurelia, what an angel? with eyes as long as that, and blonde hair; and what a smile! On coming home I felt troubled.

"Poor innocent child! and it is one of my kind that rules her destiny. If the fit takes me I can play her away with two turns of a card! Does that not make the heart jump, the fingers clutch, and the cold perspiration run down the face? Certainly, God is not just."

"But this evil—I will not cloak the word—this crime, who is forcing you to do it?"

"Who? Must I then tell you all! Who? Those infernal beings, who have lost me and who will cause the loss of many more. The agents of the morgue, of the prison, of the hospital; the speculators in human flesh, the dealers in souls, those usurers who take your honor and your conscience as their reward, the contractors of vice."

"And you wish to defeat them? Is there no chance?"

"I can do nothing. I am in their hands. They hold me by the dearest spot in my heart. Oh! if I could only die, or go to the galleys to escape their tyranny! But no, they too well know how to hold me! All struggling is in vain, impossible! The ruin of the Count de Puisaye was necessary for their dark plots. The Count de Puisaye is ruined. Now they want his daughter's happiness—they will have it; and I the miserable instrument of their desire or of their vengeance, I cannot raise myself against the hand that drives me."

Nini Moustache had arisen, and walked through the room with rapid strides.

"Listen," she said, "you shall know all, I will speak aloud to you, more so than I dare to speak to myself. But I warn you, not one word, not one expression of irony, none of the cold mockery, such as you often use, because then I should lose all control over myself, and

might perhaps kill you. If you cannot refrain from smiling, I will not see it."

She blew out the lamp, and the room was at once plunged into profound darkness.

"Now I will commence," continued Nini Moustache, "but I again warn you, I am speaking to myself, I am but confessing to my conscience; as for you, do not interrupt me; listen, or even sleep if you like!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONFESSION OF NINI MOUSTACHE.

"When I was a little girl," began Nini Moustache, "I was called by a name, that now I cannot listen to without a tremor. Oh! my God, a very plain name: vulgar, but for me that name is the only trace left of the past, which nothing can recall, it is a recollection of the paternal home, the recollection of my hope and candor.

"I was called Celina. Now Celina is dead, and but one being on earth, Nini Moustache recollects her.

"My father was a plain clockmaker, who by labor, his honesty and his perseverance, had succeeded in building a small shop.

"I never knew my mother, who died in giving birth to a sister who still lives, but my father was so good that I never missed her.

"As I advanced in years, I was looked upon as the mistress of the house, my father charged me with all the interior details of our home and the care of my sister Ursula.

"It was I who dressed her, took her out to walk, it was I, too, who prepared the meals, mended the clothes, whilst my father with his glass, accompanied by his only apprentice, sat at his bench repairing our neighbour's watches and clocks.

"We were not rich, but our daily wants were amply supplied. We were happy.

"My father's apprentice—he plays too great a part in my life, or rather I play too terrible a one in his, to forget him—was named Louis Jacquemin. He was a young lad of about my own age, well educated and honest, the son of a widow who lived in our house, on the same floor with us, and who was our only companion. Madam Jacquemin did not seem any richer than ourselves, but, as the saying is, with a good heart and courage two miseries united make a comfortable home. Louis was a hard worker, intelligent, and soon learned the business, and my father was already calculating when he should let him conduct his business, and marry his daughter.

"This prospect did not displease me. I loved Louis much, although he was but a child: I already had the appearance of a little woman. He was proud to give me his arm when walking, and to call me his bride: whether from self-love or real love, that boy adored me.

"At about this time, my father made the acquaintance, out of charity, of a young man, who came to live in our house, in a miserable closet, which the landlord let him have for six francs a month.

"At first we did not notice the presence of the new comer because he was very discreet and made but little noise. Sometimes he would remain for days together in his closet without going out: then again at nightfall we would see him slipping down the stairs, endeavoring to hide a piece of bread under the lappet of his worn, but always tidy, coat.

"My father guessed that he was enduring misery, as if noble misery were a crime. He sought some roundabout manner of becoming acquainted with our neighbor. He would stand in the doorway or upon the stairs; when the young man went down, he tried to enter into conversation with him, but for some time the other merely replied in polite retort, and that only increased my father's esteem.

"'He has got some pride!' he would say.

"However, an opportunity, one of life or death, broke the ice between us.

"He had not been seen to go out for two days, and remained closely shut up in his closet. In vain my father knocked at his door, but no answer; at last he made up his mind to force open the door, and then found the poor fellow lying stretched upon his couch, almost dead. We took care of him like a son, like a brother; and from that day, having found some employment, he became the greatest frequenter of our family.

"But our guest refused to confide entirely in us, which alone would have cooled any other person's feelings, of less honest and less generous nature than my father's.

"His manners, certain elegant habits and language, indicated a birth above his station. Nobody tried to learn his name, which pride doubtless prompted

him to keep secret. However, he informed us that he belonged to an honorable and wealthy family: his parents had wished to suppress his inclination for the stage by leaving him to choose between misery and the abandonment of his vocation. He had not hesitated in his choice, but as his name belonged to his family, as well as to himself, by an overstrained scruple of delicacy, he had, like many more of his class, adopted a fancy name.

"He styled himself Florestan.

"His emphatic manner, which to me seemed the height of distinction, his theatrical and telling intonation, the mystery in which he shrouded himself, all drew me toward Florestan. He had a manner of speaking about the art, of which I understood nothing, which excited my enthusiasm. He would recite parts from plays that I would listen to with open mouth; then, over excited by a well got up enthusiasm, by a kind of nervous intoxication, he would exclaim:

"'Is that not beautiful! shall I not be a great man! a great artist!'

"And I, poor girl, I would clasp my hands and artlessly reply:

"'Oh, yes! it is really fine!'

"However, Florestan was right. He was doomed in the future to become a great actor, one of the greatest and most dangerous among the actors who perform their parts on the immense stage of Parisian life.

"The boards that he had to tread were the aristocratic mansions of the Champs Elysees, and the rich suburbs, the galleries of the Bourse, the paths of the Boulevards. There he had to play; he now plays a part there in a terrible drama, the end of which no one can foresee, and he preluded his part of traitor of high life by fascinating a foolish girl of twenty, in the humble work-shop of a poor watchmaker.

"The fascination was soon performed, complete and easy. When I think of it, I really think I must have been born bad. My mother contained the seeds of all the instincts that render perversion easy. I was a coquette, gourmand, fond of adventure; the cares of home seemed to me unbearable. I only had one good feature, a mother's heart. I love my little Ursula, my sister, as a woman loves her first born. Alas! that love, which might have saved me, was doomed to be my loss.

"Florestan, with an infernal ability, knew how to profit by all the resources furnished by his well prepared mind. He excited my coquetry to madness; he made the life behind the scenes dazzle before my eyes; dresses of satin, lace, diamonds, general admiration, everything. Two or three times he procured us seats for the theatre, and I returned mad. The actresses seemed to me rather goddesses or queens than mere women. I could have knelt to the lowest figurante.

"Ah! if he had told me the reverse of this life so brilliant in appearance, about the back of those scenes all stained with oil, hung with tattered bills, the narrow and dreary passages, the dirty and greasy woolen dresses, for which my goddesses and queens, on leaving, changed their embroidered and tinselled dresses. But he carefully avoided this! He might have told me that that paper covered with brass, was real gold, and that those glittering crystals were real diamonds!

"What more! I was enchanted by it! I too in secret, learned by heart passages from melo-dramas. With the table-cloth thrown around me, a kitchen knife in my hand, I fancied myself Margaret of Bourbon or Isabella of Bavaria. I rolled my eyes, I sounded my R's, I thought myself superb, and he, clapping his hands, would cry out:

"'Brava! Splendid! Bewildering! Miss Georgi must only take care!'

"At the same time poor Louis and my father, whose only joy I was, were straining their poor eyes on some work wherewith to ensure their and my welfare. Jacquemin was growing up, and his love for me increased with his years. It was his love, doubtless, that enlightened him. He was the only one who mistrusted Florestan. He was afraid to show his antipathy for fear of hurting my feelings, but I should not have been a woman if I had not remarked it. And then, for fear that an outburst might open my father's eyes and spoil the realization of my plans, I turned hypocrite. I feigned to be more loving towards my intended. The poor boy was only too glad to avail himself of such a change. Definite mention was even made of an event that till then had not been fixed. Dresses were bought, an orange blossom wreath, and some furniture for the young people; the marriage day was arranged, the banns were published, and a week before the ceremony was to come off, on my attaining my majority, I fled with Florestan.

"Florestan and myself had sought refuge in Brussels. He was rich, he had met with a friend called Le Gigant, who had lent him a pretty large sum. It was

only later, and to my cost, that I learnt the complicity that united them. For the moment, M. Le Gigant, who turned our misery into happiness, seemed to be the best of men. He was not young, but in his prime, a good companion; what is commonly called a good fellow, his pockets full of money, and who knew how to uncork a bottle of champagne better than any one else. I have already stated that by instinct, I, who had, during the first spasms of my mad imprudence, of unabated intoxication, I never bestowed one thought upon my father, whom my flight had filled with despair, or upon my intended, whose very existence was crushed by it.

"I had plenty of time, true enough! All my dreams were surpassed, my nights were passed in balls, my days in delicious idleness. Florestan refused me nothing, and when my caprices became too costly, the big open purse of M. Le Gigant was always at my disposal. How I fell out with Florestan, and how he succeeded him, needs no comment. Our connection, the fruits of my dishonest caprice, could not be lasting. When I left him, he did not reproach me, and on my part if he had been the first to abandon me, I should have addressed none to him. I then commenced that careless life, at which we all commence, a life of horrible misery and mad prodigalities, in which one dines at night on truffles and champagne, although without breakfast in the morning, in which we often allow the most expensive shawls to drag the dust in order to cover tattered dresses or torn boots.

"During one of these periods of utter destitution, M. Le Gigant again came to my assistance.

"Nothing could be more disinterested than the help he offered me. He demanded nothing, really nothing in exchange, excepting an acknowledgement of what I owed him. He furnished me with introductions in Paris to a furnishing store, a lady's furnishing store, and a jeweller; and he had no doubt but, when once fairly started, that I should be able to get along well enough. Here followed a number of recommendations, which at that time seemed but precautions, but which in reality formed a catechism of vice, providing against all eventualities; dangers were signalised, with the means of avoiding them. We are not worth much, any of us, but if all the vices of our minds could be united, it would hardly give an idea of the mine of bad contained in that man's conscience.

"I accepted his offers and returned to Paris, where I found more success in the life that I had commenced in Brussels.

"At that time a scene occurred which has left, and will forever leave, an indelible mark on my memory.

"One night, or rather, one morning, for our night had been prolonged till daybreak, we left one of the large restaurants on the Boulevards, staggering and stupefied, the street-sweepers laughed and joked us, and we laughed harder than they did, for we found it so funny. When suddenly, as I was about to enter a hired cab that was passing, I heard a name pronounced behind me; a name that I had discarded for so long was called in an imperative tone:—'Celina!'

"I turned, as if struck by a thunderbolt, and found myself face-to-face with Louis Jacquemin.

"How changed, good God! He had grown taller, pale, thin, a red fire shone from his hollow eyes, his full, long black beard made him appear still more thin and pale. His imperative tone, his gesture full of authority, arrested me. The thought of flight never occurred to me. However, whether I would or could not, I felt my legs sinking beneath me. I stood there immovable and staring, as if in a nightmare, when one is riveted to the ground, as if by an inconceivable will, in the presence of assassins.

"Jacquemin had stopped the cab; he seized my arm, and forced me to take a seat in it. I did not even attempt resistance. Then he stepped in and sat by my side, after telling the coachman the number of my father's house.

"All this had been conducted with such rapidity that at first my companions had escaped noticing it. When they saw that I was being taken from their very midst, without making any resistance, they laughed and passed jokes at me.

"They laughed, and I, as pale as a corpse, my teeth chattering, I trembled.

"I waited for Louis to speak. He kept sad and mute: no anger, no reproaches, nothing! That silence was terrible.

"At last, unable longer to endure it, I made up my mind to speak:

"'And my father?' I asked.

"Jacquemin awoke from his meditation, cast a long look me, as if surprised at finding me there, at his side, and replied in three words:

He is dead.'

"Then silence again and I feared to break it.

"We had arrived at our old house. The shop was there still, all open, but my father was not inside, a strange name had replaced his on the sign. In the place of the large silver watches and their works, there were children's toys, household ware, all sorts of jimcracks. Louis paid the driver, made me enter the passage and climb the stair to the door of the room that I used formerly to occupy. He knocked, the rustling of a dress was heard, and Madam Jacquemin opened the door.

"By a push of the shoulders, Louis forced me over the sill which I feared to pass.

"'There she is!' he said to his mother.

"Oh! unfortunate child!" cried she.

"Then—then my heart sank, I let myself fall into a chair, I hid my head in my hands in order to hide my shame and I wept, I wept as I have never wept since.

"But they were not tears of remose, no, there were tears of shame.

"The first refreshened me, these burnt my eyes as drops of molten lead. If Satan weeps in his infernal regions, such must be the tears he sheds.

"Madam Jacquemin mistook my grief; she thought it was repentance, and the good woman tried to console me in tender tones.

"But the more she consoled me, the greater became my despair, and I would fain have told her to be silent.

"At last she perceived my drift, for real sincere charity is gifted with a kind of double sight; an universal apprehension, almost divine. She made a sign, motioned some one towards me that I had not discovered before in the room, and I felt two arms, two little arms, the feeble arms of a child, clasped around my neck.

"I raised my head and recognised Ursula, my sister, my child! and the only spot left pure in my heart palpitated. She was as beautiful as an angel, with her mourning dress, and large full eyes. I drew her upon my knee and covered her good rosy cheeks with kisses, then her eyes, her tiny neck, and her little hands. I could have devoured her with kisses.

"The child startled and afraid, let me do it, but more from surprise than pleasure.

"'You do not recollect me then, Ursula?' I asked.

"She fixed her large eyes upon me with astonishment but uttered no reply.

"'Do you not recollect Celina?' exclaimed Madam Jacquemin. The child smiled doubtfully.

"'Celina is dead,' replied she, 'papa told me so. Besides, Celina was not a fine lady.'

"And then with her fingers she pointed to my velvet dress, my lace and my jewels.

"And feeling my despair, I cried:

"'She is right, Celina is dead!'

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOUIS JACQUEMIN.

"CELINA is dead!

"Alas! yes, Celina was dead, and only Nini Moustache now remained.

"I arose, forever to leave that house that was no more my home, but Madam Jacquemin held me back.

"She told me that my father had forgiven me—does not a father always forgive! He left a small legacy to Ursula and to me, the fruits of his laborious economies. I would not touch that money and gave my share to Ursula. It was also agreed that my sister should stay under the charge of Madam Jacquemin, who promised to care for her as a mother. At last I was allowed to depart, my soul was not more suited to that atmosphere of virtue; it stifled me. But the trials of that day had barely commenced.

"Louis awaited me on the landing; he made me a sign to follow him, and led me into the little chamber under the roof, which he occupied.

"There I first learned how much he had loved me, and what an enthusiastic devotion I had sacrificed to the lustful caprice of Florestan. Louis conjured me, begged, and in turn became violent. He cried aloud: 'Go! go, unfortunate creature; leave the house that you have contaminated!' Then he held me back, clasped my hands, covered them with kisses and tears, and begged me to forgive his violence.

"Oh! if I could but have recommenced my life! I think that that hour would have thoroughly converted me. But no!

"I would have consented to the sacrifice that Louis proposed to make to me. I would have accepted pardon, complete forgetfulness of the past as he offered me, and in less than a month, eight days

perhaps, I would have fallen again. If I resisted his entreaties, it was not on account of my being concientiously unworthy, it was from pure cowardice: what I feared from the bottom of my soul, above all was the heavy burden of the duties that would again devolve upon me, the simple woolen and print dresses, the magnanimous severity of husband and mother. I preferred my shameful bondoir to the sanctity of the conjugal chamber and the cradle, and the feverish nights of orgies, to the serene tenderness of sincere love: I was born bad.

"From the day, from the very night of that day, I recommenced my customary mode of life, even more passionately, for I had to seek oblivion. But from that moment my existence had a mournful witness who never left it. Rich or miserable, in the rich restaurants or the resorts of poor girls, at balls, theatres, every where I met Louis, ensconced in some corner from whence he devoured me with fiery glances. On every new apparition he was thinner and more pale. By degrees his clothing turned to rags. His honorable and laborious poverty turned to sordid misery. One day I remarked that he was beastly intoxicated. As I became more degraded he followed my example, as if he were a living image of my own conscience.

"After the lapse of a few months I received a letter from his mother, in which she explained that horrible transformation. As soon as Louis had found me, but to lose me for ever, he had become downcast. Work disgusted him, his mode of life, formerly so regular, became unsettled. He returned late at night and frequently intoxicated. This state of things soon became habitual. He never went to work and rarely left the tavern. Madam Jacquemin's small savings were becoming exhausted, and her work was no longer sufficient to keep up the household expenses and provide for all Louis's debauchery. She remonstrated with him, to which he retorted with violence. He must have money, always money; then the poor woman would empty her pockets and live on dry bread, while her son would get drunk or perhaps worse. A day came however when she emptied her pockets in vain, there was nothing in them. Then Louis recollected Ursula's little treasure. But in spite of his menace, his oaths and his cries, Madam Jacquemin, who would have shed her very blood to satisfy the merest wish of her son, defended the orphan's patrimony like a fierce lioness.

"This is what Madam Jacquemin wrote and ended by praying me to arrange about Ursula's future, as she could no longer undertake it, partly because her son daily became more dangerous, and partly that when away she could perhaps more effectively help herself.

"She at once set about this, and at present she is acting as house-keeper, under a feigned name, for fear that Louis will find her out and rob her as before. She robs herself enough poor woman, and perhaps the periodical help that she sends Louis, alone has kept him from becoming a thief.

"Following Madam Jacquemin's advice, I took charge of Ursula again, but I did not keep her with me. That child was the only virtue left me, the only being around me that I had not perverted or made miserable; I wanted to keep her pure and happy. I placed her in a provincial convent, where I presented myself under the name of Madam Morel; I gave the five thousand franc notes to the Lady Superior, to whom I told my true position. Then, feeling reassured on that point, I rushed madly into the wild vortex of our life."

Here Nini Moustache interrupted herself, and remained for a few moments plunged in deep meditation; then she continued in a slow and melancholy tone:

"That is true. It seems as if there was a fatality attached to me. I can touch nothing without breaking or damaging it. My bad conduct killed my father, my love has rendered Louis Jacquemin, that honest and upright heart, a drunkard, a bad man, almost a thief. And then my sister, my dear Ursula"—

Here she drew a heavy sigh.

"Well, let us take courage!"

And she continued in the same devilish tone as at first:

"I experienced many ups and downs, but all women of our stamp have to pass those. I paid the price of my fault; that is but just, and I do not complain.

"It was at a well known public ball, at the Palace of Flora, that I again met my evil genius, under the form of Florestan. But it was not the same man. The eight years that had elapsed since our separation had been turned to account by that rough actor. He had conquered a clear spot in the sunshine of fortune. He as once recognized me, and imperiously signed me to be silent. Then he smilingly stooped down and whispered something to his companion.

"They were speaking about me, because the other looked at me and replied to the Colonel, in the same tone."

"The Colonel Fritz?" quickly asked Aurelia.

"'Yes!' drily replied Nini Moustache. "M. de Puisaye, for it was he who accompanied Colonel Fritz or Florestan, whichever you chose, immediately addressed me. He pleased me very much. Moreover, if he had not pleased me, it would have been all the same. Then the Colonel joined us, and at a moment when M. de Puisaye could not overhear us, he said to me in an undertone:

"'He must love you!'

"To which I replied, thinking that he was joking:

"'I do not wish for anything better.'

"And, in fact, to his misfortune, M. de Puisaye loved me.

"The meeting with Florestan preceeded the visit of M. Le Gigant but by a few weeks. He, at least, did not endeavor to play the hypocrite, but put the question plainly to me:

"'A fortune would be assured to me, almost a lion's share of the spoils, on condition of my ruining M. de Puisaye. If I consented to a bargain, a sensible protection should hover around me. If I refused, I should create incarnate enemies, would persecute me to death.

"'You have had, my dear child, the good luck to have been noticed by the Count. I am glad that such is the case, for I would prefer that the good fortune falls to your lot, than to any one else. But mark well, if you do not obey us in all, we will find means to replace you by some one more tractable. The Count is weak, we know what means to employ in order to secure him. You are far from being a fool, my dear, but I warn you, that without our advice, the job would be beyond your powers. On that score, my pet, good night. Reflect, to-morrow I will return to learn your choice: a hotel in which to finish your days, or a basket upon your back.'

"The cool manner in which he addressed me, perfectly benumbed me. The wild beast that was hidden under the apparent good nature of M. Le Gigant, suddenly appeared to me. His clear look pierced my breast like a blade of steel. I was sure that he would carry out either his promises or his threats without pity.

"My choice was therefore without doubt. Moreover, I did not then quite love the Count, and what is a ruin more or less to a woman.

"This is how I became entangled in this wonderful labyrinth, to which I now abandon the last shreds of conscience.

"One day I tried to withdraw myself from the tyranny of Le Gigant.

"The day on which I tried, as I said, to remove the yoke, was that on which the marriage of Mamselle de Puisaye was broached. My tyrant imperceptibly frowned, then casting on me that same sharp and cold glance, which went to my very soul:

"'Apropos, Mamselle," said he, "you know that your cousin Ursula is in Paris; her education has been finished for some time, and you wrote to the Superior to send her to you. Oh! never mind, the dove is in safety, under the care of persons whose morality is sure, working in one of the first milliners stores in Paris, and she will go right, for I vouch for it. I am a substantial tutor, and the dandy who would dare to get too near to her, would pass a rough ten minutes.'

"Then, when Le Gigant saw that I was prostrated by this unexpected news:

"'Just listen here! One has to take precautions, my dear, women are so capricious! In this manner I can sleep soundly; I am sure of you as of myself. You want Ursula to keep a good girl; well, I can understand that mania. I promised you aid and protection: that aid and that protection extends to your sister as long as you obey our conventions. You know that I keep my promises, but I warn you that I am not to be trifled with. I have spoken!'

"And really he had spoken. My bondage was complete, my will crushed; from that moment I became the instrument of Le Gigant. Alas! it was my sister who suffered the consequences of my revolt against that terrible master. By wounding her heart, he reached mine. I am forced to infamy in order to preserve the innocence of that one pure and generous corner of my soul."

Nini Moustache had finished her narrative; she was silent, and prostrated by the effort she had made to recall the painful recollections of the past, the piercing apprehensions for the future, she sank immovable into her chair. All at once she felt two warm lips touch her brow, and a voice, a murmur, stole upon her ear:

"Courage, my sister: have faith, hope! and you shall be saved."

She suddenly arose, to seek an explanation, but her hand moved in space. She ran to the window and violently drew back the curtain. Aurelia had

left. But on raising her hands to her forehead, Nini found a damp, warm moisture, a drop of dew, a tear!

The day was breaking pale and transparent, with rapid streaks, Aurelia passed through the now empty supper room, and found her carriage that awaited her. Half a hour later she got out at the door of her house, at the corner of the Chaussee d'Antin, and the Rue de Provence, and the heavy doors closed behind her sweeping train.

But if any person prompted by inquisitiveness or jealousy, had waited for half an hour, under her window, he would have seen the narrow door of a side entrance noiselessly open. A woman came out, her head covered by a hood, and wearing the dress of a woman of the middle class well to do. Although her face still maintained a marvelous freshness, that woman must be advanced in years, judging by the two large curl papers that protruded on each side of the hood. Her hair was of that harmonious pale gray, nearly as charming as blonde.

The good woman, well wrapt up in her cloak, made a few steps, then stopped and appeared to be waiting or looking for some one. At that moment, a young man, dressed as a mechanic, stepped out from the dark shade of a doorway. The woman quickly advanced towards him without any explanation on either side, took his arm, then both stepped out briskly in the direction of the Boulevard, while walking they spoke together in an under tone, in which the names of the actors in this drama were frequently mentioned. That of M. de Puisaye—Cyprienne, and also those of Nini Moustache and Jacquemin.

The woman spoke and seemed to be giving information and orders. The man listened silently, and nodded his head from time to time, as if to infer that he understood, and that it should be done.

On reaching the Boulevard the curious couple turned to the left, in the direction of the Bastille, then to the right into the Rue Vivienne. The shops were still closed, and the few foot passengers, leaving the taverns and balls hurried to their homes.

The woman stopped before a shop, on the sign of which could be read: "Madam Rosel, milliner." She inserted a key in the door at once, and for a few moments continued the conversation.

"Well then, it is arranged," she said at last.

"Yes," replied her companion, "they shall know what Le Gigant is."

"That is right."

She then held out a little hand, round and plump, marvelously white, which the mechanic clasped between his own, with a kind of respectful tenderness.

"Good night, Joseph."

"Good night, Helena."

And the door of the shop closed upon the early walker.

The mechanic continued his walk, with a meditative air. He proceeded slowly, as if plunged into a deep reverie. The shops opened, the morning noises awoke, the Rue Montmartre, down which the young man turned, was filled by venders, market-women, carts full of vegetables; but although elbowed, hustled, and stopped at each step, the man appeared indifferent and wrapt up solely in the subject of his thoughts.

When opposite a tavern at the corner of the market, he stopped and raised his head, as if astonished at having gone so far without perceiving it. A man was drinking before the zinc-covered counter. A man wan and thin, prematurely old, and whose hair alone indicated his youth.

Joseph went straight to him.

"What! drinking again, Jacquemin? Now, you promised me not to drink any more."

"That is true, M. Joseph," replied the other, stuttering, "but you see, it is stronger than I am, and then, I met her last night, that woman!"

"That will do, that will do!" said Joseph. "An honest man should have but one word. Let your glass be."

Jacquemin cast a long look at the thick glass, half filled with brown peppered brandy, then emptied it slowly on to the floor, as if he regretted it.

Joseph looked at him and smiled.

"Now, that is good," said he. "Now, come with me. I have been looking for you; I want some information from you."

Joseph and Jacquemin went, chatting, towards the Rue Rambuteau.

"Now we are there," said Joseph, pointing to the door of a dark passage. "Just see if we can speak to Le Gigant. When you have full particulars, come and give them to me. Ah! bye-the-bye, how do you stand with Clement?"

Jacquemin bowed down his head, red with confusion.

"The master is severe," he muttered.

"Yes—yes—you have taken some of your pay on account, or perhaps sent some jewelry to your uncle's."

Louis did not reply, but his shame

showed that Joseph was not far wrong.

"Go and find Clement, from me," continued Joseph; "confess your fault, and that is the only punishment that I impose. Good bye, my boy."

"Good bye, M. Joseph."

"Now, above all, do not forget to call upon Clement."

At that moment, a young and pretty work girl, with her basket on her arm, ran down the stairs of the house.

"Good Lord! what a hurry you are in, Miss Ursula," said Joseph, smiling.

"Yes," replied Ursula. "Madam Rosel is very good, but she wants us to be punctual. Let me go quickly, M. Joseph. I am afraid that I am late, and your sister will scold me."

"Oh! nonsense," said Joseph. "If I wanted to, I would soon find means to stop you."

"Would you? Well, I should like to see you do it!"

"I should only have to say one word, but one word: Cyprienne."

And leaving the young girl, perfectly aghast, in the middle of the street, Joseph slowly climbed up stairs

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAUGHTER AND FATHER.

"I now know the misfortune that menaces me; M. de la Cruz was right, it is the worst that can befall a daughter. My father will force me to marry a man whom I do not love, a man whom I can never love.

"This morning when about finishing my toilet, Florent, my father's valet, came to request me to pay him a visit. I found him in his study, wrapped in his dressing gown, and perusing a volume of correspondence, which he pushed back on my entering.

"'Ah! are you there, Cypri, thanks for your hurry, I did not expect you so soon.'

"'My principal wish, Sir, is to satisfy your smallest desire, as soon as possible.'

"Yes, yes, I know it, you are a good girl, and on my heart I will do as much, I will do all I can to make you think me a good father. But for the present I merely want to return the breakfast of the other morning. He did his utmost to appear as lively as usual, but he could not wholly hide a secret uneasiness. I, feeling that the critical moment had come, could scarcely reply. My father first perceived that he would have to break this embarassing silence.

"'Well now! Cypri, what do you say of your hero?'

"He looked at me smiling, I became as red as fire, what folly! I imagined he read my thoughts through my forehead, and that he meant M. de la Cruz.

"At last I sufficiently mustered my voice to ask:

"'Which hero, sir?'

"'Well, by Jove!" exclaimed he, 'the one for whom you would have bravely broken a lance the other day, the one on whose account you scolded me, the virtuous, the philanthropic, the magnanimous Baron Matifay.'

"This name so little expected, removed a great weight from my breast, and laughing heartily:

"'Goodness gracious, Sir, I must own that I do not think anything at all about him, but if you wish, I will reflect on it.'

"I wish it,' replied my father, suddenly become very serious."

"Then resuming the gay tone so familiar to him.

"'Let us see if you know how to draw portraits: he was presented to you the other day at Madam de Monte-Cristo's; what do you think of him?

"'As you insist upon it,' I replied, I will own that he does not please me at all. He is virtuous, philanthropic, even magnanimous, if you will, but it strikes me that he is too fond of showing himself. All about him seems to say: turn round, see, here goes a baron, virtuous, philanthropic, magnanimous. I think very little would induce him to walk up and down the street with a little blue cloak on.'

"Yes,' said my father writhing with laughter, and he would inscribe on his exterior, it is I who am Guillot, the the teacher of men! What funny little brains you misses have. Here is a girl who but the other morning would have thrashed me for speaking bad of her baron, and who, to-day, is the first to ridicule him under the pretext that he is rather old and a pretty good looking fellow."

"'Call him very ugly and very old.'

"Well let it be so! but very rich. That is what removes a man's years and wrinkles. The real fountain of youth is wealth.'

"I did not reply, although I had a great mind to, and again we were silent.

"It was again broken by my father.

"'Now, Cyprienne, we have joked enough, let us speak reason.'

"And as that expression made me tremble:

"'Oh! do not be afraid. That "let us speak reason" is not so terrible as it seems, and I do not think that a big girl of sixteen ought to faint when marriage is proposed.'

"'Marriage, Sir! do you want to marry me?'

"'And why not? you are old enough, and you will have to end by that some day or other. Then in marriage, as in everything else, chance is everything, and some one has asked your hand.'

"My looks interrogated him; he understood my mute question, which after all was not a difficult task:

"'Who?' said he, 'well it is your hero, Baron Matifay.'

"'Baron Matifay!'

"I thought that I must be mistaken, I stared at him, open mouthed like an idiot.

"'Well now!' continued my father, 'what is there in that so astounding? Rest assured that you will make more than one envious, I know at least twenty who could almost die of jealousy.'

"'For God s sake, sir, do not let them die!'

"I tried to joke, but I assure you that I felt less like laughing than crying. However, there was a hope left. I marry M. Matifay! It seemed to me so unlikely, so mad, so entirely out of the question, that I almost fancied my father was playing some trick upon me. But he very soon dispelled this delusion.

"'Cyprienne, he said in a severe tone, I think I told you that we were not joking. I assure you that nothing can be more serious than this plan, and by not receiving it with good grace you would pain me very much. Believe me that all your scruples, that all your apprehensions, even all your disgust are mere romantic and ridiculous reveries. I know life, I know that beauty flies away and fortune remains. I have weighed the pros and the cons in your interest, be it well understood, and also in that of my house.'

"He continued for a long time in this strain, endeavoring to convince me of the advantages arising from this union; he offered me all kinds of arguments: Matifay was the stuff of which ministers were made: that the King had formally promised him the direct succession to my father's peerage: that I should be the wife of the wealthiest and most esteemed man in Paris: that the Baron had given proofs of generosity, tenderness, and greatness of mind: that for me he would rather be an attentive protector than a husband.

"I hastily interrupted him in his speech.

"'It is not that I mean, father,' I exclaimed. 'Do you not see that you are breaking my heart? Oh! now I see that you have never loved me, that you do not love me! What have I done, that you should so cruelly treat me? Is it my fault that I was born? From my birth you placed me at a distance from you, made me almost a stranger. There were no caresses around my cradle, my youth met with no joyful smile. If you had but left me in my convent! There I was beloved. I was resigned to my fate; I knew you but so little, both you and my mother, that I had almost consoled myself at being treated for evermore with indifference. But no! You dragged me from the affections that I had formed, you have let me touch a happiness that I foretasted without my knowledge. You have taken me, poor girl, sad orphan, to give me, at one blow, all that constitutes unclouded happiness, opulence, family, a mother! Now you wish to deprive me of all this; you drive me from the house of my birth, where I have passed but so few days, and you impose an exile upon me, a thousand times more terrible than the first!'

"I looked up, and on perceiving my father's countenance, I was terrified at my audacity. He was standing, pale, his clenched fist forcibly resting on the marble table.

"Then I threw myself on my knees, I dragged myself to his feet, to grasp the hand that he withdrew; I, sobbing, asked his pardon for the blasphemous words that I had uttered; I protested that I loved him, that I believed that he loved me, too; that all the acts of my life should be devoted to prove my filial submission, but I supplicated him to withdraw a decision that was not yet irrevocable. I swore to him, that by trying to ensure my happiness, which had been doubtless his first intention, it was, on the contrary, the sealing of my eternal misery: furthermore, I had implicit confidence in his affection, and that I felt sure, on seeing my unconquerable repugnance to his plans, he would renounce them of his own accord.

"I finished by taking his hand, which I covered with kisses.

"He forced me to rise.

"'Cyprienne,' he said, 'never let me see you kneel to me; that melo-dramatic position is humiliating for both of us.'

"He walked round the room two or three times with a feverish step; I, as immovable as a statue, with downcast eyes, awaited his decision. When my father's agitation had been somewhat appeased, he returned to me.

"'You have wounded me deeply, my daughter, you have wounded me to the heart.'

"I tried to mutter an excuse, but could not.

"'But whether or not you have wounded me, that you have judged—severely—a line of conduct of which you are ignorant, of which you will forever ignore the motive, that is not the question. You ask me to reflect, and I make the same request of you. Reflect, and do not call me the tyrant of a drama nor the tutor in a farce. If concerning your marriage, I have taken an irrevocable decision, it is because that decision is the only just, the only reasonable, the only possible one. When you have ripely reflected, come and see me, and if your mind remains the same, you will not be forced, but you will have caused, I warn you, an immense misfortune which that union alone can avert. Instead of having been a blessing to your family, and a means of deliverance, you will have been the cause of its ruin, and I shall be obliged to look upon your return amongst us, as a disaster, in the same light as your birth. Therefore, let it be well understood, your own fate, and ours, rests in your hands. Now, let us speak of other topics?'

"He sat down to the table, and I was obliged to follow his example, although I had not the least inclination for breakfast. My father, soon became, as I had always seen him, very lively and amiable. It was doubtless a comedy, but he played his part to perfection. I cannot understand how any one can to such an extent rule the features and manner, even to the tone of the voice. He talked of all manner of things, balls, and those who frequented them. At the bottom, I imagine that he chatted in this manner, the better to hide his trouble. As for me, I listened to him with distraction, as you can easily think, replying at random, whenever he spoke to me directly. However his good humor is so communicating that he finished by interesting me, making me almost forget my grief.

"Perhaps it was owing to his taking up the theme of Madam de Monte-Cristo, and that I hoped he would speak to me about M. de la Cruz.

"'First of all,' said he, 'Monte-Cristo is not her name. Monte-Cristo is the name of the last hero of the great novelist Alexandre Dumus. Regarding the name of this enigmatical personage, you must consult more learned people than I am. That her anonymous receptions have, in a few months, become the most renowned in Paris, is a phenomena that cannot be explained neither by the beauty, the exquisite distinction, nor by the princely fortune of the mistress of the house. What I would add resembles more to a legend, and I would myself but add little faith to it, had I not been a personal witness.

"'When that illustrious, mysterious person arrived in Paris, she was careful not to seek to enter into friendly relations, soon nothing was spoken of but her marvellous hotel and the good taste displayed in her livery, and the great beauty of her equipages. It was then that she was smilingly accorded the title of Madam de Monte-Cristo, which she has retained since. Every one was asking: Do you know her? Who is she? Where does she come from? Some replied from Berlin, others from St. Petersburg, a third, from India. As you see they were very precise.

"'Now one day, or rather one evening, all of us inquisitive beings, of whom I was one, were sadly disappointed. It was at a first Court ball. The crowd formed a passage, a confused murmur arose at the entrance, and who should walk in, but our unknown herself, in flesh and blood. Then one of the most officious, hastened to the door-keeper.

"'What name did that lady give you?'

"'Which lady?'

"'The one that just came in here, with an aigrette of diamonds and a dress of English lace?'

"'Well, that is Madam de Monte-Cristo.'

"'And that is all that could be learned about her.'

"'Besides, Madam de Monte-Cristo, now that she is Madam de Monte-Cristo, was remarkably well received by their Majesties. It was noticed that the Queen spoke to her for a long time. When the conversation was finished, the strange lady respectfully bent the knee and kissedthe hand that was tendered her, in a most gracious manner, by her majesty. You must own that this was enough to dispel all scruples of etiquette. Besides every one longed to feast their eyes upon the marvels of her mansion. Eight days later, Madam de Monte-Cristo issued in-

vitations, lighted up her saloons, and all Paris danced in her house.

"'Some of our great ladies have even entered upon intimate terms, and they cannot find words to express her goodness, her sovereign grace and her ineffable beauty. Therefore the sphinx among the women has accomplished all, even to good being said of her by her rivals without any feeling of deception.

"'You can easily imagine that no efforts have been spared to extort Madam de Monte-Cristo's secret, under the worthy intention of telling every body. Only they have been met by strong minds, to-day they are as much advanced as on the first day.'

"In this manner my father chatted, and I listened, vivibly interested in fables, which had the advantage of being reality. Those proofs of the evident power of Madam de Monte-Cristo, inspired me with a curious kind of hope, was it not, perhaps, from her house that the help would come, that was promised by M. de la Cruz? Was she, perhaps, not one of those friends who watched? But when I found myself alone, all those consoling ideas flew away, and I only recalled those words of bitterness, uttered by my father. My birth had been a disaster to my family, I should cause the fall of my house, I held the fate of the Puisayes in my hand."

"And I laboriously sought to learn, in what manner, my marriage with that odious Baron Matifay could conjure such mysterious misfortunes.

"Sure enough, my soul is filled with devotion for those dear beings, which my duty and my heart command me to love more than myself. There is no sacrifice that I am not willing to make in order to avoid pain to my mother, but then I wish to know what invincible reason can render this sacrifice indispensable.

"My father owes me that explanation, he cannot refuse it to me without being arbitrary or tyrannical. I will go to him and say: 'Father, I have decided, I will submit. Prove to me by a word, only one, the absolute necessity of my consent, and at whatever cost, I will accord it at once?'

"Yes, I will tell him—but, alas! can I dare? Did he not declare to me himself, that I could never learn the fatal secret? To ask to be enlightened after such an explicit affirmation, was almost disobedience! I will ask my mother for the explanation, and if my mother will not, can not, or dare not reply. Lord, oh! Lord, enlighten me, inspire me, counsel me.

"My glance just falls upon the note of the other night. It is there all open, with its bold and plain writing.

"'Your friends watch, help them!'

"'Can that, oh! Lord, be your reply."

CHAPTER XXV.

WIDOW LAMOUROUX. A WOMAN OF PROPERTY.

If high life and the demi-monde have their noisy celebrities, the middle class has sometimes its own, more modest, it is sure, in their way, but often with greater merit. Among the former, such characters as Matifay and Nini Moustache are not rare: there are, however, some little blue cloaks among the second.

The poor neighborhoods all know Widow Lamouroux well. The dark, dingy stairs have often been brushed by her widow's weeds. In more than one fireless shanty, without bread, transformed into a hospital by the ravages of misery and fever, the sad occupant, on finding a purse, as if forgotten, on the table, has exclaimed, without surprise: "The good lady has been here!"

More than one small trader, on the eve of failure, had, on the morning when he could no more meet his payments, received a letter without signature, enclosing the amount that proved his salvation, to which was added as postcript: "Return it to the poorer!" More than one young girl out of work, on the brink of the precipice, had seen Madam Rosel bring her some orders for sewing or embroidery, for which payment was made in advance. Now, who spoke of Madam Rosel, mentioned Widow Lamouroux in the same breath, whose right hand she was: the silk dress of the milliner bore the reflection of the widow's weeds.

From whence came Madam Lamouroux? What was she? Poor people are not inquisitive; they accept benevolence without searching for the source. Whence did she come? From the angels. Where will she go to? To Paradise. Who was she? Providence.

Those of her protegees who had seen her, and they were few, for Madam Lamouroux had the habit of avoiding those whom she placed under an obligation, as criminals avoid their victims, portrayed her as a celestial being. She was, they asserted, an old woman a hundred times

more beautiful than any young one, with large blue eyes, a calm and sweet face, surrounded by flaxen gray hair, as fine as silk. Her voice was feeble and hidden, it is true, but so harmonious that it sounded like the music of seraphines. Some said, on hearing it "It is the chant of her soul!"

Madam Lamouroux lived very retired: she rarely left her apartment, which was over Madam Rozel's shop. And when she did go out, no one knew it, because she had a side stair made, which communicated between her room and the shop. She was so venerated by all around her, that none thought of watching her steps, for it would have been sacrilege. When, unintentionally, any one would perceive the rustling of her dress in the passage, the remark would occur:

"Here is Madam Lamouroux, who is going to visit her people." And heads would be turned away, so as not to annoy her, with the certain conviction that, within an hour, in that great city, there would be one misery less or some pain comforted.

Madame Lamouroux received none into her intimacy but Madam Rozel and Joseph Rozel, her brother: sometimes, too, but very rarely, she would receive M. Clement, the celebrated jeweller of the Boulevard des Capucines.

It was said that these three persons were the chief members of her benevolent police force.

If a legend was attached to Madame Lamouroux's outward life, it can easily be conceived that the mystery cast around her in Madame Rozel's back shop, was made to attain unheard of proportions. There were a half dozen heads, fair, dark, chestnut and curly, and rosy lips, all more or less protected or saved by that providence whose works were accomplished by the intermedium of the good milliner. When her back was turned there was some chatting really worth hearing. I saw her yesterday morning, one would say. When I came down stairs I heard some one speaking in her room, said another. It was her voice I am sure! And each threw in her word, or revelation, in order to reconstruct that being called Madame Lamouroux.

But on the entry of Madame Rozel, who was continually going and coming between the store and the work room, the talk was stopped and all the heads bent over their work.

At this moment the workroom was as noisy as a bush full of larks. Our friend Ursula alone, was melancholy and dreaming. She still pondered over that one word carelessly spoken by Joseph; Cyprienne! He had seen her then, he knew her! where could she be? what was she doing? She had not had time to put any question to him, of the many that rose to her lips, and he jokingly had made off with the intention of not replying.

But Ursula knew that he was only joking, and that another time he would reply.

Only she wanted to know and that is why she sat thinking.

That is why, and also four other reasons, for although Cyprienne formed the principal object of her revery, she was not the only one.

The dear creature had found a deep touching misery in her home. To alleviate it herself was impossible: she too was very poor, she only had her work, and the nights are so short, the gains so small! But she had thought of Madame Lamouroux, she had intimated her grief through the mediation of Joseph, and now awaited the reply from that saviour of the unfortunate.

A joyous shout filled the room:

"M. Joseph! M. Joseph!"

All the little rosy smiling lips lifted. Joseph was more than popular in his sister's workshop, and on seeing the good-looking mechanic more than one cheek blushed, more than one heart beat under its thin covering.

Ursula said nothing but fixed an interrogatory look upon him, to which he merely replied by a gesture:

"Silence!"

In his hand, Joseph had a carefully sealed letter bearing an armorial stamp.

"Is my sister not here?" he asked.

"She is with Madame Lamouroux," replied the girls in chorus.

"Well then," said Joseph, "I will go up stairs."

And he disappeared in the dark entrance to the stairs, accompanied by half a dozen sighs, sighs of regret for his hasty departure, perhaps, too, because he was privileged to see the widow face to face.

Immediately after his departure a rustling of a dress was heard on the stairs. It was Madame Rozel coming down, she held in her hand the same letter that her brother had just brought.

Doubtless some fresh order from one of her aristocratic customers.

But instead of reading it, she quickly slipped it into her apron pocket.

Silence again reigned, as if by en-

chantment. Nothing could be more imposing than Madame Rozel. Had it not been for her staid dress and general appearance, she could have passed for one of the liveliest and youngest of her assistants.

She inspected their work with a semi-serious air, which was the most charming that can be imagined, then when she came to Ursula:

"Mademoiselle Ursula," she said, "leave your embroidery, you are wanted up stairs."

Happy Ursula! The door of the holy of holies was to open for her, she was going to see Madame Lamouroux, even doubtless to speak with her. To see her, to speak with her, was enough to kill her companions with jealousy, but Madame Rozel was there now, and not a sigh could be allowed to escape.

Trembling, Ursula climbed the stairs; she waited for a long time before the door before knocking. Only think! the fate of her protegee depended upon her words, the reply she would receive!

At last she knocked faintly. A feeble voice announced from the inside: "Come in!" and before, in her agitation, she could find the handle of the door, the door itself opened wide, displaying the frank, generous countenance of Joseph, who drew a side to let her pass.

The room was large and sombre—plainly furnished with mahogany furniture and Utrecht velvet. On the chimney stood an alabaster clock between two vases of artificial flowers. It is true, there was nothing very imposing in this, but still Ursula stood immovable, as on the door step of a chapel.

The sweet voice again spoke:

"Draw nearer, Mademoiselle, draw dearer, my child."

And Joseph pushed her towards a large arm-chair, from whence the voice emanated.

In that chair sat the venerated widow, Madam Lamouroux.

Ursula would willingly have fallen on her knees, but somehow Joseph had placed a chair, and Madame Lamouroux affectionately pressed her down, with her white hands, and she found herself seated.

"It is you, Mamselle Ursula, who wish to speak to me about two persons dwelling in your house?"

"Yes, Madame," replied Ursula, rendered more at home by this kind reception, "and they are very unfortunate."

"It is about, I think," continued Madam Lamouroux, "a marionette showman Signor Cinella, as he is called in the neighborhood, and a girl called Pippione."

"It is he, Madam, that has given her that name; her real name is Blanche, and I only call her by that."

Madam Lamouroux gently inclined her head.

"That fact doubly interests me in your protege," she said, "for I dearly loved a person of that name. Moreover I have made inquiries, and they perfectly agree with your remarks. The father, it is said, is a brutal fellow, a bad man; but his daughter is interesting, and they say that he loves her. There is always some resource when people love each other. Will you do me the service of taking charge of all that concerns these poor people? I am going away for a few days, but before leaving, will send round Doctor Ozax; for it seems to me the little girl is very ill, and the district surgeon will be insufficient. You will fetch the medicines from the apothecary's store that the doctor will name; for the rest arrange with Madam Rozel."

This was spoken in almost an undertone, but, and very naturally too, Ursula felt her eyes filling with tears, before such charity and simplicity combined.

"Oh! Madam! Madam," she exclaimed, rising, "How happy they will be· How I do thank you!"

"Now that is too much!" replied Madam Lamouroux, slightly frowning. "You know that I do not like that. Who tells you, but that at this moment, I am not acomplishing a sacred duty, and that I have received a hundred times over, from Heaven, more than I can distribute in the course of human life. Then, assuming her habitual voice, she added: "If you want to remain friends, never thank me."

Ursula thought her evidence at an end, and prepared for leaving, when Madam Lamouroux retained her.

"Wait a moment longer!" said Madam Lamouroux, taking Ursula by the hand, "are you so soon tired of me!"

"Oh! no, Madam."

"As you will now become one of my accomplices (and such a fine candid smile accompanied the "accomplices") it is but just that we should know each other better. You are named Ursula?"

"Ursula Durand, yes, Madam."

"The letter that you wrote me about your protegees, is well worded.

"You have received some education?'

"Yes, Madam, I was brought up in the convent of B——, under the care of the sisters of St. Martha."

"And yonder in that convent, had you not a privileged companion, a friend?"

Ursula, cast a rapid glance at Joseph, he was resting his elbow upon the mantel and looked at her with a smile.

Madam Lamouroux surprised this double look.

"Come, come," she said good humoredly, "I think we shall understand each other. You come to invite me to a mission of charity, my dear child, I give you two: high as well as low, there are pains to be calmed, and these among the higher placed are at times the most cruel. Your friend is suffering, so go and console her, and tell her—but do not name us—because the first, the only order of our affliction is discretion—tell her, that her friends watch and that she must help them.'

As if informed of what was passing, and only waiting for that instant to interpose, Madam Rozel entered as these words were spoken.

"Are you not going to the hotel Puysaie to-day, my dear Rozel?' asked Madam Lamouroux.

"Yes, Madam, to carry several things to Miss Cyprienne."

"And I suppose it does not matter which of your assistants accompanies you?"

"Not in the least."

"In that case, I beg of you to take Miss Ursula along with you. *Au revoir*, my dear child."

And clasping Ursula in her arms, the good Madam Lamouroux imprinted a kiss on her forehead.

Ursula flew down the stairs like a bird.

Since the farewell kiss of the good Lady Superior of the convent of B——, she had never felt the impression of more cordial and maternal lips on her face. It is true, that the Goss family, with whom she lived, showed her some affection, but so vulgar, that often Ursula would have preferred indifference. And, therefore, beyond the hours spent in Madam Rozel's workshop, she passed the time alone in her little room under the roof; and later, when she had made the acquaintance of her new protegee, the poor Blanche, surnamed Pippione by Signor Cinella, she passed her time at her bedside.

Cinella and Pippione had excited the curiosity of the public in the streets for some months, at a time when the misery of Italy had not yet caused the periodical emigrations from the Peninsula towards Paris. The public was not yet tired of the picturesque costume of the pifferari, and their pointed hats and red belts drew eager crowds of boys.

Signor Cinella was a Neapolitan, and his avocation consisted in carrying his Punch and Judy, in their chintz dresses, from square to square.

Through mud and dust, bursts of laughter and hisses, poor Pippione followed her padrone. The crowd, with whom charity is not the most prevailing virtue, ridiculed her blue boddice, her red apron trimmed round with gaudy colors, her head-dress similar to those seen on the pictures by Leopold Robert, and her poor little tiny feet, incased in a pair of old boots of Signor Cinella's. She met this ridicule without complaint, without even appearing to notice that she was its object; and her eyes, enlarged by a dark circle that deepened every day, seemed to seek on the distant horizon the image of her native land.

Do you know the land where the orange blossoms?

But still, nothing in that emaciated face revealed the Italian. The burning sun of Naples had not burnt that milk-white skin, under which the hot colored blood of southern lands did not flow. Pippione's eyes were pale blue, and her hair had retained that attenuated, dull fairness, that is but generally seen on the heads of little children. In fact, in her whole being, the special features of a child had persistently and strangely held their sway. She looked like a babe of five years old grown to a girl of seventeen. Her bodice encircled her well-developed bust with touching grace, and the heavy folds of her skirt fell straight and stiff along her thighs, as on the sculptured images in Roman churches. When her white head-dress was removed, it seemed as if the glory that crowned her brow with a golden ray was the trace of a departed apparition.

It really was so; she was departing, the little Blanche, the poor Pippione; She was leaving the cursed world, of which she had but tasted the miseries, and each time when the cruel cough tore her emaciated chest, the angel, held captive within her body, clapped its wings, impatient to depart.

It was not that Signor Cinella was bad. Oh, dear, no! In respect to his pupil he showed himself as affectionate as his nature would allow. But he was a drunkard, avaricious and brutal. In short, he dearly loved his poor Pippione, like a master loves a dog that he beats, but to whom he will sacrifice his last

morsel of bread. This comparison was the more true, as Signor Cinella, who had the highest esteem of his own intelligence, considered Blanche in the light of an affectionate but shallow-minded animal. Therefore he had surnamed her Pippione, or pigeon, but without forgetting that in his language Pipionaccio signifies a coarse beast.

One day, when coughing more painfully than usual, Ursula noticed and took pity on her. It was a being to be loved in the solitude of her heart. The only perfectly happy hours she passed from that time forward were those passed at the side of the sick bed, chatting in a sweet voice, and mending her tatters.

And now Ursula would be able to bring health and comfort to that horrible dwelling: again she would be able to clasp her Cyprienne in her arms; again she had refound the affectionate protection of the Superior of the convent of B——, in the person of Madam Lamouroux!

For this reason did she fly down the stairs, which she had climbed with so much apprehension! Madam Rozel, who had preceeded her, awaited her below.

The boxes were all tied up. One of the girls had gone for a carriage.

The coquettish mistress had laid aside her silk apron, and before a glass was putting on a shawl handed to her by another.

"Come, are we ready?" she asked.

Then suddenly recollecting something she had forgotten, she picked up her apron, took the letter from the pocket, and placed it in her bosom.

The two women entered the carriage. Ursula's heart beat quickly; she was going to see Cyprienne!

"My dear child," said Madam Rozel, "I will take you direct to Miss Cyprienne; you have only to try on the two dresses, and to let her choose from the embroideries: as for me, I want to speak with Madam Pastel. You can arrange all this alone, can you not?"

"I hope—I think, yes, Madam," replied Ursula, whose innermost wish was thereby gratified.

Meanwhile, the conversation between Joseph and Madam Lamouroux continued, but her tone was changed; both were pale, their brows frowned, their lips quivered.

"I know the real name of that Le Gigant," said Joseph. "He was shown to me, and I recognised him at the first glance, although he is much altered. Le Gigant is Hercules Champion."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE BLUE WRITTING BOOK.

'I HAVE seen you again, my sweet Ursula, my dear sister. You have moistened this book with your tears, in it you read the anguish of my poor heart, and, you too, in turning over its last leaves, you too, have repeated the words uttered by M. de la Cruz:

"'Your friends watch, help them!'

"You could not, or would not tell me more, but those fine words coming from your mouth, have sufficed to render me courage and some hope for the future, and it is joyful to continue a diary that I am sure you will peruse.

"Yes, I have full confidence in those unknown friends, whose name you would not consent to tell me, although I feel sure that you are in their secret. I have confidence in them, because I know that you are with them. There was something prophetic in the words spoken by our Mother Saint Martha, when she said:

"'Whenever you need counsel or consolation, seek it nowhere but between yourselves. Ursula, to you I confide Cyprienne.'

"Be my guardian angel, my Ursula, and as you have the fortune to know my mysterious defenders, tell them that I bless them and love them.

"For believe me, that it is from them alone that I can henceforth expect any help. In my father's house, I am the plaything and the victim to interests, unknown to me, and which are carefully kept from me.

"Since some days my father only speaks to me in monosyllables. He is continually in confabulation with Colonel Fritz. Twice during the days they have gone out together, and I have learned from Pastel, who told me, without knowing the blow that she dealt, they went to Baron Matifay's. The coachman himself told her. My mother does not leave her room. My father passed the whole morning there, and all were forbidden to enter, even I was, I mention myself above all, for they spoke about my marriage. I saw this clearly by my mother's red eyes, when I was allowed to embrace her.

"I passed the rest of the day with her, very sadly. We dared not even to look at each other. I worked with downcast eyes, and she feigned to read. By good luck we received a visit from Madam de

Monte-Cristo. On seeing me very pale and not gay, she was uneasy respecting my health.

"'I do not know what is the matter with that child,' my mamma said, 'I fear she does not like being at home?

"'You must amuse her,' replied Madam de Monte-Cristo. 'Send her to me the day after to-morrow, during the day I have a meeting of all my young lady friends—I mean all those who are school girls—The mammas will chat whilst the girls dance together in the park: perhaps that party will please Madam Cyprienne better than our grand formal balls and our grand receptions.'

"Mamma said that I could act as I choose, and then they talked about other things.

"When Madam de Monte-Cristo was gone, and we were deprived of her pleasant chit-chat, the sadness, dispelled during her presence, again reigned. Mamma took up her book and I resumed my embroidery, but my stitches were all wrong and she read inattentively. Every now and then our furtive glances would meet. I longed to confess my grief but dared not, and I think mamma feared to provoke any mention of the subject that occupied our thoughts.

"At last she broached the painful topic:

"'Your father has spoken to you, Cyprienne?'

"'Yes, mamma, on the day before yesterday, in the morning.'

"'You must take courage, my daughter, and obey.'

"'Oh! mamma!'

"'I could say no more. She had risen and I was in her arms.'

"'How foolish! she murmured at my ear, Why do you cry? Why do you cry? Alas! my dear Cyprienne, the marriages for love are not always the most happy. The best is, for us to be resigned to our fate: moreover you know no one, you love no one, the sacrifice is therefore the less painful.'

"I remained helpless, without reply. clinging to her neck.

"'Oh! my God,' she exclaimed, violently loosening my embrace, 'I am sufficiently punished?'

"She stared wildly, her despair was fearful. My tears ceased to flow and I trembled.

"After a moment's silence my mother continued:

"What do you require of me, my girl, say? shall I lose myself, shall I lose all; for I will do it? Oh! if you only knew?'

"'Mother I do not wish to know anything, I will obey.'

"'And you will be unhappy for all your life, you will bear the faults of another. No! That is impossible, unjust, impious! She to be delivered up to that Matifay! Good Lord can you allow this? She, my Cyprienne! my only one, my only consolation, to be sold, violated, lost! No! even if I were to die a thousand deaths, if I were——.

She stopped, and then in a curt voice:

"'Then it is decided, you will not, you cannot overcome your horror? and how could you? you have not been brought up among our atrocious, shameful institutions! gold, luxury, noise could not repay the chastity of your heart and your conscience. No, Cyprienne, you are right, I cannot allow, I will not allow this sacrilege. Slumber quietly, my daughter! your mother will watch. I will struggle against M. de la Puysaie. With the other—that will be terrible! never mind, I will be strong in fighting for you, I promise, I swear by that I love most, by yourself, that you will not marry that man.'

"This excitement broke her down and she burst into tears. My poor mother dropped into a chair and gave way to sobs that tore her breast: she was as pale as a corpse, so severe had been her struggle. Overcome by her sufferings, I consented to this marriage with a man that I really dreaded.

"In my place, what would you have done? You would have acted as I did, would you not? You would have promised everything, in order to bring some comfort to a mother's troubled soul. More than that, the warmth of conviction overcame me: I really thought that the act would be less painful than I had imagined at first. If M. Matifay had been present with the lawyer and the papers, I should surely not have hesitated to sign the marriage contract. Without doubt my accent lent force to this resolution, for by degrees my mother became more tranquil.

"Our conversation terminated in about the same manner as that with my father.

"Dear Cyprienne. If truly you are strong enough to keep the resolution you have now taken, you will have saved from great suffering: but if on the contrary, bear in mind that I shall always be with you, and that no blow shall reach you without first passing through me.'

"I left, quite unnerved by this con-

versation; and to add to my trouble, I met Colonel Fritz in the ante-chamber. He was close to the door, and started back on perceiving me; notwithstanding his icy coolness, he was confused. He saluted me without saying a word and withdrew.

"What could he be doing there? Was he spying us? I really think so. During the last eight days he is roving all over the house; I cannot move a step without meeting him. He is the enemy, I feel sure of it. How, why, has this conviction come over me? What interest can he have in driving me to my ruin? I do not know, but I cannot avoid this thought.

"Enemies all round, nowhere a firm defender. To demand protection of my mother, I thought of it this morning, but I cannot do it, now that I know what it would cost her. You see, my dear, that I can only reckon upon you and your friends, or, like the poor princess surrounded by enchantment, I await the coming of a radiant prince to deliver me from the Cave of the Ogre, or from Bluebeard's lofty tower.

"'Sister Ann, sister Ann, is there nothing coming?' As for me, alas! I see but the gravel of my garden walks and the green chestnuts. But never mind, I hope—perhaps the prince will yet come.

"At all events he has sent me more news. I have found a second letter in the old place, in my jewel box. All that passes around me is so surprising that I believe in enchantment. All the princes of the tales have some fairy in their service, is it not so? Why should mine not be like the rest?

"The note is very short, but a little less vague than the first; always the same handwriting, and now signed by two initials.

"It runs as follows:

"'Your enemies are known, and also the exact danger you are exposed to. But an understanding must be made with you to prevent your injuring the efforts being made on your behalf.

"'Some one will be in the Champs Elysees to-morrow, and would like to see you holding a white rose in your hand. If you will let it fall out of the carriage, some one will be pleased, as it will be a signal that you accept the purest and the fullest devotion that a man can lay at the feet of an angel.

"'J. DE C.'

"Yes, my dear, there is an angel, and my heart beat with pleasure on reading that word. However, I will not, I cannot, consent to such a demand. To drop that rose would not only be replying to the letter, but also to the word angel, which is worse still; it would be creating a closer familiarity than that between the protected and the protector. If he wishes me to accept his devotion, he must remain as something providential, something beyond me. Decidedly, I shall not drop the rose, neither shall I go to the Champs Elysees.

"I reckon on you, Ursula, to tell them my intention, which is unshaken in that respect, and also to carry them the testimony of my infinite gratitude.

"I have invented some work, some handkerchiefs to be embroidered, anything, in fact, and I have told Postel that I wanted them expressly to be done at home. She will go to Madam Rozel's to-morrow to ask for the young girl who called upon me the other day: if I am absent, I will leave the blue book behind the mirror, the place that I told you of.

"It is late. The sky is overcast with clouds, the storm rages in the distance. A few stray drops of rain are falling, like drops of lead upon the leaves. I placed myself at the window and mused.

"Over the tops of the chestnuts, and through the branches, I can see the corner of a lane, faintly lighted by a lantern. Nobody passes through that lane that runs along the bottom of the garden. In the luminous circle cast upon the ground by the reflector, I perceived a shadow—the shadow of a man standing close to the wall.

"I hastily drew back; the shadow, not thinking that it had been seen, extended its arm as if to withhold me, and then in the emotion of the moment, I thought I recognised M. de la Cruz.

"I was courageous; I closed the window, but I could not refrain from returning a moment later, and then, placing the lamp so as to prevent my being seen from the outside, I lifted up the corner of the curtain.

"He was still there, notwithstanding that the rain fell heavier, the storm muttered right over our heads, a violent wind rushing over the tops of the trees caused them to bend like feathers; another moment, and the sluice gates of heaven would open.

"I opened the window full, and placing myself in the full light, made an imperative sign to M. de la Cruz. He understood its meaning, he advanced to the middle of the lane, gravely bowed, and slowly walked away.

His form was soon lost in the night. I could hear nothing more than the dull thud of his heel upon the pavement, then leaning on the balcony, I dreamt.

"Now the thunder is silent, the rain falls in torrents! Oh! if it would only rain to-morrow!'

"I have renewed my orders to Postel; she will go to fetch you directly, and in order that you shall know all, I will hasten to write what transpired in the morning.

"Did I not tell you that he had a fairy in his service and that all occurs as he predicted.

"The sky is clear and transparent as a sea of blue.

"Not even the shadow of a cloud could be seen.

"That is not all, as if she were the accomplice of M. de la Cruz, my mother sent me word to dress myself very early; she intends going out with me immediately after breakfast, and to the Bois de Boulogne in the afternoon.

"But wait, all this is nothing, oh! that prince's fairy is mischievous and has foreseen all.

"I easily made up my mind to break the first part of the promise that I had made.

"I could not well refuse to accompany mamma; then again, by showing myself in the Bois, where all Paris is sure to be on such a fine day, I do not bind myself to anything. There is nothing in that to give any hope to M. de la Cruz. If he had not written I should have been there all the same. On the contrary to let my mother go alone, would be a thousand times more compromising in the eyes of M. de la Cruz. It would lead him to think that he was feared and avoided.

"Wholly occupied by such reasonings, which to me appeared the soundest possible, I let Postel finish my toilet to her own taste, without even looking in the glass.

"'Will Mademoiselle not look, whether her headdress suits her?' said she.

"'That is quite perfection, Postel.'

"I could say no more. In my hair on the left side, I had the smallest imaginable white rose, a tea rose, fresh, still bearing its leaves, and it looked beautiful.

"That was another of the fairy's tricks.

"'And why did you put in that rose, Postel?'

"'Does that annoy Madamoiselle,' asked the good girl, 'still it suits you splendidly.'

"'I would have preferred not to wear a rose.'

"'Well, it is only to do the hair over again,' sighed Postel.

"And I saw that I hurt the poor creature so badly, to spoil her masterpiece, that I said:

"'Well, let it be, Postel! you are right, on looking again I think the rose becomes me.'

"And then again, a rose in the hair is not a rose in the head, and however clever the fairy may be, I defy her and her band, to make me take that rose from my circlet in order to let it drop from the carriage window.

"Oh! no that would be a hundred times worse than what M. de la Cruz asks for—a flower is held carelessly in the hand and drops, can there be an accident more natural, and has he who picks it up any reason to be proud of it, but to undo the headdress in order to throw a rose at some person, is a thing that they cannot force Mademoiselle Cyprienne to do, even if it were the ablest of fairies.

"However all is now for the best. That rose in my hair proves that I have received M. de la Cruz's note, that I have read it, and that I accept the devotion therein expressed; and still by not holding the rose in my hand, and not dropping it, I show that I accept the devotion and nothing more. That fact fully reassures me.

"For a long time I have not been so tranquil and happy. The sun is beautiful, clear and radiant. The birds are chasing each other through the trees, uttering sharp cries; it would require very little to make me sing like them, and dance round my room like a mad girl.

"But there I hear the carriage in the yard, mamma calls me. Good bye, Ursula, I love you!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AURELIA AT HOME.

Noon has long since struck, but daylight is scarcely visible in the beautiful Aurelia's room. The light from the outside filters through the blinds, and falls upon the gilt corners of the rosewood furniture and only serves to define the outlines.

An indefinite, feminine, exquisite perfume pervades the atmosphere, with its enervating and sensual emanations. The room is empty, but the fine linen of the bed in disorder and the pillows still retain the impression of the body that has left them. The mistress is absent, but in the air that she has breathed, on the

things she has touched, on the downy carpets where she had placed her naked feet, everywhere, she has left a trace, like an aroma of grace.

A murmur of voices is heard and guides us. Let us lift up that heavy curtain and we shall find ourselves in an elegant dining room decorated in the Chinese style. The marble floor is covered with a slight matting, curious birds fly along the walls, encaged in a net of wire around which climbed unheard of flowers and plants; deep thinking herons, perched on one leg on the shore of a doubtfully blue lake, contemplate the golden clad fish, while a plump mandarin swimming in his palanquin, devoutly winks his eyes while devouring some swallows' nests or a leg of roast dog.

Aurelia and Nini Moustache are seated at breakfast, which is nearly finished.

Nini Moustache is voluptuously sipping her coffee, and a decanter of brandy at her side, is nearly a quarter empty.

Aurelia, carelessly reclining in her armchair, is looking at her, smiling with an indefinite smile.

In that smile can be detected the germs of affection, irony, disdain and the pride of success.

"Ah! well," exclaimed Nini, putting down her cup, quite empty, and resolutely placing her elbow upon the table, her chin resting upon her hands, and her inquisitive gaze fixed upon the impassible countenance of her companion, "what kind of woman are you then?"

"A woman," quietly replied Aurelia, "who has seen much, hated much, loved much, one who has suffered much and made many suffer, and to whom consequently nothing womanly is strange."

"I could as well take you for the devil's sister," murmured Nini, "if at other times I did not see signs of a fallen seraphin, who by some unknown fault has been cast down to the depths of our hell."

"Who I am," replied Aurelia, "does not matter to you. I have given you proofs of my power, for the time being that is all I wish. The other day you hid your family name from me, I have now repeated it to you, your name is Celina Durant. Your sister has been brought up in a provincial convent, but that you told me. But in which town? Did I not tell you at once, the convent of the Sisters of St. Martha at B——?

"Do you want to know the name of the milliner where she is employed? It is——

"But for the moment it is not necessary to reveal more, suffice to prove you my power. Now to find out Ursula in this ant-hill of Paris, to learn all about her, perhaps better than you her sister know yourself, how much time did it take me? Scarcely a few hours; the same for Colonel Fritz: the same for Le Gigant, whose name, by the bye, is not Le Gigant, but another, which if you were to pronounce before him, would doubtless make him fall at your feet and ask for pardon."

"Oh! that name, that name," ardently implored Nini Moustache.

"I will not tell you," replied Aurelia drily. "I will not tell you, firstly because it is a two-edged sword, of which you can make no use, and which would perhaps wound yourself; and then because, I demand one thing from those who come to me, and that is confidence. Have but confidence in me, and I will remove the weight pressing on your soul as easily as I lift this saucer. I will remove your sister beyond all seduction and all vengeance. I will withdraw Louis Jacquemin from the ignominious depth into which your love has plunged him. You, yourself, I will render more noble and better than you are. The irreparable past shall be sponged out as much as possible, there is only one thing that I cannot accomplish, I cannot recall your father to life: but still I feel sure that you will feel his pardon fall upon your heart, as if coming from heaven."

"And," asked Nini in a tone of defiance, "what do you ask for all this?"

"Nothing! nothing but faith, blind faith, full and absolute: for it is faith that saves."

"Then," said Celina, "I do not understand, I will not understand, I cannot."

Aurelia shrugged her shoulders.

"In fact, in all this," insisted Nini Moustache, "what interest have you?"

"My interest! and you, perverted soul, born to bad, as you yourself said the other day; you, who by following the plans imposed upon you by Le Gigant, by driving Ursula to ruin, by driving her to ruin by your own hand, perhaps by selling her, who knows? You would but consummate and augment the bad genius that reigns within you. What power binds you? Why do you hesitate? Why do you suffer? Why did you call for assistance? Why are you ready to sacrifice all, even the vulgar interest, which you alone can understand?"

"Ursula is my sister," remarked Nini.

"Well, then," exclaimed Aurelia,

rising," my soul is more vast than yours, for all women are my sisters!"

Like a tranfiguration, a ray of sunshine gleamed through the window and transformed Aurelia's golden hair into a ray of glory. Her lip, disdainfully curled, imparted a look of saintly anger to her face, similar to the anger of an archangel, but an ineffable tenderness shone from her eyes; by a touching gesture she opened her arms as if she would clasp, in one embrace, all the women of the earth to her throbbing bosom. She looked like the statue of Deliverance and Pardon.

Nini, stupefied, astounded, still doubting, contemplated her in fear.

The vision vanished, the sun hid itself behind a cloud, and the enthusiasm gave way to a deep invincible sadness.

"Listen," continued Aurelia, "the other day you told me your history, you writhed under the agony of your suffering. Well! if I were to tell you that all this is nothing and that, in suffering endured, shame swallowed, despair conquered and submitted to, you were but a child; if I were to tell you that there is a woman whose very name horrifies those who hear it pronounced, that, all she possessed has been taken, killed; her husband, her lover, her daughter; that there is not a fibre of her heart that has not been tortured, not a particle of her honor that has not been sullied, not a drop of bitterness that has been spared her lips! If I were to tell you, that like Lazarus, that woman arose after three days from a sealed tomb; that, at one stroke Providence returned her all that could be returned, alas! And that then a voice murmured to her:

"'Go, my daughter, travel the world; withdraw your sisters from the trial you have gone through; let not your deliverance be selfish, benefitting but you in person; dispense to all those good will. Raise up the fallen, console the afflicted, protect the innocent, forgive the guilty.'

"And if at last I were to tell you, Celina, it is that woman who speaks to you. My sister, will you turn from your lips the cup of refreshment that I offer you? You have invoked consolation, it comes to you in my person; will you turn it aside? Poor soul, will you always remain in doubt, when to be saved, it only requires faith?"

Now Nina Moustache was conquered, a share of Aurelia's enthusiasm had passed to her. The very breath of the words of that singular creature caused her to shudder to the very roots of her hair, a strange internal emotion governed her whole being. "Oh! yes, this woman must be certainly more than a woman." And when Aurelia addressed herself directly to her she replied with a kind of religious veneration:

"You have but to command, your servant will obey."

"Your servant!" said Aurelia with a faint smile, "no, my sister! I am as weak, as miserable a being as you, my poor Celina, and if God withdrew his hand from my brow, you would see me weep and wail, as you wept and wailed the other day."

Aurelia touched a golden bell, and at once the head of a young negro servant peeped from under the curtain.

"Lino, order my carriage. Excuse me for a moment, Lina; you see my hair is dressed, allow me but the time to slip on a dress."

And retiring to the room, she left Nina in deep meditation and startled at what she had seen and heard.

In a few moments Aurelia returned in full dress, with her suit of mail she had resumed her habitual sarcastic smile, the haughty manner and the look of effrontery.

Nina Moustache no more recognized the inspired being of a few moments ago, she thought that she must be dreaming.

Nearly at the same moment Nina reappeared and made a sign as of whipping a horse.

"Is he dumb?" asked Nina astounded.

"Yes," replied Aurelia, "I am not fond of indiscreet people."

An elegant open carriage awaited in the court-yard. The two women entered it.

"To the Bois!" ordered Aurelia.

And drawn by two thoroughbreds, the carriage rolled off in the direction of the Champs Elysses.

"Now," said Aurelia, seating herself comfortably, "this is what you have to do, my dear."

"I am listening," simply replied Nini Moustache.

"First of all," commenced Aurelia, "what has so far been the part allotted you by Le Gigant, and what has he in store for you? It is clear, above all, that the evil disposition of that man is too seeing, too cautious, too experimented, in fact, too clever, that he should ever have dreamt of ruling M. de Puyssie by means of your advice and by your influence.

"You have only been the instrument of ruin, because for a creature like our-

selves, do you see, a man of the Count's standing can dishonor himself, leave his wife and child, sacrifice all, but he never would consult such; a man ruins himself for his mistress, but consults his wife. So you have been placed near to M. de Puysaie to ruin him. To ruin him through you, Le Gigant found a double advantage; first, a direct interest, because you shared the spoils with him, and on the other part, your dresses, furniture, carriages and horses, were nearly all purchased by means of using the name of Le Gigant."

"How do you know all this?" asked Nini Moustache, astounded.

"What does it matter, as long as I know it?" replied Aurelia.

"Then another interest, darker still, which I will not point my finger at, but which I can guess, that of dragging Count de Puysaie into the fix in which he is now, to place him between ruin and the marriage of his daughter with Baron Matifay.

"Suppose this marriage accomplished —which God forbid!—Le Gigant would not require you any more, but do you think he would leave you in peace? Those wolves of social life scent gold like their kind of the woods scent blood, He holds you through your sister, he holds you sufficiently strong to have forced you to accomplish to the end a work repugnant to your conscience: the more reason he would have to hold you and oblige you to disgorge the wealth obtained through his means, and then to sell your sister if he found a market.

Crushed by this inexorable logic, Nini remained silent.

"Why then, after the task, as regards the Count, is finished, does Le Gigant still lead you? It is because if you have ceased to be his help, you may become a danger. If the circumstances did not compel him, your influence could not force M. de Puysaie to marry his daughter. You have done more than is necessary to oblige him to overstep, even in spite of circumstances. It is no more yourself that speaks, but his own conscience that expresses itself through your tongue. I am sure that he only seeks a pretext to break off this union, of which he fully knows the odious results, without daring to declare it aloud. Give him this pretext, and you will see with what avidity he will seize it.

"This is how I should act in your place. I would beg the Count to call upon me. I would tell him that I had learned the rumor of the marriage of his daughter with Baron Matifay, that I knew that I was publicly accused, and that I would remain under the weight of a like accusation. 'They allege that you sacrificed your daughter for your mistress: 'tis your mistress who will be sacrificed for your daughter. Take back every good gift you may have made me the receiver of, I will have no more of them.' If he refuses, and he will necessarily do so, insist. If he makes fun of it, which is possible, listen quietly, let him go, and forbid him the house. In a week he will be docile, and you will have the satisfaction of having done a good action for the first time in your life.

"As to what is owing Le Gigant, don't trouble about it. I give you my word that not a hair of Ursula's head shall be harmed; every plot against her is known to me as soon as it is conceived, and exploded before arriving at maturity."

Aurelia's caleche at that moment came in view on the Place de la Concorde, which presented a magnificent spectacle. A stream of carriages and horsemen traversed the Avenue de l'Etoile. Fair ladies reclined indolently on soft cushions, making signs to the gentlemen on horseback, who saluted them in passing. Other gentlemen trotted at the sides of carriages, bending over to speak to their occupants. Celebrities of high and gay life, of the nobility, and of commerce, all were there; and were easily detected by their good taste, and by the beauty or fantastic luxury of their equipages.

On both sides of the drive, under the trees, the crowd collected near the edge of the walk, regarding curiously these privileges of wealth.

The crowd, however, only saw the rich carriages, the silks and satins—but the grief and pain often hidden by jewels to them is unknown, and can perhaps be only conceived with difficulty by them.

"What suffering," they ask, "can people know, who devour night and morning the most delicate repasts, on porcelain or old china; pass their days under gilded ceilings, and who sleep on velvet? Not to have bread or shelter, to be able to buy nothing without the sweat of their brows and manual labor there is the proof there is suffering.

"Happy the rich!"

This minister got up at four o'clock this morning, he pondered laboriously while even the masons were sleeping, and he is still up long after they are gone to rest. The pre-occupation of the responsibility which rests on him never leaves him. It accompanies him every-

where—even to the moments he devotes to repose. The balls, entertainments, theatres, and grand dinners, which you so much envy, are to him his greatest bane. After six hours passed in wearing out his eyes over correspondence and despatches, he must still injure them in blazing re-unions. Ah, how much better would he prefer your modest dwellings at home, at the fireside with his children about him, and a Christmas log on the hearth. But no:

Happy the Rich!

And the carriages roll on with their bedecked servants behind and before their proud horses, foaming at the mouth, and striking the earth in cadence with their hoofs. The shop boys open their eyes wide to see the duchesses pass, the young girls sigh at the sight of so much splendor, and the philosophers grumble. The artist Voreloque knew as well as any one how to take off these butterflies, many fresh from the plebeian mud and destined in a few brief years to grovel there again.

Happy, happy, the Rich!

A carriage passed, escorted on each side by a gentleman on horseback. A Count's coronet shone on the panels over an armorial bearing. Two ladies, the one a blooming young girl, were seated on it; they were talking in a low voice.

They were Madam de Puysaie and Cyprienne.

The two gentlemen were M. de Puysaie and Colonel Fritz.

The crowd gazed with an admiration mixed with envy at the fine equipage, and a brunette in a linen cap sighed:

"Ah, how happy are the Rich!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ROMANCE OF A ROSE.

It is doubtless unnecessary to state that at the moment we speak of the Bois de Boulogne resembled but little that of our day. No lakes, no rivers, no cascades, at that time. Only a scanty dry grass covered the ground under the oaks then dwarfed and ill kept.

The forest, now so admired for the ingenious manner in which it has been laid out, *a l'anglaise*, presented the appearance of a savage court of wood.

Nevertheless, without making any invidious comparisons between the present and the past, this wildness was by no means disagreeable; far from it. The stunted oaks of the Bois de Boulogne, in contrast to the glorious wealth of foliage at St. Cloud or Mendon was quite piquant and agreeable from its variety. The outskirts of Paris are so happily possessed of three advantages, viz: situation, fertility of soil, and running water, that they nearly always present an artificial and cultivated aspect. Free nature here dresses herself and appears in gardens alone—amid all the forests round Paris the Bois de Boulogne is a genuine forest.

However savage and arid it might have been; however its proximity to the fashionable quarters made it sought after as an agreeable and fashionable promenade.

As soon as they had passed the gate at Maillot, Loredon and Colonel Fritz confided their horses to the care of a manservant and got into the carriage opposite the Countess and her daughter.

Perhaps they chose their position the better to analyze by a gesture, a look, a murmur, how far the ladies had taken each other into confidence.

Loredan, above all, lost nothing. Cyprienne's marriage was the only means left him to escape from a scandalous ruin. He had thus began to doubt himself as capable of being weak enough to cede to his wife or daughter.

Away from them he thought himself strong enough to resist them. With them they would have the advantage of his vacillating character.

This match must be broken off. To divide to govern, according to the maxim of the authorities of the old school.

As is usually the case between persons having a common object in view, they talked of everything but that which they had most at heart.

They laughed gaily in that carriage, when perhaps there was not a movement, a gesture, which did not hide sadness, apprehension, regret, or remorse.

Happy the Rich!

The carriages went and came along the alleys, cutting across each other, coming back, and doing the graceful generally, like dancers in a gigantic quadrille.

All of a sudden, Cyprienne gave vent to a little subdued cry, and placing her hand on her mother's arm, said:

"Madam de Monte-Cristo!"

But as the carriage came on she blushed to see she was wrong.

That eccentric harness, those jewels, the negro groom in such a many-colored livery, could not, ought not to belong to Madam de Monte-Cristo.

All was supremely elegant, 'tis true, but of that undecided elegance which touches on bad taste. Luxury itself by harmony of colors and details can be modest. The equipage in question was impertinently showy.

Could that woman, with her meaning looks, her loud toilette, her sharp conversation, and loud laughter, be Madam de Monte-Cristo? How could Cyprienne have thought so a single instant? She could not, however, help murmuring:

"How she resembles her!"

Colonel Fritz's face wore a meaning smile.

"There goes Aurelia, the Viscount de la Cruz is not far off."

This phrase went to Cyprienne's heart. What could there be in common between M. de la Cruz and this woman?

The Colonel, without doubt, did her injustice. But what interest had he in calumniating her before Cyprienne; because he should and did ignore the secret commerce which bound her to M. de la Cruz.

Up to now a sentiment vague and tender agitated the heart of the poor child.

Was it jealousy? No, undoubtedly. Mademoiselle de Puysaie could not be jealous of Aurelia. It was indignation, and, above all, sadness.

She would not put faith in the colonel's words, but the heart loves to torture itself. In spite of herself she believed in them. She would have given anything for M. de la Cruz not to have been in the wood now that she did not know whether he went there on account of Aurelia or for her.

But the last resource of feeble minds, who feel invariably before certainty, was not long in being taken from her. The Viscount was seen advancing at a gentle trot on a superb Arabian.

"There, what did I say?" asked the Colonel, "after the enchantress Armida comes Renaud the enchanted."

"*Trahit sua quemque Voluptas*," added M. de Puysaie laughing, who remembered at times his latin studies with the Jesuits.

And he rendered it thus:

"Every cockchafer has its needle."

Cyprienne felt faint.

Then the relations between the Viscount and Aurelia were a mystery to no one. She alone was the only person who ignored them.

M. de la Cruz had then lied! Was it not lying to keep silence under such circumstances? This hero, this statue, which she had taken to be something precious, was only vulgar platina; an ordinary casting, which one word from the Colonel would allow to fall to pieces, as if it were struck with a hammer.

People are unjust when they suffer, and Cyprienne suffered.

She who the evening before pretended that she could only accept M. de la Cruz as a protection in her affection, now found that without her love his protection was an insult.

Then a feeling of repulsion came over her, against what she had just heard, against what she had just seen, against evidence.

She said to herself: "'Tis impossible, the Colonel is deceived! My father is deceived! Everybody is wrong. I alone know M. de la Cruz."

At that moment the Viscount again passed the carriage, on the side on which Cyprienne was sitting.

She raised her hand quickly to her hair.

'Twas the tenth time that during the moral battle she was fighting Cyprienne went through the same gesture.

"Heavens!" said Madam de Puysaie, "what is the matter with you, Cyprienne; are you ill?"

The dear child blushed like a berry.

"Nothing is the matter with me, mamma," answered she, quickly. "Only this rose hurts my head."

"Wait a bit," said Madam de Puysaie.

And bending over her daughter's forehead, she endeavored to take out the rose without undoing her hair.

"'Tis useless, mamma; 'tis useless," said Cyprienne, struggling.

"There, you see it is gone." said Madam de Puysaie, holding up the rose.

But while Cyprienne at this moment made a sudden movement to push Madam de Puysaie aside, her mother dropped the flower.

The young girl made a catch at it. It was too late, and M. de la Cruz, on looking round, saw the rose on the ground and Cyprienne's white hand stretched towards it, as if she had just lost it.

This was the fairy's last trick.

As soon as the thrice happy caleche, from whence fell the rose, turned the corner of the road, the Viscount jumped off his horse, picked up the blessed flower, then regaining his saddle, at one bound, he went off at a gallop across one of the least frequented roads in the wood. He went like the wind, pressing the rose against his bosom, as if he feared it would be taken from him.

He rode at hazard, with the look of a conquerer; his chest heaving with enthusiasm, his nostrils trembling, with a look of happiness on his face.

He thought of his past labors, of past trials, of every obstacle overcome, of all the conquests he had brought about. But what were all these to the conquest of this rose.

Cyprienne loved him! What a talisman! What would he not, could he not do, with this thought at heart?

The very same morning, he was doubtful of the success of his efforts. He felt himself weak against so many hidden foes, whose intrigues fortune seemed to favor. The fight of the Archangel Michael against the demon, which he assisted Madam de Puysaie to carry on, had strained his will and his courage, but here was a new auxiliary descended from Heaven: Love!

Love! 'Twas the first time that this dove of Paradise had cooed in his ear. Pure of heart, pure of sense, he undid voluptuously the cords of his soul which were stiffened by constant effort. The grown man, the unmoved spectator of human villany, felt with an unspeakable thrill a yonthful hope, confident and enthusiastic, rise up in him.

His task, until then so hard, became easy, and, more, its accomplishment decided Cyprienne's well-being—Cyprienne, whom he loved so much, as one loves the angels. Cyprienne, who without doubt loved him, also, as she had thrown him this rose.

His reckless ride, however, served to cool down his delirium and his joy. His blood ran more tranquilly in his veins, the beating of his heart was appeased. The Viscount looked with a calmer air on the objects which surrounded him, and perceived that he was a considerable distance from Paris.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Not a moment to lose.

He turned his horse's head in the direction of the town and started at a brisk trot.

His horse was a good one and an hour after M. de la Cruz got down in the court yard of his mansion, and throwing the reins to the groom, went up two stairs at a time to his rooms.

He only stopped there a short time, just time enough to change his dress, and to write a couple of lines, which he thrust into a fine satin envelope. Then he went out, stopped the first cab which passed, and was driven to the Rue de Varennes.

Only, according to his orders, the cab turned into the narrow street which ran along the garden of the Puysaie mansion.

Almost immediately a little green door opened and Madam Postel came towards the cab.

"Come in, Madam Jacquemin," said the Viscount, and he added, addressing the coachman, "Boulevard des Italiens, at a walk."

The chambermaid, quite confused at the honor done her by M. de la Cruz, did not dare to sit down. He took her gently by the hand, and constrained her to do so.

"We are better like this for talking—I have the best possible news to give you about Louis," continued he. "He has a good situation at Clement's, the fashionable jeweller, and has been given a good character, and whatever faults he may commit he will be excused 'till he has learned his business. You know your son is but a child, and we have apprenticed him to learn courage and honesty."

Madam Jacquemin had seized M. de la Cruz's hand and kissed it.

"You know very well," said he, in withdrawing it, "that it is not to me you owe these thanks, but to Madam Lamouroux and Madam de Monte-Cristo! 'twas to them that you went—'twas they you begged to do something for you, and they only promised you the redemption of your son, on the only condition to help them in the work they had engaged in."

"Yes," murmured Madam Jacquemin, "but if they are providence you are their envoy."

The good lady persisted in her demonstrations of gratitude.

"Come, come now," said the Viscount, a little impatiently, "I don't want that, have you anything new to tell me?"

"Nothing," answered Madam Jacquemin. "Yesterday, my young lady was a long time in her mother's room. They both were very sad. Then my young lady shut herself up in her room, and was writing all the evening. Ah! I forgot she told me to go to Madam Rozel's to get the work girl, who came the other day: Madam Ursula, I think. 'Twas perfectly useless as I could well have done what she wanted."

The Viscount smiled imperceptibly.

"Ursula must," he murmured, "see Madam Lamouroux a second time, she will tell us more about this."

Then he resumed aloud:

"Is that all?"

"Yes," said Madam Jacquemin, "my mistress and the young lady have been to the wood to-day. I put a white rose in her hair, as you told me. She wanted me to take it out at first, but, on second thoughts, she told me to leave it there."

De la Cruz listened attentively. He would have preferred Madam Jacquemin to enter more into details about this rose matter, but he was afraid to commit himself and dared not question her farther.

"Here," said he, "is a letter which you will put in its usual place."

"Very good," answered Madam Jacquemin, simply.

There was certainly nothing between these two beings to make them ashamed—no understanding, between seducer and duenna—between a *blase* libertine and a seller of souls: neither of their looks wavered when one gave the letter and the other took it. Madam Jacquemin would have lent herself to no shameful business. She believed in M. de la Cruz as in her God, and obeyed his orders without discussion, thought of ill, or scruple.

Madam Jacquemin and the Viscount got out of the cab. He paid the coachman, and whilst she went back to the Rue de Varennes, he turned slowly in the direction of the Boulevard.

He was pensive just then. His sublime faith of but a few hours ago was fading away. Doubts were forming in his mind.

At one moment he said to himself:

"She loves me."

Now he asked with anguish:

"Will she love me?"

"Will she love me as she knows me better; when I shall have thrown off for her the prestige which surrounds me; when I shall have shown myself to her as I am, "Will she love me?"

"This rose proves nothing. What can a rose prove? The anguish of her heart, that's all. She feels herself neglected by all whose duty it shall be to defend her at the price of their life and honor, and she accepts the first protection which presents itself—the drowning man catches at a straw.

"'Tis fear, perhaps confidence, but not love.

"After all, what have I done to be loved by her! By what work have I merited this ineffable reward? Are there not around her those who are a thousand times handsomer, more gifted, more worthy of her attention, and to fix the vague reveries of her soul.

"All this is folly. She cannot, does not love me.

"But what matters it? Her confidence, as there is only confidence, shall not be deceived. Loved or not, my life is at her service, and I am only too happy to devote it to her. A fine devotedness, in truth, a mercenary devotedness, which sees at the end of its efforts a reward which a king's ransom could not buy. No, I will be firmer, I will be better, and if I am vanquished in the strife, I will not reserve to myself the right to say to her:

"'Tis for you I die!"

Cyprienne, however, had come back from her drive, and by a species of divination—lovers are poets as well—*Vates*—she ran straight to her jewel-casket. It held a note, which ran thus:

"Thanks for the joy your confidence inspires. You are invited to come to Madam de Monte-Cristo's to-morrow. Come.

"J. de la C."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ROAD TO HELL.

Nini Moustache had gone back to her house on the Barriere Pigalle.

Aurelia, on getting down at the corner of the Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin, left here her carriage to go home in, and as soon as she was alone, Nini began to reflect deeply.

The earnest speech of the singular girl she had just left, had convinced her.

She was decided to follow her advice immediately, and even to go beyond it.

In good, as in evil, natures like hers do not know of half-measures. She now wished, by a rapid and unique effort, to clear the foul flood which separated her from the haven pointed out from afar by Aurelia, as another Canaan—to again become Celina, even for herself, and be Nini Moustache no more for anyone.

The first fervor of repentance made her think the task easy. Thus drunkards, whose mouths are polluted with the bitter effects of the libations of the previous evening, think they can drink no more without being disgusted.

First, she must, by a sudden effort, break every connection with the past.

'Twas for her, and by her, that M. de Puysaie had ruined himself. If she found it impossible to restore that fortune, dissipated in a few years, at least she could

return the few remnants of it in her possession.

The thing was to carry out this restitution before Le Gigant could oppose himself to it, and that M. de Puysaie would be obliged to accept it from her.

As soon as she got home, Nini Moustache did up in a roll bank-notes, bonds, stocks, everything she owed to the Count's magnificence, and sealed them up in a large envelope, addressed to him. Then she made an inventory of her jewelry.

Of these she made a division—one part of them, which came from different persons, she set aside to procure her the necessaries of life at starting; the other part, which came from M. de Puysaie, must be returned to him.

There were there diamonds, carbuncles, rubies, and bracelets enough to make a duchess envious, and pearls worthy of a crown. Nini Moustache put them on for the last time, made them sparkle in the light, and then did them up in a easket.

Only two or three jewellers in Paris could buy them in a lump and pay cash for them. Nini Moustache went immediately to M. Clement, of the Boulevard des Capucines, and the next morning, at an early hour, M. Clement came, and placed himself at her disposition.

This merchant, or rather artist, whose name has already appeared several times in this story, was a man about thirty years old at the most. Paris is a town where success is rapid. Three or four years had sufficed for him to create an unique reputation in his art; he owed it, moreover, to a very curious speciality in ancient jewels. No one knew better than he how to cut gold, bronze, or silver lightly and masterly, in the style of the artists of the Renaissance. Beyond the value of the material, all mountings from his establishment were treasures of good taste in detail, and of strict purity in style.

At that time everything ancient was in vogue. It can be said that, with Fromentin, Meurice Clement was a Theophile Gauthier in jewelry.

A fine fellow besides, he wore admirably the dress, half shopkeeper, half fantastic, which was the rage in studios at that epoch. His fine aristocratic form was well shown off by his light velvet jacket. His long, shining, curly black hair escaped in disordered harmony from under his gray felt hat, and ran gracefully over a Louis the XIII. collar. Finally, his moustache well waxed and his goatee turned up, gave Clement the appearance of a runaway from the Pre aux Clerc, or the Place Royale.

With all this no pretension—a hearty laugh was ever on his lips, a decided look, without braggadocia, a nervous hand, a deep voice, all the action of a man accustomed to work with his hands united to all the elegancies of a man of the world; such was Clement, and I suppose that after this portrait, no one will be astonished at his rapid success with his numerous customers.

He examined minutely the contents of the casket, and finished by proposing to buy them for an hundred and fifty thousand francs.

'Twas about the price they had cost.

Nini Moustache was just a little astonished at being offered so much, but Clement's reputation for fair dealing was so well established, that it was sufficient to explain this anomaly.

She accepted the offer without more ado, and in politely bidding her good day, Clement informed her that he would call during the day to fetch the jewels, when he would bring the money.

He made a few steps towards the door and then came back.

"My question is, perhaps, indiscreet, but I am in a certain sense authorised in asking it by the bargain we have just made. Might you, perchance, have the intention to sell your house?"

The proposition was too favorable to Nini Moustache's project for her not to answer affirmatively.

"For the house furnished as it is," Clement went on. "Arrangements could also be made for the horses and carriages. At any rate, you doubtless know the name of the purchaser that I propose. 'Tis one of my richest customers, M. de la Cruz, and I know that at this moment he is looking out for a chance like this."

"Then all is arranged. I am going to travel, and this arrangement is the best I could wish."

"I will send you M. de la Cruz, then, as soon as I see him."

It was probable that Clement knew where to find his client, for an hour had not passed by when he in turn presented himself at the house.

He went all over it rapidly, and the same day the affair was terminated for the price of two hundred thousand francs. For the obstacles in Nini Moustache's way seemed to diminish, and even to make the lawyers prompt and quick. The bill of sale was signed at the notary's and accepted by M. de la Cruz in the name of the widow Lamouroux. Ev-

erything being in order, the money was paid over immediately, and the same evening Nini Moustache was able to contemplate, heaped up on the table, a bundle of notes which gave a respectable total of four hundred thousand francs—a fortune!

She played disdainfully with the enormous sum represented by silky bank notes of every color, as with her rosy fingers she counted the money. This sounding number, four hundred thousand francs, did not make her covetous. She had had a thousand times more pain in parting with her jewels, which, nevertheless, reprsented about a third part only of the money with which she played so negligently. Woman is a little savage in this respect, and has but an obscure conception of abstract values. Although education teaches her the relative value, the prodigal heart spends more easily a bank note than the same sum in gold, and throws even the latter away more willingly than a jewel of less value.

Thus how often are miserly women seen to hide their treasure in gardens, or in mattrasses like magpies which hide in holes in walls every bright thing they come across, while few even of those who are the most fond of accumulating money trust themselves to the hazards of speculation.

Whatever it might have been, generosity or indifference, Nini Moustache placed, without the slightest emotion, these printed papers which represented a fortune in the envelope where she had just placed the others.

She had to give up her house to its new owner the next evening, and she proposed placing the envelope in the hands of the Count de Puysaie at the moment when, already abroad, all search after her would be useless.

In the same letter she placed a letter explanatory of her conduct, and, calmed by this great resolution, she went about with renewed ardor her preparations for travelling.

She had given orders, the better to be at liberty, not to allow any body admission, but Le Gigant possessed the golden key, which opens every lock, and the next morning he walked into the room as she was closing her last trunk.

Le Gigant appeared between forty and forty-five years old; he was tall and stout with large shoulders and huge fists; his face was not without a sort of vulgar regularity which made him pass formally for what is called a handsome man. But what struck you most at first sight was his pretentious vulgarity; his short fingers with large knuckles were so covered with bogus jewelry as to render them nearly immovable; a long chain trailed ostentatiously over his pattern waistcoat, which looked as if it had been cut from an old shawl; a blue coat with gold buttons and light nankeen colored pants completed his costume.

All these together ought to have presented a grotesque spectacle. They formed a terrible one. Behind those stupid, inanimate, brutish eyes, glowed something that spoke of watchfulness. When his mouth was shut, the thin lips, too small for the huge jaw, hung over it, showing its form like that of a bulldog. But when those lips parted to give vent to a sort of whistling laugh, they showed two rows of white teeth wide apart, the incisives almost wanting, the canine dominating, long and pointed. At such times, the whole physiognomy changed. The nose twisted about in a thousand strange contortions, the nostrils opened like those of a beast of prey, which smells blood. The eyes were dully illuminated, as with phosphorus, and the blood rendered his cheeks purple, swelled the veins of his apoplectic neck, taking those vinous livid tints which are seen on certain venemous mushrooms.

'Twas astonishing that, with a visage possessing all the soul-denounciating signs, Le Gigant passed with his acquaintances for being a good fellow. Effectively this profound politician had the first quality of a good fellow—a purse always open, one which dispensed with all others. An open purse at heavy interest.

For although they did not pay in cash, his numerous debtors always paid. Le Gigant was a sort of usurer in favors.

No one can refuse to put himself out to give information and such trifles to a man who, the day before, found you a watch on credit to pawn, an India shawl second-hand, or a good dinner. Thus Le Gigant, thanks to his all-christian indulgence for his neighbors' vices which when desirable he even encouraged, had surrounded himself with an active police, all the more dangerous and difficult to shun from the fact that those who formed it did not know each other. When one knows all he is powerful, and Le Gigant knew everything from the drawing-room proverb to the bloody dram shop tragedy, from an old clothes seller's bargain to the greatest usury by a dealer in rose and walnut wood.

'Twas face to face with this man that

Nini Moustache found herself. He smiled, Nini saw from the smile that the combat would be a tough one, and put herself on her guard.

"Ah, well," said Le Gigant, feigning to see for the first time the packages that encumbered the floor, "So we are going on a voyage it seems?"

"Yes," answered Nini Moustache, firmly.

Le Gigant turned round on his heel, sat down on one of the trunks, and nibbled the ivory head of his cane.

"And you didn't tell me about it," continued he in a paternal tone, "that's wrong after what I have done for you."

Nini Moustache looked at him as if about to answer and then shrugged her shoulders.

"And when are you coming back?" went on Le Gigant indifferently.

"I don't know," answered Nini Moustache, drily.

But she lowered her eye as she felt that the fight was about to commence.

Le Gigant's eye-brows were knit.

His eyes wandered from right to left. They fell on the packet addressed to the Count de Puysaie.

"What's this?" asked he, rising.

Nini Moustache had already thrown herself between him and the envelope.

"That is none of your business; you are not going to see it."

"Come now," said Le Gigant, in a low voice, but trembling with anger, "no child's play."

He doubtless perceived from the attitude of his love, who was yesterday so submissive and to-day so defiant, that he had taken a false step, so he continued gently:

"Let us remain good friends, 'twill be better for everybody."

"After all, why should I hide it," cried Nini, to whom the apparent retreat of Le Gigant gave courage, "that is a restitution which I make to M. de Puysaie.

"A restitution!" said Le Gigant ironically "'Tis touching, on my word. Loredan has spoiled you, my little one, he has made you love the drama too much—comedy is better, believe me, for a woman of the world. After all, it is your business; the money is yours, as it was given you, you can do what you like with it."

Nini Moustache was terrified at such an easy victory.

"And how much, without being indiscreet," asked Le Gigant, "is there there?"

"Four hundred thousand francs."

Le Gigant smiled disdainfully. 'Twas he who in turn shrugged his shoulders.

"Four hundred thousand francs. A moiety which will not save the Count. A fortune for you."

He walked up to Nini Moustache and took her hands in his, which she abandoned sheepishly.

"Let us reason," said he. "I wanted to ruin M. de Puysaie. This has been done. Do you think that, if these four hundred thousand francs could repair it, I could not find means to stop your returning them? You can do it if you like, as by returning them you can undo none of my projects. If you like I will even accompany you to his house, while you perform this disinterested act. Only I ask you to do one thing, and this request is dictated by my friendship for you—reflect."

All this was said in such an affectionate way that Nini could not believe her ears.

"I came with the intention," Le Gigant went on, "to tell you that I did not want your assistance any more. For some time I have become aware of your repugnance. You would in future only be a bad tool to me, and I prefer to do without you. Oh, if you were only the woman I thought you to be at first, your destiny would have been a splendid one. Well, don't let us talk any more about it. 'Tis not for nothing, my girl, that we know each other as we do, from A to Z. Sooner or later affection steps in, and I wished precisely to give you to-day a proof of that interest in trying as much as possible to change your future life.

"Thus I wanted to advise you to sell your house, your jewels, your carriages, in one word to realize everything. 'Tis already done—good—it has produced four hundred thousand francs—I did not count on so much, but we must not complain of the surplus. This money at five per cent. makes twenty thousand francs a year income, that is to say enough to live comfortably in the middle world even in Paris.

"To prove to you that this is not a tale invented for the occasion here is the key of an apartment which I have hired furnished in the Marais under your name of Madame Morel.

"Then I said to myself, and we should think of everything, if this imaginary Mrs. Morel died, if the married cousin became a widow she could at the same time inherit in the Touraine, or in Berry, far from Paris, a little country house with green shutters and creeping

plants over it, and a poultry yard; and who then I ask could prevent her from going to live there where no one knows her, and where her twenty thousand francs per annum could make her rich? Who could denounce her? No one. As her instincts lead her to do what is commonly called good, she could indulge in it to her heart's content. She could become the lady partroness of her parish, and the consoling angel of her canton.

"There the dear Ursula could join and then live a life of tenderness and comfort!"

"That is what I thought; you think otherwise, do you? Do as you please. Return to this prodigal Count his money which cannot avert his ruin. Grovel in the mud. Leave your sister exposed to the suggestions of poverty, but don't complain to me when, with a basket on your back and old and wrinkled, you see Ursula roll by in her carriage in a velvet robe."

With these last terrible words he left Nini Moustache prostrate. She looked wistfully at the envelope, and from that roll of notes, which just now she was so indifferent about, she saw the vision which the tempter had invoked arise—the house with green shutters, the respect of every one, and Ursula's love

Le Gigant was gone. But he had left on the table the key of the apartment in the Marais, with the address attached to it.

Nini Moustache broke the seal of the package addressed to the Count, tore the envelope into a thousand pieces, and then, pressing the precious papers against her bosom, wrapped up to her eyes in her shawl, and the key in her hand, she slunk out of her own house like a thief.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHERE THE LIGHT COMES.

(THE BLUE WRITING BOOK.)

"I LET the rose fall, my dear, or rather, I don't know how the rose fell of itself. I was at first furious at this chance conspiracy which forced me to do a thing which I was resolved on not doing. Now I thank the rose, although a little angry with it at not being allowed to throw it properly.

"For, do you know, that I think that in any case I should have thrown it.

"This delicate white rose is a veritable talisman. By only touching the ground in the Bois de Boulogne, it has called up that mysterious prince, the unkown deliverer of story books and fairy tales.

The Viscount Don Jose de la Cruz is neither Viscount, Don Jose, nor de la Cruz. Whence comes he? I know not. Where does he go? I cannot tell. But that which I know well, for example, that which I divine, that which is told me by the most secret voices of my conscience and faith is, that never a heart more noble, enthusiastic or devoted has ever beaten in a more manly breast. I found in him the savior I sought. I bless him and love him!

"When I got back from the drive, to a new prestige of this 'white magic' of which I have already spoken to you, I no longer seek to analyse, I found the answer to the rose; a short letter, in a style rather ambiguous, in which I was thanked for my confidence, and requested to be present the next day at a day party, given by Madam de Monte-Cristo.

"For nearly an hour, the most cruel of my life, I was doubtful of him. My heart protested not against the way in which he was pulled to pieces by those around me. Alas! unhappy one that I am, I still doubted, and if I wished so much to go to Madam de Monte-Cristo's party, 'twas less to find with M. de la Cruz's aid the means to escape from the union which is being forced on me, than to make him justify himself before me.

"Madam de Monte-Cristo's party was simply a little dinner. There were there about fifty boarders from the Sacre Cœur, the Convent des Oiseaux, and of all the most aristocratic educational establishments. The fine park around the house seemed transformed into an immense play-ground. On every side were white dresses and red and blue ribbons. It carried me back for an instant to B * * * and my eye sought our bench under the chestnuts.

"You ought to have seen how these young ladies ran. The oldest of them danced on the lawn, where a fiddle had been placed on a barrel, like at country fairs. All this time the mammas, sitting on the terrace, in the shade of an arbor covered with clematis and honeysuckle, conversed together while employed at fancy work.

"I was with them, turning over negligently the leaves of a picture-book that I had taken from one of the tables in the drawing-room.

"'Miss Cyprienne,' said Madam de

Monte-Cristo, with her nice, indulgent smile, 'does not seem to amuse herself in our company. We are too old for her, and she is too old for them young girls.'

"I tried to protest, but she placed her delicate white hand on the book.

"'The flowers which are painted therein are very pretty, but without life and perfume; you will find some in the hot-house which are both honey and perfume. You doubtless love flowers, Miss Cyprienne?'

"'Ah! so much, Madam.'

"'Then will you allow me to give you a guide?'

"She called with a gesture, a fair little girl with curly hair, who was passing at the foot of the terrace and trundling her hoop.

"'Lily, will you lead Miss Cyprienne to the hot-house?'

"'Oh! very willingly,' said the little girl, fixing her large, astonished eyes on me, and holding out her dimpled little hand, which I took in mine.

"'Come, miss,' said the little girl.

"At this moment I turned to get mamma's permission, and I saw her with her eyes full of tears fixed on us. She nodded softly, and I followed Lily, but I don't know why I turned again, and I saw in trembling, that my mother, feigning to let her embroidery fall, had secretly seized Madam de Monte-Cristo's hand and was kissing it.

"While walking, I examined Miss Lily, my little guide. I had never seen anything so adorable as this little rosy being, as active as a bird, and as delicate as her name. Long, curly hair fell over her shoulders, and from time to time, by a pettish movement, she threw them back.

"We arrived at the door of the hot-house.

"'Your mamma ought to love you very much, Miss Lily.'

"She made a sad little face.

"'I don't know,' answered she, 'although they always say so. I don't think so, if she loved me, she would come and see me. Then I wish no other mamma than Miss Helena!'

"'Who is Miss Helena?'

"'Mamma Helena. 'Tis Madam de Monte-Cristo.'

"Poor child! she made me think of my own grief at the chateau de B * * *.

"'Ah, then!' said I, 'you only love mamma Helena.'

"'Oh! I love others also,' said Lily. 'I love my uncle Joseph, and Rose, and you, too, miss, because mamma Helena told me that I must. But I now see that there was no reason for her ordering me to do so.'

"'In that case will you let me kiss you?'

"'Oh! with all my heart,' cried she.

"And jumping up, she put her arms round my neck with extraordinary vehemence, and taking my head between her little hands, she almost stifled me with her kisses.

"Then, quite joyful, and with the gaiety peculiar to her age, she took her hoop and started away like a mad thing.

"As for me, I stopped, full of thought, watching her disappear. Another enigma, said I to myself; but not a menacing one, at any rate. 'Tis one more being to love, that is all.

"When she had turned a corner of the walk, I stepped aside and entered into a very Paradise. Yes, it must have been in a similar garden to this that Adam and Eve saw each other for the first time. Flowers innumerable; grapes, both luscious red, black, and divinely white. At the bottom of the hot-house was a murmur, a rustling song, that of water falling in a marble basin. I, in the midst of these perfumes, of this verdure, of these rays of every color, walked as in a dream.

"He rose from a seat where he was seated, and saluted me, with a timid air. I am convinced that had I made a sign he would have gone away, but what supplication there was in his looks.

"I gave him my hand."

"'You wanted to see me and I have come.'

"He took the tips of my fingers, but not daring to touch them with his lips he let my hand fall.

"Thanks!

"I was much troubled, much moved, I assure you that he was still more so. He was able to say nothing more, but his eyes spoke for him, and I read in them such a profound abnegation, and such a religious deference, that I was no more afraid."

"'My putting myself out proves to you that I am sensible of your devotedness, and that I accept it. Nevertheless, I must confess that the mystery which surrounds you frightens me a little.'

"Then I stopped and blushed.

"The Viscount looked at me fixedly, and his piercing eyes seemed to dive, to penetrate, to the very bottom of my soul.

"'My hands are tied,' replied he, with simplicity, 'but all that concerns me you

may know; but some of my secrets involve others.'

"I avow that a wicked desire came over me, and that I could not help speaking it out.

"'Yes, I know you have many secrets, and among others a satin dress, which was driving about the Bois de Boulogne yesterday.'

"He at first appeared astonished and then smiled frankly and openly.

"'Is that what troubles you. A woman that neither I nor any one else can love. A dead heart.'

"Then a grave shadow came over his features.

"'I offered you, Nini, my devotion, and you were so good as to accept it. I am paid for it, and the price is far above my expectations. You half expressed a desire just now that all doubt should be cleared up between us. I also wish it. This is the real cause of my having solicited this interview.

"'I know, and wish you to know, that I cannot, without lowering myself, hope for a greater recompense than the permission to serve you.

"'At the time when I began to interest myself in your welfare, I thought I owed you a frank explanation which put a limit to my pretensions, or those which you might think me guilty of.'

"He said all this with a touching sadness. It seemed to me that every word he spoke broke a chord in his heart. In my own too I felt those words resound.

"'The insect groveling in the earth is at liberty to look at the stars, and wish itself with them. But it would be foolish for it to open its wings and say:

"I will fly higher than the eagle, I will lift myself even to the stars."

"'And if by chance a merciful ray fell on it from the star, would it not be its duty to say:

"Star, you are deceived. I am not an eagle, a conqueror of space, I am only a little worm."

"'And this is what I wished to say to you to-day, Miss. A secret which I am prevented from revealing, as it is not mine, has given me power, fortune, and a fictitious name. You think I am noble. I am the cast-away son of a poor peasant. You think me rich; even the coat I wear is not mine. You think me powerful; my power I hold from one of whom I am the servant, and the tool. I cannot, of my own self, even defend you. The Protection for which you thank me is part of the mission to which I am ordained, and in accepting your thanks I should rob the mysterious being I serve. Accept, then, this protection, without thinking any more of me than of the servant who, when you go away from a ball, throws an opera cloak over your shoulders, or shuts the door of your carriage. Like him, I obey the orders I receive, only too happy to have been called to a task which I should have solicited if it had not been forced on me.'

"'You would have solicited it do you say? Ah! is it not as if you had chosen it of your own accord? You want to give me all, and receive nothing in exchange. Nothing, not even the gratefulness of my poor heart. This is not humility, it is pride. If I considered you the passive instrument that you say, do you think I should be here? Could you have thought that I should draw back from the debt which the magnitude of your services impose on me? Then why should you seek to lower yourself in my eyes and in your own? No, Don Jose, I have confidence in you, and I claim of you a greater confidence. 'Tis you, and you only that I know, and wish to know. 'Twas you who said to me, 'have faith in me and you will be saved!' And I came and gave you my hand, and answered: 'I believe you, save me!' But understand from me that I will not be saved by any other than you. Your protection does not humiliate me. It makes me greater, on the contrary, to my own self, because I know, I divine that it is not alone to pity that I owe it. I lean on your protection with the utmost sincerity. But this unknown being who prompts you, as you say, frightens me, and I want nothing of him.'

"He was very pale, large beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, and his hands trembled convulsively.

"'Ah, Cyprienne,' said he, 'you don't know how deliciously your words would fill my heart if I had the audacity to listen to them. But no! there is an obstacle, an immense gulf between us; my birth and my fortune. The joy of protecting you, or rather to fight for you, is the only one henceforth that I can claim. I entreat you, do not take it from me by vain scruples and false reasoning on dignity. My work finished, your future assured, the Viscount de la Cruz will cease to exist. I will throw off my borrowed name and clothes. I will go away, carrying with me as an eternal source of happiness, the knowledge that I have been instrumental in securing

yours. And you, then, ignorant under what sky I live, what I am or what I do, you will preserve in some corner of your soul the visage of the Viscount de la Cruz. 'Tis the sole reward he desires for his efforts, with the joy of knowing that you are happy.'

"Tears came to my eyes; tears of sadness, mingled, perhaps, with those of spite.

"He took my hand, and went on in a softer tone:

"'You are beautiful; you are noble; you are rich, Cyprienne, and every struggle by you against destiny would be useless.'

"'Your unknown friends, those of whom I am the humble instrument, are powerful, and I doubt not but that with their help you will succeed in making your father change his opinion. Keep this triple gift of beauty, nobility and wealth. One day you will find a man worthy of you · noble, handsome, and as rich as you are and you will be as happy as you deserve to be. As for me, I will then be far away, but you will think of me as of a friend, a brother who loves you, but whose destiny forces him to live alone.'

"'Ah!' cried I, 'you are cruel to think that I could ever be happy, knowing you to be alone and unhappy. Now I detest my nobility and fortune.'

"'I shall not be at all unhappy,' answered he, shaking his head dolefully. 'The task I have in hand is severe, the work and trials I have to encounter will not leave me time to suffer. No, Cyprienne, the souvenir of past happiness is only a torture to the bad and weak. That happy acquaintance of ours will ever be to me a consolation for the past, give me greater strength in the present and hope in the future. In each of my endeavors, at every task accomplished, I shall feel myself worthier of you, and I shall draw more and more courage from this holy conviction, not that I ever entertain a hope of an impossible return, but you will be to me what the stars are to the mariner in peril. From afar I shall turn my eyes to you, and you will show me the way, and I shall be reassured and consoled.'

"This is, in one word, my dear Ursula, what we said at this memorable interview. I came out of it with a heavy heart, but as confident in M. de la Cruz as in God. He will save me, I am certain. Alas! I have not merited the happiness of being loved by him. Ah! how much I wish that all his mysterious statements were true, and that he were poor and obscure, and that he really thought himself unworthy of me. I could then in my turn sacrifice something for him. Not much, certainly. A name which has only been a burden to me, as during my youth it exiled me from my home. A fortune which is the curse of my present sufferings, as it makes my father desirous of increasing it by this odious marriage. Oh! fortune and name, how quickly could I give them up to be loved by M. de la Cruz.

"But no! he tries to draw me away from dangerous illusions, and knowing that he never can love me, he creates imaginary obstacles. Every one knows that he is rich: only a glance suffices to see that he is of noble birth. He deceives me in pity. 'Tis to me, and not to him, that the apalogue of the insect and the stars applies.

"Well let it be. The conduct which he seems to impose on himself shall be mine. I, also, when saved by him, will try in the sanctuary of my heart to be worthy of him. I will not sigh. I will not complain. I will not shed a tear.—And satisfied with the appearance of generous friendship which he offers, I will love him in silence' and till death.

"The heavens are starry; I think of the poor worm, Oh, if I had wings! How soon would I take my flight towards your calm scintillations, and your serene light. But what matters it as your rays fall to me and throw a consoling reflection on my obscurity and silence.

"Adieu, Ursula, I want to weep, and yet——yet, I never felt so light and happy."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

In spite of the air of indifference and contentment, first artificial, then natural, which Cypriennie showed to Madam de Puysaie she was not taken in by the protestations which her daughter had made her in a moment of thoughtless enthusiasm. The poor woman had already felt too heavy charges weigh on her conscience, of which more anon, to add this to them, to allow her daughter's unhappiness to be plotted under her own eyes without an effort to save her, without a protest, or at least without a prayer.

Besides the moment seemed well chosen.

M. de Puysie, the prey to a hidden grief, drew insensibly nearer and nearer to Cyprienne and his wife. Nini Moustache's desertion had broken him down. To this feeble being, so nervously active to the world, an affection to sustain him was a first necessity. He had thought—and where is the man isolated and suffering who has not these illusions?—that Nini Moustache was really attached to him. He had certainly never asked more than she could give, more than the every day gratitude which an animal feels for its master; but this gratitude, instinctive though it was, sufficed him. He thought he had merited it, and now he had lost her at a moment, when he only had her in the world to console him.

Thus was it that when Madam de Puysaie asked humbly to have a few words with him, he instantly complied with her wishes.

He received her while stretched on a couch in a room, which the curtains closely drawn rendered half obscure.

"To what, madam, may I attribute the honor of your visit?"

"Do you ask me, sir?—and now that you are suffering?"

"Just so," answered the Count, bitterly. "This is an excellent reason; but no one hears us, and we can seek a better one together."

"Ah!" murmured Madam de Puysaie, "I am lost! You will never pardon me!"

Her husband rose.

"I am not God, madam, to pardon."

Then going on in a light tone:

"Enough of tragedy," continued he, standing up. "Deceived husbands belong to comedy, every one knows that. There is even, to express how ridiculous they are, a word which makes the shopkeepers die with laughter. The lover is the hero, the husband the noodle. Besides, I was entirely in the wrong; I was not received by your family, anxious about your future and that of your race, every one of them reasons why a man should be thought uninteresting. The other was young, nearly a child, poetic as a dream and poor as one of Florian's shepherds. No hesitation could come from you, and I should have been a fool to count on any."

He made a few steps, and clenched his hands.

"He had everything for him, that boy, even to a romantic and touching death in exile."

Madam de Puysaie was as white as a sheet.

"Pardon! pardon!" she implored, "Do not calumniate the Chevalier des Alezes' memory."

"You see very well that you still defend him," replied the Count, with fury. "You still love him!"

"Have I ever loved him?" sighed she. "Ah! believe me, sir, we had better leave the dead in peace. Don't let us trouble with unjust recrimination, the eternal peace which they have conquered by suffering, hate and trial."

"I venture to wager," grumbled M. de Puysaie, "that you will soon assert that he was the just and I the unjust."

"No," said the Countess, holding up towards him her supplicating hands, which trembled in the dim light like two white doves. "But myself, and only me. Oh! keep for me all your anger, all your indignation, all your scorn, Loredan, and you will see if I ever complain. Have I ever complained when your reproaches were confined to me? Have I not, on the contrary, thanked and blessed the hand that struck me, and who, by deserved sufferings, lessened so much my future reputation. Scorn me more than the least of the servants, make me more vile in your heart than the worst of those women who walk the street. Certainly the punishment will be terrible, but I will, nevertheless, try to smile, and I shall not have one bitter word against you. But let your vengeance, only merited by me, never touch others. Never, never call up the memory of the Chevalier des Alezes into question. Do not be the cause of the eternal unhappiness of my daughter—of your Cyprienne!"

"My Cyprienne!" murmured the Count—and in a voice of thunder he repeated, "My Cyprienne! How dare you pronounce such a name before me? You think, perhaps, by this name to turn aside my just——"

He bit his lips till they bled, and then becoming suddenly calm, he went on:

"Listen, madam; I will not get irritated at all, and still less judge. I have no more that right. The fault which, in the beginning, was particular to you, is now reciprocal. I feel to-day as culpable as you, and the only punishment which is allowed me to impose on you is, to reveal the depth of the abyss into which you have made us fall. For the fall of a great race and a large fortune is similar to that of an edifice. However ancient its origin may be, as long as the keystone remains in its place, the design resists. The first stone removed, all crumbles miserably. 'Tis I who con-

summated the absolute ruin of this noble, this ancient fortress of inviolable honor, of greatness without stain, that they call the race of the Puysaie's. But 'twas you, madam, with your white hands and rosy finger nails, who pulled away the first stone."

Madam de Puysaie made a movement as if to answer. With a wave of his hand her husband enjoined silence.

"You have provoked this explanation which I should never have had the bad taste to impose on you. I beg you then not to interrupt me.

"'Tis true, for I must tell you every thing, even that which might seem to excuse you—that at the time of our union but little trouble was taken to ascertain our respective characters. The dowager Marquise of Simense, your only relation, on whom you entirely depended for future fortune, and all, absolutely ordained this marriage which she had much at heart. She was extremely intimate with the old restoration party. But better than anybody, this proud woman, who was possessed of uncommonly good sense, knew that a return to the old state of things was impossible. I was as well as could be with the citizen court. I was ambitious. A fortune, both superior to my pretensions and my name, was the sole obstacle. Madam de Simense, who was well acquainted with my father in his exile, and who loved me as a son, resolved to enrich us both at the same time by marrying us, and by giving you her immense property in Vendee, Poitou and in Brittany.

"You had never seen me. I did not even know you. You were privately educated on one of your aunt's farms. She had sought, without consulting you, to dispense with the publication of the banns and the limit as to age. One night, a man, twenty-five years old, arrived in a post-chaise at Simense. Your aunt said to you: 'Hortense, here is your husband.' Almost at the same moment the mayor appeared with his scarf of office in his pocket. Four rustics of the neighborhood served as witnesses. The parish curate blessed our union in the chapel of the chateau. You only had to know your new husband at the time to dine; for, contrary to custom, they placed us side by side. He was as amiable as he could be, and you charming, although timid, you were so young. Then, the same evening, after dessert, whips up coachman. He whose name you were henceforth to bear was whirling away in his post-chaise on the road to St. Mazoive, where a vessel was waiting to take him to England. An important mission from the new court called him to London. Besides, you were too young for a more intimate union. The day's ceremony was a sort of a betrothal. The real marriage was put off to the time my mission ended; that is to say, six months after.

"You see, Hortense, that I have sought neither to justify nor palliate. Yes, I married you solely through ambition, without knowing you, and almost by force. Yes, the good will of the Marquise of Simense was imposed on you without her ever having inquired into the state of your affections. Thus I do not upbraid you for your weakness, but for the hypocrisy which you surrounded it with. If, when I came back from my diplomatic exile, with what haste you know, (you had written to me during my absence, and in your letters I came to know and love you,) you had said to me: 'M. de Puysaie, I am married to you, but I can never be your wife. In forcing me to put my hand in yours, you and my aunt have taken advantage of my youth, and violated my conscience,' oh! then, certainly, I should have been unhappy. But then, to-day, I should not consider myself right in condemning you.

"But no, you received me with your sweetest smiles, with all the tenderness of a young and happy wife, and for many weeks I thought I had found a prodigy in the union of the heart and fortune. 'Twas only six months after that I found out that the Chevalier des Alizes was clandestinely stopping under my roof, and his stopping there bore fruit, alas! by the premature birth of Cyprienne!"

Madam de Puysaie made a gesture of denial.

"No!" said Madam de Puysaie's gesture.

Her husband went on:

"Oh, I know very well. This coincidence, of which you admit the strangeness, is not a proof, it is only a presumption at the most. Thus, I sought not at first to explain the estrangement for you and your daughter. I was accused in society. I let them accuse me. I was treated as a bad husband, as an unfeeling father. I preferred this injustice to the revelation of your fault, which alone could have justified me. I allowed you, and allow you still, to play the part of a martyr. But when we are alone, madam, the situation changes. You will allow me in your turn to treat

you with scorn when you come and try to make me have pity on my daughter's position. Your anger, when face to face with me, will defend you against my legitimate hatred of the memory of your lover."

"The Chevalier des Alizes never was. I call God to witness that Cyprienne is your daughter!"

"Indeed!" said the Count, "dare you uphold that assertion on reading this?"

He ran, or rather bounded towards a desk, and opening a secret drawer, he drew from it a folded paper, cut at the corners by being often opened and read.

"Do you recognize this?"

"Yes," sobbed the Countess, hiding her face in her hands.

"Listen to what this letter contains; this letter without date or signature," the Count went on, with curt voice, as implacable as that of a judge pronouncing a sentence of death.

"'Into what an abyss have you drawn me? If he were to come back, the trace of our crime is so evident that I could not hide it from him.' "'*He*' is I," put in the Count, bitterly. "'Do not remain deaf to this supreme appeal which I address you. My head is gone! I am going mad! you have ruined me, and my only hope of salvation is in you.'

"Is that clear?" asked Loredan, "or shall I read you another letter, which you know as well as the first, the letter in which you announce to your accomplice the birth of a daughter! Do you understand? of a daughter; that is to say, of she whom you call *my* Cyprienne. Come, now, rack your brains! Invent some subtle lie. Justify yourself. Justify the Chevalier des Alizes. Prove to me that this paper is a forgery, or that I do not understand the sense of the phrases it contains, or——what shall I say? I am waiting, madam, and not without some curiosity, for what you may be able to answer."

"I have nothing to say," murmured the Countess, "but that these notes are in my handwriting; and that notwithstanding, Cyprienne is your daughter, and that the Chevalier des Alizes is innocent."

"How can that be, miserable one?" cried M. de Puysaie.

But he again gave a proof of the marvellous power he had over himself.

"Whatever may be the name of your accomplice, whatever may be the fruit of your sin, the results are none the less the same. The results are these: falling into an abyss all the more gloomy on account of the beauty and radiance of my dream, I arose, wounded and mutilated. No more ambition; no more courage; no more love. Yes, Hortense, I should have loved you. Ah! in that holy affection, what courage would I not have drawn from it? But no! suspicion had glided like an adder over the frozen stones of our cold hearth. Confidence was no longer possible between us. Then an immense indifference took possession of me. I renounced all my dreams of greatness and fortune. Work for an infant of adultery! To what good? I severed myself voluntarily from the holy embraces of the daughter and the wife. And in that sumptuous castle, with a whole army of servants, where you shone like a queen envied by all, knowing the cause of my scorn, I lived alone.

"Then—and here commences my fault, a fault of which you should assume the heaviest part, I sought elsewhere what I found impossible to obtain at home; happiness being for ever lost to me, I pursued the illusion.

"I pursued this illusion feverishly, with delirium; and like all mirages it fled unceasingly from my unwavering pursuit. In this ardent and perilous chase I have lost all my moral and physical energy, my nerves and my blood, my heart and my head, my fortune and my honor! You have nothing to envy me for, Hortense. I am to-day as miserable, as vile as yourself. We can look at each other as equals. Neither of us will have to blush for the other like two convicts at the galleys riveted to the one chain.

Sadness, a sadness dark and incurable had given place to anger. Seated in an arm-chair, his hands hanging down, the Count seemed to look over the space between him and past happiness.

"Why," said Madam de Puysaie, in a deep, trembling voice, "render a poor innocent girl responsible for our faults? Ruin menaces, as you say. What matters it? Is not ruin expiation? Oh, you are right, Loredan. I am the chief, the sole one culpable. Ah! if you only knew to what extent; more so than you believe. There! all the scorn which you might heap on me would be inferior to that which my conduct inspires me with for myself. Let us be courageous, my friend! Let us suffer without complaining and without weakness, the destiny which we have worked out for ourselves! You are in debt; we will pay them, even though I should be obliged

to sell my last diamond and work with my hands to live. Let us wash out the past; I only wish to keep one remembrance of it—my fault and the unhappiness it has caused. I shall always have it before my eyes as well as your clemency.

"This clemency I do not implore for myself. I feel myself unworthy of it. 'Tis for yourself, so that you may one day know—when I am dead—the true and horrible secret of my life. Then you will, perhaps, repent of taking a resolution with too great precipitation, and Cyprienne will cause you remorse."

"But why not clear this up from to-day?" cried M. de Puysaie, in despair. "What is there so horrible in your confession that it surpasses in infamy the fault of which I accuse you?"

"Spare me! do not ask me any more, Loredan. I cannot, I ought not, under pain of causing, perhaps, an immense evil, for which I should consider myself responsible, reveal more to you. Alas! my conscience is so weighted with what it has to carry, that I could not bear a new load. Only know, oh, do know, do believe that Cyprienne is really your daughter, and that you must love her, cherish her, and protect her as such.

"Have faith in what I say, rather than in the apparent falsehoods in my letters. They prove my fault, but they would even prove it less clearly than I in the absolute humility of my remorse; but they do not, cannot prove more, and on my bed of death I should still cry to you, Loredan, curse me, but love and protect Cyprienne! Cyprienne is your daughter!"

"I believe you, then, madam," answered the Count. "But as you find it useless or dangerous to throw any light which might direct my conduct, allow me to throw on you the responsibility before God. You know how we are situated. On my soul and conscience, Cyprienne's marriage alone can save us. If, however, you think the secret reasons you possess more valuable, do as you please. Cyprienne is to give me to-morrow the answer I must send to M. Matifay. Dictate it to her—whatever it may be, it shall be respected."

Madam de Puysaie tried to seize her husband's hand to kiss it. He withdrew it quickly.

"Adieu!" said he. "Leave me. I am sick of action, sick of wishing, sick of life. There are no thanks due to me by you, as it is not through clemency I give in; it is through lassitude."

"Thank God!" murmured Madam de Puysaie, on going out, "Cyprienne is saved!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE UNKNOWN TYRANT.

The poor woman had happily accomplished the first portion of her task, but a new and insurmountable obstacle now rose up against her in the person of Colonel Fritz.

Buttoned up to the throat, his lips compressed, his eyebrows drawn up, he waited impatiently in the ante-room for the end of a conversation of which he suspected the mystery.

When he saw Madam de Puysaie come out, radiant with that ineffable joy which accompanies a sacrifice for one who is loved, he divined that if his scheme was not entirely frustrated, it was at least greatly compromised, and that he could only place himself on his former footing by an audacious effort.

Conquer, or die, was the maxim of this redoubtable gambler in souls. Either to be ignominiously expelled like a domestic, from the Puysaie mansion, or to be governor and master there—this was the alternative which he was to risk audaciously. One chance, namely: the firmness or weakness of Madam de Puysaie.

He walked towards her with a stiff and automatic step.

"Hortense," commanded he in a stern voice, "I want to speak to you."

On hearing herself called in this manner and in this tone the Countess trembled and threw up her head like a horse which a spur makes rear. But however proudly indignant was her look she was obliged to lower it before the Colonel's icy stare.

She blushed scarlet and in almost a supplicatory voice she murmured—

"What do you want again with me?"

She was giving way.

The Colonel stepped towards her and supported her with his arm, then placing Madam de Puysaie's on it, said with the air of people who talk together as good friends—

"I am going to let you know, Madam."

He dragged her rather than led to her private room. She entered more dead than alive and allowed herself to fall into an arm chair.

He followed her, minutely examined the doors to see if they were shut, then folding his arms

"Now," said he, "I want our daughter to be rich."

"Our daughter!"

"Yes, Madam, *ours*. You have broken in vain the ties which might have bound her to me. Vainly have you spirited her away! Stolen her from me. I shall find her some day, be sure of it, even should I be forced to rummage every educational establishment in Paris. But while waiting for that day, I toil for her and I will not have her set aside in favor of her sister Mademoiselle Cyprienne de Puysaie."

"Her sister!" cried the Countess, "you know very well that she is not!"

"She is, on your side at least," coldly replied the Colonel.

"And by this she has a right to half of her maternal succession. Besides you know as well as I that all search into the paternity of a child is prohibited by law. All the precautions which you have taken to render any attempt on her part to assume her legal name abortive are useless I warn you. I have taken contrary measures which will destroy them. I have a certificate from Dr. Toinon who was present at Lily's birth and the testimony of the Gosses who brought her up. Nothing is then more easy than to establish her identity."

"But what then do you want? What do you insist on?"

"That you help to avoid an exposure by not obliging me to resort to violent measures to defend our daughter who has been sacrificed by you to scruples which are out of reason.

The Countess tried again to expostulate, but the Colonel's imperturbability stopped every exclamation on her lips.

"Listen, Madam," continued he, "we understand, from what I see, paternal love, in an absolutely different fashion. I do not know if you have heard of that well advised bird, the cuckoo. It has the habit of laying its eggs in the nest of some other species of bird, in a robin's or nightingale's, for example, but for all that it does not abandon it progeniture, Perched on a neighboring tree it jealously surveys its hatching and growth. Little by little the young bird becomes voracious while growing. It must not only have the part which its adoptive parents have assigned it but all the parts. Then its own family comes to its aid and by pecking and hustling the robins' or nightingales' brood are thrown to the ground and crushed. You will find, Madam, that this example, given me by nature, is a good one; and I think you too intelligent to insult you by explaining one of La Fontaine's fables."

"Just so," said Madam de Puysaie, bitterly, "and you have valiantly begun your work. Already taking unfair advantage of letters confided to your honor, and written to yourself at the time that Lily was born, you have made Cyprienne suspected by her father. 'Tis she who to-day pines for a child of crime! Oh, but you possess an infernal genius for intrigue, and if La Fontaine forgot your apologue, Malieri, at least, has not forgotten you! But are you not afraid that from being constantly tortured your victim will cry out, that from being forced to submit to the exactions of your complicity she will not tear herself away from it. If in the end I told my husband everything?"

The colonel shook his head, and his face wore an infernal smile of malice and irony.

"I don't fear that! Besides in doing so I warn you that you would be throwing M. de Puysaie into the greatest danger it is possible for him to be in. He would without the slightest doubt provoke me, and if he did so, he would be a dead man."

"Oh! no, no!" cried the unhappy woman. "I will not do it, you know well that this last threat is a useless one. To avow that I could have trusted in you! that I could have been so weak for a man of your stamp! This would in verity be the climax of humiliation and infamy. This would be putting myself in the eyes of the Count beneath the stature of those miserable trollops who take up with the first man they come across whether porters or valets. Certainly had I loved, as my husband after your denounciation believes, the Chevalier des Alizes, I should have been in no small degree culpable; this love, however, would have been grand and worthy of an honest heart. But to have loved *you!* contemptible as you are, with a waiter's and thief's soul—To have loved you and confess it!—I had rather die a hundred times!"

"That is just what I presume," answered Fritz, bowing awkwardly, and chuckling in a constrained manner. "I am obliged to you, madam, for having such a kind opinion of me, and one above all so favorable to my projects."

Madam de Puysaie was standing, her nostrils quivering, her eyes flaming, really

beautiful in her scorn and indignation.

"See, now," said she, setting a crushing look on the Colonel, "that is all I can tear from him, a low and trivial irony. He is of a serpent's race. Whatever he may do he cannot help rearing his head; he can remain bold strong and vigorous even in infamy, he is ever condemned to the platitudes of crime."

"Take care, take care, madam," replied the Colonel, gruffly, "that I do not reply otherwise than I have done if you drive me to it! your haughty airs and disdain do not impose on me. By good luck for you they hide so clumsily your profound conviction in your own weakness that far from irritating me they inspire me with pity for you. But do not add to the hate with which my soul boils over, or do you see I will break you like glass, I will torture you at leisure in the person of Cyprienne, and in that of M. de Puysaie. There is not a corner in your heart that I do not know of, that I cannot reach."

He stopped then, laughing and showing his teeth, ironically.

"Serpent, do you say? Well, yes, I will be one if necessary. Oh, you don't know how I hate every one of you. This hate I do not seek to justify. Good or bad I am thus, and cannot be otherwise. 'Tis with gall, doubtless, that my mother suckled me. When young, I was like the rest of the world, good-looking perhaps—at least many a one not precisely venal has told me so—and rich at times; well, I will swear to you that in hours of prosperity there was not a moment but that I envied some one or something. Hundreds of thousands of francs income, a countess for mistress, a duke's and peer's title, all this was not enough. I have the soul of a Cæsar Borgia. Ah, were I in those times when energy and implacable will were the unique necessities of a man, and when one carved out a throne with a brigand's sword! I should have been a great man then, you would have admired me, you would have loved me.

"I don't blame at all society as it is at present. That would be a fool's act, as I profit by it. I assure you that souls like mine stifle in it. We have perhaps the will to do great things and the force too. We were conquerors, it has made us adventurers. From a living force it has made us perilous. Try to confine steam in your cast iron boilers without leaving a safety valve, it will force its way out, and burst them like a soap bubble in the sun. Well, as for me, something boils in my brain which cannot find an issue, and by heavens, madam, when it does, it will make a stir in the world.

"Come now, in all honesty, what would you that I become with the soul of a Cataline, in the body of a poor vassal. The ambition of a Sesostris in the brain of a counter jumper, or a lawyer's clerk. The unheard of appetites of a Sardanapulus and old boots. Try one of those immense crimes which change in twenty-four hours the whole face of the world? I have thought of it. But the times of Brutus are past, and they would have guillotined me like any other common rogue. To seek fortune from afar in unknown and new countries? I should have tried this when I was twenty if I had only had enough to pay my passage. Then rendered powerless with all fevers, all delirium, all ambitions, all passion in the soul, I say to myself that society was a virgin forest; that at Paris, as among the savages in the new world, one can create for himself an absolute and occult royalty. Only instead of saying 'Might is right,' one should take as the pass word 'for the cunningest.' This is what I have done, madam, and with such a prize as yourself you have just found out that I am a miserable swindler, a poor meagre police bird. Besides, I have deceived the most clairvoyant in this. I hold in my hands quite an army of which I appear as only one of the humblest soldiers. I appear to serve in it and am served by it. I am at the eve of its triumph, that is to say, its triumph precedes mine by a very few hours only.

"'Tis at the moment that you stand in my path, and you hope that I shall not crush you. If I was not certain of it, do you think that I should thus speak about what I am almost afraid to whisper to myself. Initiated into my secret you must be obedient or be broken. This is why I reveal it to you, in order that you may understand well that in a contrary case no scruple, or weakness, or pity can retain me from grinding you under my heel."

Thus spoke he angrily, deliriously, drunk at the sound of his own voice, his veins swollen, his eyes glowing, his hair in disorder, sublime in wrath. Ah, yes, Nini Moustache was right. He was an admirable, a marvellous comedian. Madam de Puysaie listened to him, terrified at so much perversity united to an energy which had become invincible.

Satan—for, by a common and well known phenomenon, Col. Fritz thought

the role he was playing was a true one, and that he was Satan—Satan held his tongue. Something like a ray of light illuminated his distorted features, and wiping his forehead as if to chase away all sinister thought:

"There was a moment," said he, "when I could have become different. For several months I saw before me the aurora of red mption; 'twas you Hortense who had made its calm ray shine before me. At that time for one of your smiles I should have abandoned all my schemes, all my ambition, all my hatred.

"I found the Chevalier des Alizes abroad while in the sadness of his exile and his broken love. He died in my arms, and his last words, his last sigh were for you. I accepted the mission to carry to you his last words. 'Twas thus I came to make your acquaintance, and on first seeing you I said, she must and shall love me!

"You were very unhappy; unjustly neglected by the count, separated from your daughter, a wife, and nevertheless a widow. Your confidence in the Chevalier's friend rendered easy a seduction commenced by calculation and consumated wth delirium. Yes, I swear to Heaventhat I love you so as to become almost good. Do you recollect into what an excess of joy I was thrown into at Lily's birth? I who had hated all my life," I said to myself: "This is love."

Such great happiness was no doubt a sacrilege and could not last. Like the children of the angels descended to earth at the call of the children of men, you wept for your celestial home. You tortured me with your regrets and your remorse. I thought you had extinguished in my heart the last sparks of hatred and 'twas you who made me acquainted with it again more intimately than I had ever felt it.

"Yes, I hated your husband. I hate him because he was the only obstacle to your work of mercy. I hate him for having misunderstood you, what even I do not, while thus torturing you. I hate him for all the harm I am obliged to do you to reach him. Remorse driving me from you will attach you to him perhaps. I was separating you by an impassable barrier. Calumny and vile tale-bearing were alike to me. The letters you wrote to me were used to build up terrible proofs against you and the Chevalier des Alizes. I have done it and do not regret it. I have but one tender corner in my heart now, my affection for Lily, for my daughter.

"This affection has also been hurt by your imprudence. Lily has been stolen from me, and you want me now to pardon you.

"Don't think about it. I will return what I have suffered a hundred-fold and, as you have stricken me through Lily, so will I strike you through Cyprienne.

"I must have the name of the Count de Puysaie, Baron Matifay's millions, all the great men and all the wealth with which to crown my Lily, and I shall have them, don't doubt of it.

"But to reach them I must have an instrument—Cyprienne is there—so much the worse for her—a means to-day and she would become an obstacle to-morrow, she is condemned.

"'Tis on you and you alone, madam, that this condemnation depends. The hurricane does not break the grass which bends before it, but strikes down the oak which resists. If there remains to you to-day one more arm against destiny, be sure that it is contained in this one word: Obedience."

At these last words and certain of his triumph the Colonel bowed and went out, leaving Madam de Puysaie struck down with what she had just heard. It seemed to her while her tyrant was speaking, that she was suffering from a terrible nightmare. 'Twas only when he was gone that she breathed, but afterwards, alas, fell into an anxiety still more profound. What was the condemnation her daughter Cyprienne was menaced with in case of rebellion? She knew not.—But she knew that Colonel Fritz was not at all delicate as to the means, and this made her all the more fearful even of a crime.

What help could she invoke? What devotion call to her aid? M. de Puysaie? Alas, what could this poor debilitated being do against such a strong player? To put them face to face would be to render a new and terrible catastrophe inevitable.

Thus on every side darkness. Salvation nowhere—one sole ray of hope—obedience to the unknown tyrant.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHERE THE HEAVENS ARE OVERCAST.

THE BLUE PORTFOLIO.

"A WEEK has passed that excepting at meals I have not seen my father or mother. M. de Puysaie has almost been invisible in the dining room and has not spoken a single word. As to my mother she is sadder than ever. Colonel Fritz alone appears unchanged.

"Evidently the moment approaches for them to insist on a decisive answer. And I have had no news of M. de la Cruz since the day when I spoke to him for the first and perhaps the last time in my life in the hot-house at Madam de Monte-Cristo's; can he too have abandoned me?

"Florent came this morning, as at the first time, to tell me that my father was waiting for me; 'twas in trembling you may judge that I followed him. What was I to decide or answer? I was still ignorant with regard to it. I felt so inert and broken down that in going in I had a mind to cry out—

"'My father, do with me as you will.'

"Mother was there with M. de Puysaie. It was to her he first spoke.

"'Further hesitation is impossible. You are aware, Madam, that a decision must be come to to-day. You know that I have put our common destiny in your and Cyprienne's hands. Consult between you, and dictate the answer I am to give the baron de Matifay.'

"My mother had then interceded in my favor. Her husband's obstinacy was overcome, and I was saved!

"'Oh my mother!' cried I.

But she stopped me.

"'Wait, Cyprienne.'

She could hardly speak, her emotion choked her, my father leaning against a table regarded us.

'My daughter,' my mother went on, 'you believe in my love, do you not, and you know that for you I would willingly lay down my life.'

"'Oh, yes!'

"'And you have confidence in me, and you do not doubt but that the resolution that I am going to ask you to take will be for the best.'"

All these protestations, this hesitation proved to me that my fate was sealed. I tried again to say yes, but I could not say a word, so held my tongue, trying to keep back my tears,

"'Ah!' cried my mother, 'do you want to die of despair and shame?'

"She had risen, her arms outstretched. I divined that she was about to kneel before me. I prevented it by catching her in my arms.

"'Not another word! Mamma, I will marry M. Matifay.'

"But in my turn I felt my throat choke, my tears overflowed, and I fell sobbing into a chair.

"My father left the table and rushed towards me, my mother hung over the other side of the chair, crouched on the carpet, and holding my hand which she was kissing.

"'Oh! thanks! Cyprienne, thanks! my daughter.'—and I felt the scalding tears running over my fingers.

"'Madam,' said the count in a grave voice, 'in loving sin God has placed the germ of redemption. The birth of this poor neglected child was, I now see, a blessing to my race. Forget as I forget.'

"And opening his arms wide in which she rushed, he kissed her on the forehead.

"Then turning to me:

"'The sacrifice which you make for us is one of those which are always remembered. I was at once an unjust and severe father to you, your conduct, so generous and devoted, to-day, makes me feel my error acutely. Pardon me—you can, for I swear that I can never pardon myself.'

"Oh, dear father!—dear mother! all disunion was over between them. Their reconciliation was complete, and 'twas due to me. Alas, I paid for it dearly, but, however dearly, had I the right to regret it impiously. No! My tortured heart found its sufferings almost sweet, and in my anguish, there was I don't know what ineffable happiness, the doleful joy of sacrifice.

"I went back to my room—my father and mamma saw I had better be alone during the first moments of trial, and did not seek to invade my solitude. I wept, oh! yes, yes, Ursula, I wept much! But the conviction that I had been devoted refreshed me, and these tears far from being painful did me good.

"Quite a new order of duties came up before me. I felt that to render my sacrifice profitable, it must be complete. I should hide my regrets, dissimulate my tears, appear, if not joyous, at least consoled; resigned, if not happy.

"Thus, when a few hours later, my mother stole gently to my door, she almost found me smiling. I received with an air of serenity, the news that I was to be introduced to M. Matifay the same evening, and, without letting the

smile leave my lips for an indiscreet tear to wet my eyelashes, or a sigh to reveal what I felt, I placed myself in the hands of Postel to be dressed for the presentation.

"A sad toilet!

"To affirm to myself that the past no more existed, and that I had practiced dreaming, and that I was entering never to return into cold realities, I made them dress me as I was on the day I went to the Bois de Boulogne. Nothing was forgotten, not even the white rose in my hair! Poor rose! it was the emblem of my hope—it had become that of my sadness. I will keep that rose! 'tis the only memento I will keep of my three days of happiness!

"When I went into the saloon of honor, my father was already there with M. Matifay, my future master! They rose; he bowed clumsily. Then they continued their conversation for a few minutes, when M. de Puysaie quitted the room under some pretext or other, leaving me alone with my future husband, sixty years of age!

"He had at least the good taste to come to the point immediately, which obviated all embarrassment on either side.

"'I fear, Miss, that M. de Puysaie may not have exaggerated your submission to his orders.'

"'My father gives me no orders, Sir Baron; his simple desire is enough.'

"'Then, miss, I can hope—I may hope—'

"'You are very well answered when you see me here.'

"He precipitated himself on to my hand, which I had the courage not to withdraw before he had placed his big lips on it.

"'You are an angel!'

"'No, sir!' said I, smiling, 'I am in no wise an angel, I only hope to make you a good and faithful wife.'

"'A wife, a girl, an angel, as you will,' cried he, enthusiastically. 'Oh! you will see that you have not done wrong to accept me.'

"The good man's energy moved me a little, although it was ridiculous enough.

"'I know your history, Baron, and I have learned that you are very good.'

"'Even were I not, I should become so with you. Not to feel good beside you, one must have a heart as hard as a rock. Oh! if you only knew, Cyprienne—pardon me, Miss Cyprienne!—everything is not rosy in my life! I am so lonely! sometimes at night, when my valets are gone to bed, I walk about the vast rooms in my hotel with a candle in my hand! Everything is empty, mournful, and lugubrious! and what memories! Oh! 'tis terrible! During the day, I get on better. I stop in my office; there are folks about me, clerks who come and go, pens scratching over paper, money which rattles. This is my life, all this. Then it is light; but at night!'

"He wiped his bald front, damp with perspiration.

"'These ideas will quiet me when you are there. Youth and innocence like yours will lighten my dark house. I will work for you. You will be good to me. Oh, very good, eh! you ought to be so charitable.

"'Listen! when I first saw you, I loved you. You are very beautiful. My wrinkled heart, till then insensible, beat like that of a youth. I said—pardon me, Cyprienne!—I said, she must be my wife. Ah! but then I knew you not! I thought you were like the rest, sensible of all the seductions which pride and riches have. And now that I know you, I ask you:—will you be my Providence!'

"The Baron de Matifay is not seductive at first sight. There is something false in his looks and actions which is repulsive. I must, however, confess that I was touched. I remembered the story of 'the richest and most honorable in France,' which my father told me, and it served as a commentary to the Baron's enthusiasm. Poor man. To be as lonely with all his millions as a stray squatter in the golden desert of the California mines. At night, no doubt, he see pass before his eyes Blanche's pale and sweet phantom, his adopted daughter, so tenderly loved and dead so young under Neapolitan skies.

"'Tis she he seeks to replace in his heart and home. 'Tis not a wife he asks but a daughter. This idea reassures me entirely, and this time I gave him my hand of my own accord.

"'If anything depends on me, sir, you will be happy.'

"Thus, Ursula, you perceive that this sad affair is not so terrible as I suspected. Is not devotion the principal happiness of a woman? Thus, instead of one act of devotion, I accomplished three at one time: I made a new affection spring up between my father and mother, so long separated, and I consecrate my future to the happiness of this old man who is very good and after all loves me nearly paternally.

"This destiny I must confess it has nothing in it so terrible after all, and had

it been proposed to me three months ago, at the convent of B——, I should have, perhaps, accepted it joyfully, and you would have been the first to counsel me to it. Ah, why did I ever know M. de la Cruz?

"What matters it since he himself declares to me that any union between us is impossible? that he does not love me?

"And, had he loved me, I feel, Ursula, that in spite of my father's sadness and my mother's anguish, I should have resisted, although moved by the Baron's grief, I should never have ever placed my hand in his.

"But he does not love me!

"I have just read, re-read, and read again these three short letters, the only witnesses of his passage on my life. Then, an hour after, I twisted them up, lighted them by my candle and burned them. What is there remaining of them now? a little pinch of black powder, a few fragments which disperse at the slightest breath, and which two or three letters stand out in white. This is what was fine dreams—a few ashes! I have carefully preserved this ash in a satchet and will keep it with the rose.

"These pious cares have quite calmed me, now I am tranquil I can pray, I can offer to the good, the merciful God my sadnesses as a sacrifice. He has given me consolation in my martyrdom; for love being dead, devotion remains.

"I went to the window, and in the silent night I pondered over and I recollect everthing that has passed around me and in me within the last few days, and all this only has left the sensation of a bygone dream. It seems that I relate to myself the pure and chaste adventure of love dawning on another. Listen, listen, Ursula, to the glorious, the radiant tale which I tell to myself.

"There was once a princess so poor and unhappy, that she could only weep. The king, her father, and the queen, her mother, separated by a Sorcerer, had been exiled from their palace, and when he called them back it was to enjoin them to marry her to a king, their neighbor, who was ugly and deformed. The poor princess wept bitterly, and they shut her up in a tower a hundred feet high, telling her that she should never be released unless she wed the Baron Matifay.

"Thus one day while at her balcony, thinking over her sad fate, a voice cried below her in the dark, 'Cyprienne!'

"It was at this portion of my tale when from underneath my window I heard some one say cautiously, and under his breath:

"'Cyprienne!'

"I lifted my head, and from the open window something fell on the carpet, and rolled to my feet; 'twas a letter rolled round a pebble.

"Another note, a note from M. de la Cruz.

"I read it at a glance. It only consisted of a few lines.

"In the name of your eternal happiness, in the name of the honor of your family, grant me an interview. It is known that you have consented to marry M. Matifay. This marriage is impossible. That man is a monster! oh, for mercy's sake hear me! believe me! It is absolutely necessary that I see you—that I speak to you—that I decide you to break this odious engagement. If you consent to hear me, dear, holy, sacrificed one, hold your candle outside of your window, and the most fait ful of your friends will fly to you, bringing with him—who knows?—deliverance perhaps."

"This odd letter, so strangely sent, threw me back on my doubts and perplexities. 'My eternal happiness! the honor of my family!' He to whom I had promised to unite myself—'a monster!' These precise affirmations only permitted me one alternative: either I was on the brink of an invincible gulf, from which only a miracle could tear me, or M. de la Cruz must appear to me a most infamous calumniator.

"I ran to the half opened shutters, and opened them violently. I saw a dark shadow standing out on the sand in the walk, just under my window.

"How had M. de la Cruz got there? I could not tell. On seeing me he held up his hands, clasped together.

"My first thought was to motion him to withdraw. He at first obeyed, as if regretful, but seeing that the candle remained on the table he sighed deeply.

"What shall I say to you? Ursula, I felt possessed of an imperious desire to know, although the singular statement in his letter had given birth in my mind to such cruel doubts I could not bear to think of M. de la Cruz as an enemy and traitor. My confidence in him was so great that I could not now condemn him without hearing him. If, in the end, what he wrote was true! If this Matifay!—I called to mind the false actions, low and obsequious gestures, and cunning looks of this man,—oh, no! no! my invincible repugnance had not deceived me. What resolution was M. de la Cruz going to make?

"Don Jose went away softly and slowly towards the little garden gate, of which he had doubtless the key. On arriving at the gate he turned round again. Then I, by an instinctive movement, stronger than my will, I ran to the table, seized the light and returned to the window.

"By a single effort, a single jump he had cleared the space. And faint, already repenting my imprudence, I let the candle hang over and drop the wax on the leaves of the chestnut tree.

"He ascended the stairs, four at a time, coming nearer and nearer to me, near enough for me to distinguish his breathing, even the breathing of his heart.

"'Mademoiselle,' said he, 'be assured. Your sublime confidence renders me your slave, your dog. There is not one drop of my blood but what is not yours. Henceforth I have but one desire: to save you and die.'

"His hand touched the handle of the door, the inside bolt of which I only draw when I go to bed. It turned quietly and he appeared sad and pale against the background of the dark trees.

"'For pity's sake, return.'

"'Cyprienne,' he simply replied, 'I cannot allow that you for one moment ever suspect my intentions. The things that I have to tell you, the plans of escape that I wish to propose to you, are serious, nevertheless, I can reveal them before the being in whom it is your duty to place the most absolute faith. I await you here. Go and seek your mother.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SEALED NOTE.

On the day, at the very hour, when Cyprienne pledged her faith to Baron Matifay, two scenes, both intimately connected with this drama, were being enacted in the two opposite points of Paris.

The one in a dark basement in the Rue de Faubourg, Montmartre; the other in the sumptuous mansion of Madam de Monte-Cristo.

Viscount de la Cruz is walking, with rapid and impatient strides, across the conservatory, in which we heard him protest his devotion to Cyprienne.

The spot is still delicious; the water bubbles sadly in the marble basin; tropical flowers glisten in every direction, like flames of fire. Here, indeed, is Flora represented in all her wondrous beauty. But the Viscount hardly appears to notice all these beautiful and charming things. A bitter thought wrinkles his brow. His hands are agitated with feverish impatience; the pallor of his cheeks and lips, the sombre light of his eyes, all indicate that he has learned some painful news, and that he is still under the influence of a violent and sad emotion.

M. de la Cruz started. A footstep was heard on the sand in the conservatory, and a dress rustled. A white hand was placed upon Don Jose's shoulder, who turned round and found himself face to face with Madam de Monte-Cristo.

But how different to what she appeared to the world! She, too, was pale; her brow weighed down by an incalculable sadness, she slowly advanced, in her long mourning dress, faltering at each step, ready to fall.

What trouble, what pain, had then that woman undergone, to bring her to this fainting condition?

Don Jose contemplated her with a mingled feeling of respect and pity.

"It must be," said she, in a tone of complaint, "a pressing case that drives you to me on this day."

"So it is, Helena. I am aware that each year you celebrate this terrible anniversary when, alive, you descended into the abode of the dead. For one day you shut yourself in a tomb, and the next day you arise, more calm, more radiant, more strong. But still the evil ones continue their work, and what could I do against them? me, poor, feeble thing, if you deprive me of your aid?"

"Come, then, my son," she said. "Nothing that is mine must be kept from your pure devotion. You have the right to enter into the tomb where my recollections are deposited."

With a firm step she advanced to one extremity of the conservatory, and he followed.

He followed her through a series of chambers, a sumptuous bed-chamber, then entered a dark retreat, barely lighted by a sanctuary lamp suspended from the ceiling.

It was a kind of mortuary chapel, covered on all sides with black serge. No furniture, but a *prie-Dieu* of ebony, and a kind of altar, on which sundry objects were placed. Two locks of hair, one brown and the other fair; two portraits of men, so alike that they would be taken for two brothers, and a large note of sealed paper under a glass globe. That was all.

Above the altar, a Saviour, in ivory, extended his arms of grace.

"See there," said Madam de Monte-Cristo, pointing to the two locks of hair and the portraits, "all that remains of my destroyed happiness. See there," she continued, raising her hand towards the crucifix, "the only force that supports me. Only you, besides myself, Jose, have passed this step. Here, the noise of all exterior life ceases. And now, speak, what would you?"

"Helena," gravely replied Jose, "I attest to the noble dead for whom you mourn, and that divine victim of man's impiety. For you, for yours, I have done all that my feeble forces permitted me. I did it without afterthought, without desire for recompense, and it is to-day, the first time that I ask for one."

Madam de Monte-Cristo reached her hand towards the sealed note.

"Remember the words of Beasson, that you repeated to me: 'This paper contains your recompense and my rehabilitation.' This letter, Jose, is yours; you can open it."

But Jose hesitated when about to break the seal.

"No, Helena. This paper, I cannot—I ought not—I have sworn—not to read the contents until the day that Rancogne, conqueror over his enemies, shall carry his head high and enter the house of his fathers. I will not open it till then."

"Then never!" sighed Madam de Monte-Cristo. "Alas! never, for Blanche, my poor girl, is dead."

"Who knows?" muttered Jose.

"We know it but too well. Our information, received from papers, cannot allow of any doubt on that subject."

"And I have some—I have some doubts," exclaimed Jose. "Moreover, whether dead or not, what odds? she must be found. Dead or alive, she must be avenged!"

"Avenged! No, Jose. Our mission is not a mission of vengeance, but a mission of rehabilitation. I came here below to bring mercy, not war. I am strong in good, for the Lord is with me. If I undertake a work of anger, He will withdraw His hand from my brow, and I shall be broken. Avenge my daughter! avenge the dear dead! oh! yes, only too often have I dreamed of this, and that is why, each year, I enclose myself here to fly that temptation, and I pray, weep and humiliate myself. Then, from the depth of their graves they speak to me, they counsel me, they fill my soul with the refreshing divine clemency. To speak of vengeance here, Jose, is almost an impiety."

"Let it be so," replied Jose, with an air of sadness. But shall we allow the others to continue their perverse doings, without opposing them with all our strength? They have murdered your husband, your brother, your daughter! They have robbed you of everything, even to your name. They have rendered you a spectre, without home, without family, without a standing in the world. Let it be so; forgive all, if you demand it. But shall we permit them, under an exaggerated pretext of clemency, to make fresh victims, and to plunge them into the abyss from which you came out, but by a miracle of God? Shall we allow Cyprienne to wed that—that man, whose name I dare not pronounce here, for fear of troubling the rest of the dead? No, Helena, no! We cannot, we should not allow it.

"Listen! let me act alone. I take upon myself all the responsibility of that task, you remain Clemency and Calm Providence, but allow me to become Anger and Justice.

"All I ask of you, Helena, and that I ask on my knees, as the only price of all my past work, of all my work in the future, is to help me to save Cyprienne. I have just learned from Madam Jacquemin, that the unfortunate child, overcome, has promised to obey. You only, by offering her a refuge, or by using your influence with Madam de Puysaie, can gain time. Now, a time, a few weeks, a few days, see there, all that I require! To-morrow I commence my duel with Matifay. It is Champion himself who will act as my arm, and who knows, perhaps, I shall be fortunate to render you your daughter, at the same time that I serve Cyprienne."

"Madness," muttered Madam de Monte Cristo with a mournful smile, "Blanche is dead indeed! but I have not the right to refuse you anything, Jose; my happiness is blasted, I cannot and will not oppose yours. Cyprienne is worthy of you, and you are worthy of Cyprienne. Go where fate urges you. My children, you will always find me by your side.

"Should Cyprienne knock and ask for a refuge, the doors shall be open to her. Decide, Cyprie, you can do it. At all events I count on your prudence. You know to what extent your confidence can go. To her, my name must not be mentioned.

"If she refuses to follow you,—and doubtless she will refuse,—I will act powerfully on Madam de Puysaie, in order to secure the delay you require."

"Oh bless you!" ardently muttered Jose. She sadly bowed her head.

"I am very tired! Never did I feel so tired! Indeed, I fear my time is near, for hitherto I never felt so discouraged at heart, such doubts on my mind. During the past five years, how many of these miserable beings of all kinds, have we not saved. The agonies of famine, pain, even remorse seemed to melt before our approach. But now to-day, we find ourselves for the second time confronted with that Matifay, and that Champion, against my will. My task of good is covered by a task of hatred, and I hesitate, I feel that I am weak!

"Yes, which ever way I turn, whatever I do, I find them facing me, those beings who are more like incarnations of evil. I stretch my hand towards Mde. Jacquemin, I wish to draw her and her son from the gulf. I find myself confronted by Nini Moustache, that is Champion. I protect Ursula, again is Champion my adversary, Madam de Puysaie has scarcely cast herself at my feet, I have received her confession full of tears, I wish to repeat the oft repeated cry: "Be forgiven." Between us rises Colonel Fritz, that is Matifay, and doubtless Champion is the back ground, always Champion.

"Oh! Lord! you must ere this, know, that this task of mercy that I follow, presented itself to my mind as a revelation, I abjured all hatred. I have reserved but this one day in the year for my suffering and regret. All the rest, I have consecrated to my poor sisters in God, so persecuted, so tortured. I started with hands filled, and strewed your harvest of mercy and pardon before all the winds of heaven. What evident faality then always strews toads and vipers on my path, as if continually crying to me: 'Thou art still woman, Helena, thou hast forgotten nothing. Crush their heads, avenge thy dead, avenge thyself.'"

Fainting, she had let herself fall upon her *prie-Dieu*, reaching forth her arms in the strength of doubt imploring like Jesus in the Garden of Olives. "Lord! if it be thy will, let this bitter cup pass from me!"

Standing erect, his arms crossed, his brow lowered under the religious air that seemed to rise from her prayer. Jose contemplated her.

Her state of annihilation lasted for some time. She said no more. Her lips scarcely moved, at intervals merely ejaculating a moan or a cry of anguish. At last she threw herself back, opened wide her eye, lightened by an internal flame and shook off her lethargy.

"Go, Jose, go my son," she said. "Our Father in heaven reads our souls. He who knows all, knows that we have not sought this struggle, that we will not be our own judges in our own cause, and furnish our own offence. Oh, no! we strive to gain a nobler, a goal more worthy of him. If he drives those miserable beings towards us, it is because he wishes to strike them with our hand. Mercy for repentance, implacable justice for those who persist in evil ways.

"Pardon to he who yields, *qui ne se rend coigne*," replied Jose, arming himself for the battle, with the noted war cry of the Ouisran Rancogne.

He quickly retired, fearing that perhaps Madam de Monte Cristo might return from her decision. Rapidly passing through the consevatory he hastily jumped into a hack. Twenty minutes later, the carriage stopped in the narrow street, where we have already found M. de la Cruz, waiting for Madam Postel.

Again, the femme de chambre did not keep him waiting; but she merely came to the door and handed him a key.

The key of the small garden gate.

"Have you any news of Louis, Viscount?"

And the widow's faded hand slipped a small purse into that of the young man's.

"That is for him; I am so afraid that he will commit more follies."

"Fear nothing, Madam Jacquemin, I will tell you all about him this evening. Moreover, I have some hours to spare. I will go as far as his master's, and then this evening I can tell you all about him."

And accordingly, M. de la Cruz drove to the Place Vendome. Then, turning down the Boulevards, he went towards Clement's store.

Behind that store was the work-shop, where numerous workmen, under his guidance, turned out those marvellous articles of jewelry, that had so attracted the fashionable trade.

Stones for polishing hard stones were turning. The bellows of the forge were blowing full blast. Crucibles were filled to the brim with molten gold.

In the middle, his arms resting on a drawing-table, Clement himself was arranging the admirable combinations of precious stones and gold in all their phases.

While working and arranging the dif

ferent styles, he still had his old habit of singing, like when in the woods of Braconne, and was merrily humming to himself.

Jose slapped him on the shoulder, which startled him.

"That jewel," said he, in a low tone, "is called a Rose, is it not, friend Clement?"

Clement turned as red as one of his own furnaces, and held down his head without replying.

"Good, good," said Jose, smiling, "there is no harm in that."

Before going into the work-shop, Jose had passed through Clement's private apartments. He now had gaily assumed the light garb of a workman, gray pants and white blouse, only the pants was whiter, and the blouse cleaner than the others, that was all.

On seeing him enter, all Clement's men raised their heads.

Cordial greeting came from all parts and large open hands were held out.

With a rapid glance he looked around.

"Louis Jacquemin is not here."

"No," replied Clement, "Jacquemin has not settled down yet."

Here he lowered his voice:

"It seems that the other has disappeared. Before he used to get drunk, because he met her, now he drinks because he cannot see her."

"Poor boy!" muttered Jose.

"I decidedly think," replied Clement, in the same tone, "that his mind is unwell! yesterday I went to hunt for him and how do you think I found him? Dead drunk, in a dirty tavern, hobnobbing with a suspicious looking Italian, who is called I think, signor Cinella."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jose.

"Yes," continued he. "And they were dividing money, doubtless the proceeds of some bad act. We will try once more to save him if you wish; but my opinion of him remains unchanged. Nothing can be done with him."

On the contrary, thought Jose, I begin to think that he can be good for a great deal.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. LE GIGANT. GENERAL AGENT

M. LE GIGANT, GENERAL AGENT:—His inscription was prominently engraved in black letters on a brass plate, affixed to the door of a first floor of a house in the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre. Over the glass knob of the door was placed the notice.

"Please turn the handle."

If by chance the reader should have had the misfortune to comply with that notice, he would have found himself in a large hall, the sole piece of furniture in which was a long bench, covered with horse hair. At each end of this hall the windows were closed off by wire gratings, forming two spacious cages, before each of which were suspended cords on which were printed, on the right, CASHIER, and on the left, APPLICATIONS. The crowd generally made for the latter. The narrow space, limited by the green gratings, to the left was occupied by three young clerks, who incessantly scratched their pens on ruled paper from eight o'clock in the morning until five in the evening. To the right, only the bald pate of a good-natured old man could be perceived, who was perpetually asleep on a large, dog-eared ledger.

In the middle, on a folding-door, was raised in majestic solitude, the word MANAGER.

There, behind that door, was the centre of the spider's web; and it was a real spider's web, that study of the general agent, to whom all prey came alike, the gnat and the fly. That office was a market for everything, pawn tickets and old shawls. They even sold Bordeaux wine and coal to embarrassed sons of families; the frail fair ones of the night found there a market for their diamonds and their consciences.

Accordingly, the hall was quite full of people, quite a sight to look at.

The door of the sanctum sanctorum, that is, the manager's, was rarely opened to the vulgar; but there were persons to whom it was never closed. Those privileged persons mostly all belonged to the smaller commerce of Paris. Some were furniture dealers, toilet purveyors, dealers in articles of fashion, half-merchants, half-usurers, who agree to sell on time; dealers in job-lots of jewelry and fine shawls, who usually supply the gilded Bohemians; and also some wealthy proprietors, who never declared their true names, like those serious-looking people who put on false noses, in order to visit places of evil note.

These latter were not customers, they were shareholders.

In fact, M. Le Gigant was the manager of a credit company, in so far anonymous that, it is doubtful whether he had ever asked permission to start it. The householders supplied their houses and then

guests; the furniture dealers their furniture, the milliners the fine dresses, the jewelers and others supplied diamonds, lace, cashmire shawls, carriages, horses, and all, more or less, supplied souls. As for Le Gigant, he managed all; kept everything in discipline, and even assumed the eventual responsibility. In this manner this man had formed a monopoly of the vilest trade, but not the least productive. He had centralized vice, and launched debauchery on its path.

The same as an expert tradesman launches new articles in his line of business. Le Gigant, too, had his intrigues, and by starting eccentric equipages, or, by spreading some well arranged scandal, he could effectually launch into the gay of Parisian life any member of the frail sex, whether taken from any of the lesser dancing houses or from some obscure kitchen.

The same as all managers, in turns, have discovered theatrical stars, some have found a William Tell working his plane, a Bertram at the plough, or a Lucia shelling peas.

There was no risk to be incurred; moreover, Le Gigant held his clients by bonds of the strongest kind that can bind souls—complicity and interest. By withdrawing his hand he could let them drop into the mire from whence he had raised them. Neither did he fear any dangerous publicity that any one might imprudently give to his doings.

It is now five o'clock. The offices are closing. The old cashier has taken off his holland sleeves, and after stretching his arms has replaced his black silk skull cap by a rusty silk hat. At this sign the other clerks prepare to leave. Throwing down their pens even in the middle of a work, they hurriedly close the books and rush noisily down the stairs. Only Le Gigant has not stirred from his green manager's chair, he awaits some one.

However he is not alone, a little puny man remains seated, planted rather, in the corner of the sofa.

This little man is dressed with all the elegance of an old dandy, light pants, dark blue coat with gilt buttons, and nankeen vest. His hair of a doubtful blonde tint seems to announce—"I am a wig!" a timid obsequious smile, plays round his glassy goggle eyes, and he is sucking the coral knob of a child' stick, evidently embarrassed.

Unable longer to hide his impatience, Le Gigant has arisen and is walking up and down with rapid strides.

"The news that, that good Colonel is going to bring us seems to be important, old fellow?" in a tone of voice that seemed to issue from a musical snuff-box, so sweet and modulated.

Le Gigant did not interrupt his walk.

"I have already told you twenty times over, that to-day Matifay's marriage is either broken off or decided upon."

"Exactly," insisted the other, "but I do not see what connection that"——

Le Gigant stopped short and cast a terrible look at him. The little man trembled all over, and if possible shrunk still closer together.

"I do not wish to contradict you, old fellow, I only asked for my own information, that is all."

"Toinon," said Le Gigant continuing his hasty walk, "you're a fool."

Doctor Toinon, for it is no other than our old friend. understood the remark and kept quiet. But that was not what Le Gigant wanted. He was waiting and lost his temper, his bad humour had to fall on some one.

"What would you be without me? a miserable village doctor. Two thousand francs a year, and a heap of rheumatism caught by running over the damp fields, that is all you could expect in your old age, wheras you are a fashionable doctor, sought after by people of high life, some of them doubtful, it is true, but they never barter with you. Your health establishment is never empty. You make, without counting your share with us, your thirty thousand francs a year. I would just advise you to complain, and discuss my plans."

"And I do not discus them, old fellow, I do not complain, on the contrary! only I want to know"——

"That is, horrible" replied Le Gigant, "you are afraid of loosing the position that I have raised you to, or rather to risk it by following my fortunes. Come, do not try to lie to me "old fellow," you are thinking of getting out of the fire and betraying me if necessary."

"Oh!" protested the doctor.

"Good Lord, what a good soul you are, and I know it," interrupted Le Gigant, "but you are devilish soft, my poor Toinon. And that is why I wish to tell you that I am not so easily quieted. The deuce. why I have more work for you to do. I did not enrich you merely for your good looks. What I accomplished at one blow, I can also undo."

"And at least it is not dangerous, what you want me to do?" muttered Toinon, turning fearfully pale.

"H'm! well that depends upon the turn things take. However I hope not, Own at least, that what you have made has been easily got. Of us three, Matifay, you and mysely, to-day I am the only one beaten. It is but right that in your turn you too run some risk.

"Moreover the stake at issue is grand. If we succeed, we shall not count our gains by the hundred thousand francs, as we did last time, but by millions!"

"By millions!" the doctor, opening his eyes wide, "and out of whose safe are they to come?"

"You forget Matifay's?" replied Le Gigant sitting down astride upon a chair.

"Bah!" said Toinon cracking his fingers, "that is hot! Matifay is a wicked monkey to touch, who will not very willingly let us touch his cash box. He fixed us too well the first time."

"And that is just why I will not spare him," violently exclaimed Le Gigant. "That scoundrel has not even the usual honesty of a thief! But I have sworn, that the money, which he robbed us of shall not do him any good, especially as we helped him to get it. I will ruin him, in his turn, even if I cannot touch one fraction of the spoils! yes, at the price even of my own ruin, I will be avenged! Listen, Toinon, our game is dangerous, and I will not hide from you that it is so. But either win or lose, Matifay's fall is sure, yes, even if I were to give him up to justice with myself."

The doctor's teeth chattered.

"But me, my good friend, but me, I have done you no harm."

"So much the worse for you!" gruffly replied Le Gigant. "I hope, however," he calmly added, "not to be driven to such extremities. But I warn you, we must conquer or perish. I wanted to tell you so as to forestall your fooleries, and not be continually obliged to conquer your eternal hesitation."

Again he rose, walked two or three steps, and clenched his fists.

"Well is that Colonel not coming then! Oh! I would give ten years of my life if he but brings us good news!"

Just then the bell was violently pulled.

At the sound of the bell, Le Gigant rushed into the hall, and immediately returned, accompanied by Colonel Fritz.

Both were smiling.

"Come! come!" said Le Gigant, rubbing his hands, "all goes well! The little one consents. Matifay is overflowing with love, and they will begin housekeeping in a month. Now it is time to come to an understanding. Colonel, have you any news about Lilias?"

"None; so far all my researches have proved in vain."

"They can be recommenced. We will put all our spies on the track this evening, at once. The deuce! we cannot allow the future heiress of Matifay to be lost for such a long time."

Toinon opened his eyes wide, and scratched his forehead, evidently trying to understand.

"What does this all amount to?" he mumbled.

"Must I then dot all your i's, my poor friend? Matifay marries Miss Cyprienne de Puysaie, doesn't he? But it is not a gallant of your kidney that gets a wife so cheap. By contract, he has made her his universal heiress. Now, Lilias is Cyprienne's sister, and the daughter of our friend Fritz. Now, surely, everything is clear enough."

"Yes, I commence to see clearer; however, I must own that."

"Suppose a mishap befalls Matifay," impatientty exclaimed Le Gigant, "and it will befall him, you may be sure, for I have taken especial care of it. Cyprienne will inherit; and then, in turn, Cyprienne——"

Now the doctor understood all, for his whole body trembled.

"That is dangerous," he said, "but then there remain M. and Madam de Puysaie."

"Oh! as for those," replied Le Gigant, "they are already condemned. They will perish easy enough without our assistance. Against them we have two staunch allies, vice and remorse. Our friend Fritz will take charge of the remorse. Vice is already well on its way in the shape of Nini Moustache, who has pretty well got hold of the Count."

"But Nina Moustache has disappeared" exclaimed the Colonel.

"I know it," replied Le Gigant, "but I know her hiding place, for I furnished it myself, and I have the means to make her go straight. The foolish girl was scrupulous and pleaded repentance. Stuff and nonsense! But I have again placed her in temptations way and she has bitten Following my advice, she cleared out with the four hundred thousand francs that she foolishly wanted to return to the Count.

"However do not be afraid, this sum, by rights belongs to the company, will not long remain in her hands, and with it, her ideas of virtue will likewise vanish.

Only, Ursula must be taken from the Gosses', and placed in some other retreat unknown to her sister. The little one, once in our power, Nini Moustache will comply with any demands in order to regain her."

"All very well," said the Colonel, approvingly nodding his head. "The pistol that will blow Loredan's brains out is more than half loaded. I have seen Nina Moustache at work, she is a rough customer."

"Ursula," said Le Gigant, "will be carried off within two days. In that respect all preliminary steps are taken. within three days Nina Moustache will again pursue her task of perdition with M. de Puysaie. Then there it left our dear repentant Madam de Puysaie."

"Find Lilias for me," said the Colonel, and I will take care of her."

"Then all goes well! Two months hence neither the Count nor the Countess will bother us. Within three, the honest Baron will have finished his labors here below, and Cyprienne will inherit the united millions of Matifay and of her mother. Then we will bring forward Lilias, she will claim, or rather, we will claim for her, the share of the inheritance that is due to her. Thanks to our foresight, the proofs are abundant and we shall find some quiet method of disposing of Cyprienne.

"To whom will this immense fortune fall, if not to Lilias, if not to Fritz, if not to us? for the Colonel knows there is no trifling with Le Gigant, and friend Le Gigant is too wide awake not to have taken his precautions in that respect."

"You need not employ threats, Hercules," said Fritz, in a tone of deep submission. "In this entire affair I have but been your agent, more or less expert. You have ordered everything, have combined all, and then I am but too grateful ever to be able to betray you."

"Yes! yes!" grumbled Le Gigant, "that is all very well, but there is nothing like a good understanding."

On this resolution the three confederates went out. They went down stairs arm-in-arm, chatting and laughing together quite like good friends. They halted in the doorway, and before separating entirely:

"Well, then, all is arranged?" asked Le Gigant for the last time.

His two companions nodded their heads in assent.

The result following the conspiracy of this trio of worthies, as well as the future fortunes of the various characters of this romance, will be fully set forth in the following chapters of this work.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CAFE DES ESCARPES.

It was not one of those cabarets whose prototype has been described by Eugene Sue. The Cafe, of which we are now speaking, fronted upon one side upon the Market square, the other upon the rue Rambuteau. Decorated, moreover, furnished on the first floor with two mahogany billiard tables, and well illuminated by gas, it was a well patronized and by no means dreary establishment.

Its patrons comprised both the small traders of the neighborhood, coming each evening from ten to eleven, for a game on the first floor, and the numerous employees of the market, invading the basement up to the moment the patrons above them retired for their slumbers.

Consequently the basement presented none of the luxurious appearance of the first floor; it consisted simply of a long lobby, half barred off by a counter covered by zinc; near the door stood the oyster stand and the errand boy's box; upon the side walk a heap of straw, moist and trampled down by the feet of the customers: at the rear was a winding staircase, by which descended from time to time in whirlwinds the white aprons of waiters—and you have every thing.

Upon the right hand, a door opened upon a lateral chamber, lower than the passage way by several steps, styled "the bar," or "cellar." It was this retreat, otherwise by no means terrible, which especially bore the melancholly inscription, CAFE DES ESCARPES.

The more ancient inhabitants of the locality recount concerning this a legend.

Some time ago, it appears—it may have been twenty years or six months, none could say—there had been arrested, sleeping off the drunkenness of crime upon a pine table, stained with wine, two individuals—assassins of an unfortunate female pedlar of the rue Montmartre. What was the name of the woman or those of her murderers, no one could remember,—but that makes no difference. That event had attracted public attention to the tavern, then poorly frequented. At first persons came to it through curiosity, afterwards through habit, and the Cafe des Escarpes profited through this deed of blood.

At the present time, despite the tradition nothing could be more innocent than this spot, whither romance readers and literary apprentices, intoxicated through perusal of the "Mysteries of Paris," came in search of sensational emotions. Five or six stout marketmen fraternally dispatch a quart; our friend Joseph and Clement, seated in front of the counter, quaffed their glasses of cassis; while a solitary group, could attract the attention of those athirst for the picturesque.

That group was composed of Jacquemin and Cinelle.

Jacquemin, leaning upon his elbows, gazed abstractedly into the bottom of his tumbler, while, in front of him, Cinelle melancholically scratched the end of his ruby nose.

Le Gigant had just quitted them, reflecting upon the promises he had been making to them.

After Le Gigant and his colleagues had concluded their convention in the manager's room, that gentleman had addressed them in this wise:

"You colonel, go to the hotel and apprise me whether any thing new has occurred. You, doctor, to the rue Rambuteau. I am aware that Dr. Ozam will be absent for twenty-four hours and cannot see Pippione this day. Invent some falsehood, the first lie coming handy, and he will send you in his stead. You are, moreover, the district physician.

"Nothing will be more easy than to

palm off this fabrication for the old scoundrel, Cinnelle, is in the plot."

"As to the poor girl, Ursula, she is as innocent as a child just born. Once installed within Cinelle's apartment, you must find the case a very grave one, and demand the assistance of a nurse. That nurse must be Ursula, do you comprehend! Beyond this the affair is no concern of yours; that's my business and I will go forthwith and perfect all my arrangements."

Uttering these words Le Gigant precipitately took his departure from the scene of their conversation.

An hour after, the manager could have been seen, seated at a table in a paltry dram shop in the old market quarter known to its patrons by the characteristic appellation of 'The Cafe des Escarpes.'

With his elbows upon the wine-stained table Le Gigant conversed in a low tone of voice with a couple of miserably dressed individuals, one of whom was Signor Cinelle and the other Louis Jacquemin.

"You understand," my boys, said he. "No risks to run and heavy stakes to make. You operate in the cause of virtue and rake in your pile at the same time. The dear child is as harmless as a lamb, and we must snatch her from the clutches of these Gosses who will doubtlessly lose her some day or the other. It is on behalf of her family too, that I am charged to hire you to carry out this job."

"It's all very well," quoth Cinelle, "but it cuts one to the quick to betray her who has been kind to poor Pippione."

"Who talks about betraying her?" interposed Jacquemin half drunk, "dont the gentleman say, on the contrary, that it is to save her."

"Doubtlesly," said Le Gigant in a mild tone. "Your friend here is right, and you deceived yourself, Cinelle."

"Hang it!" returned the Italian, "you know better than I, moreover it concerns you most. You pay well, and I can make some present to Pippione out of this money."

At that moment, two working men entered the tavern with white blouses on their backs, and their caps drawn over their eyes. Both staggered a little as good fellows will do after making the round of a few wine cellars.

Those men were—Clement and Joseph.

Le Gigant departed, but Louis and Cinelle remained in meditation.

Despite the stupefaction of inebriety, something like remorse agitated the depths of their confused souls. The desperate act, to which they were pledged mutually, was repugnant to them. Cinnelle turned over in the depths of his pocket the louis, bestowed upon him as earnest money by the tempter, at the same time repeating, as a refrain, his former words,

"I can give presents to Pippione."

Would that prove an excuse for his treason? he attempted to demonstrate such to be the fact but could arrive at no conclusion.

What! Ursula had for many long weeks been the guardian angel of his child, who had hung over its bed, mending its tattered garments and sending a gleam of joy to extinguish the agony of its miserable hovel, and now he was about to lend a hand to an infamous abduction, for the explication of Le Gigant failed to convince him otherwise, and he was well aware a forcible carrying off was contemplated.

As to Jacquemin, what did he see at the bottom of his glass? His existence heretofore pleasant, honest and happy, forfeited from that hour forth; then, with a terrified aspect, he measured the space so rapidly traversed.

Heretofore he had been honest, laborious, happy, then came disorder, long nights passed in wandering from bar-room to bar-room, long days wasted in stupefaction, inevitable consequences of debauchery, which to-day was to end in crime.

For Jacquemin could not delude himself upon the purity of Le Gigant's intentions, he well knew he was to commit a crime.

Well, then, so much the better! It would then cause some one to suffer in her turn; not being able to avenge himself upon her he had lost, he would appease his thirst for hatred upon another, whom he would torture as he himself had been tortured.

He conjured the victim up to his mind, pure, chaste confiding, as Celina had been in days of yore. Then he pictured her delivered over to some rich libertine, contaminated, spoiled and descending in the scale of vice, becoming in the end that which to-day was Nina Moustache.

And he cogitated to himself, "This is well done, let her suffer as others have suffered; let her weep as I have wept; let her become vile and infamous, because she whom I have adored has become vile and infamous."

In a like manner, Satan, excluded from

aradise would, had he the power, people hell with angels from heaven.

Moreover, in the midst of these wild ideas, Louis exhausted still another encouragement for, inasmuch as Celina had not possessed force adequate to raise herself to his level, he discovered a galling satisfaction in descending to hers.

"If I am that, which I am," he said to himself, "it is she who has willed me to be so!"

And seizing his glass he attempted to drain its contents, not perceiving that it was already empty.

However in front of this phantom of Nina Moustache, ever present before his eyes for many years his perturbated brain perceived another. Celina had been his evil genius, the fatal passion for whom had caused him to descend step by step down the ladder of crime. The other on the contrary with outstretched hand designated to him a path, more painful it may be, more lengthy, but far more noble.

And a voice, melodious and firm, swelled in his ears amid the bewilderments of intoxication.

"Come with me, brother! bury in oblivion your cravenly love, regenerate yourself through patience and toil. The arm of industry gives freedom to the soul, and hours of labor, expended in the workshop, are rewarded by nights of tranquil slumber, and the calmness, which accompanies a good conscience You think to buy your sorrow in intoxication, fool as you are; you are only adding fuel to the consuming fires of remorse."

This form had appeared to him and this voice had been heard at every grave period during his existence. This consoler, this benevolent counselor had tracked him everywhere; in the bar-room or in the garret where he slept at night; at the moment, when, in despair, he was about to plunge into the river, wherewith, upon this day he deliberated as to whether he would sully his foot this guardian had ever arrived in time, and, his hand upon the erring man's shoulder, said to him:

"Jacquemin! You shall not do that!"

Then, without reproaches, with fraternal authority, he had lead him back. succored him, sustained him; had smoothed beneath his feet, the rugged path towards his return to good, had guided his vacillating inclination and, in fine, attempted to infuse into him, that strength without which the most courageous resolutions fail of effect—the force of perseverance.

"Oh! if he should come," thought Jacquemin, "only once again and I may be saved. But no! he has doubtlessly abandoned me; even deceived by protestation, followed on the morrow by trangressions more and more grave, he has perchance renounced his hopeless task."

And, upraising his glass in a hand growing heavier and heavier, Jacquemin exclaimed:

"So much the better! he will leave me to my destiny, for assuredly I am one of the accursed."

The evening advanced, night invaded the cellar and by degrees as its darkness increased the heavy shades of despair weighed the heavier upon the ideas of Jacquemin, who had arrived at the stage of intoxication where the animal tramples out the spiritual, when the brute nature in turn succumbs before the pressure of sleep. His head in its heaviness leaned upon his bended arm; Cinelle shook him vainly to awaken him and leaned over to his ear, to proffer some advice, but receiving no answer he arose from his seat staggering.

"Bah!" exclaimed the Italian to himself, "It is only for midnight. He can sleep here tranquilly in this little corner and I'm sure he'll not budge hence for some time; come, let us prepare everything below, let's see what am I to do?"

He passed his hand over his brow as if to gather his scattered thoughts, and then murmured:

"We must allure our neighbor to Pippione's—well she's handsome, that neighbor is!"

He giggled, then stopped short, and then turned pale.

"Ah! Bah!" he ejaculated, snapping his fingers, "Pippione shall have her presents."

And he emerged with difficulty, stumbling against tables.

A waiter entered to light up "the cellar," Louis stretched himself out heavily upon his elbow and emitted within his throat a cry, partially of anguish partially of joy.

A strong nervous hand was placed upon his shoulder and before him stood the proud and stalwart figure of Joseph Rozel.

It was truly Josepn Rozel, standing before Jacquemin, the adviser, the consoler, so long invoked by the miserable man during hesitation and doubts.

Willingly would he have flown to throw himself in Joseph's arms imploring: "Save me; lead me hence; tear me from this horrible engagement, which I entered upon," but he dare not, through shame.

"Brother," said Rozel, "you swore to me, but a few days since, never more to drink and to return to Clement's, and yet this very day I find you in a tavern. This is bad."

Louis vainly endeavored to stammer out an excuse.

"You well know, however," continued Joseph, "what I have promised you in case you changed your conduct."

"Yes," murmured Jacquemin, "you have promised to return me to mother—my poor mother, whom I have forced to fly from me. But stay, Monsieur Joseph, you are wrong in endeavoring to work out my salvation! I am a worthless being! I am lost, yes, lost, past redemption!"

A large tear dropped from the man's eyelids and fell upon his hand, which Joseph pointed out to him.

"A man is not lost when he can shed tears," observed Joseph.

"Oh! if you only knew," exclaimed Louis.

Joseph assumed a smile of mystery.

"You have yourself proved that I know everything, at least as to that much which concerns you."

"That is true," murmured Jacquemin; "it was you who surprised me robbing my employer, for nothing is wanting to my degradation not even theft. It is you who have stayed my hand, paid my debts, from out of your savings, you saved me from prison and suicide, that is true! I believe that if any one could make me return to the pathway of good it would be you: but see you, Monsieur Joseph, that is an impossible task. I am full of good intentions at the start, then I encounter reverses and have no heart for work. Then I take to drink, selling tools, clothing, everything for drink and —when I have no money for drink, then I take where it can be found. From an unfortunate and a coward I come to be a villain."

The mysterious smile still hovered upon the lips of Joseph.

"Then," said he, "my poor Joseph, when your heart is sad and your home empty you feel capable of anything?"

"Alas! yes," murmured Louis in reply, "and then all the promises I have made you, do you see, I cannot keep them, no more than anything else. Here, you can perceive I can keep nothing."

He turned out his pockets; they were empty.

Then he clenched his hand and smote his breast violently.

"We must do something to fill it," said Joseph to himself.

Then he spoke in a louder tone of voice:

"Jacquemin," said he, "if I should ask you to do something, seeing you sad and moneyless,—If perchance I should ask you to aid me in doing something which neccessitates an unscrupulous and devoted tool—for example an abduction?"

Louis looked upon Joseph with a stupefied air, as if he never expected a similar proposition from such a quarter. The word "abduction" explained this mystery, for it was evident that Joseph was cognizant of his arrangement with Le Gigant, and made this proposition to arouse his shame.

"Ah, you know all!" he exclaimed.

It was the turn of Joseph to be astonished: yet he entered upon his plan of subjugating the feeble spirit of Jacquemin by appearing to be surprised at nothing.

"Perchance," he responded. "Let us talk business. A young girl is to be carried off, with what aim concerns you not. She is named Ursula Durand and dwells close by in the rue Rambuteau at the house of a certain monsieur Gosse."

Subsequent detail, adequately precise, convinced Louis of Joseph's knowledge of his shameful bargain.

"Mercy, mercy: yes, yes; I have promised," said Jacquemin, with sobs, wringing his friend's hand convulsively, "I was drunk, I was crazy; but I swear I will not do it, although I have promised to carry her off this very night, to allure into the house of Cinelle, whose child she is nursing; but I repent."

"Le Gigant has taken steps before me," murmured Joseph, after some reflection. "I have arrived in the nick of time."

Louis Jacquemin was continuing his maudlin protestation when Joseph interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"Relate to me exactly," he said, "the entire plan of this abduction."

"I only know what concerns us, that is Cinelle and me," responded the inebriate. "The girl is to pass the night at Pippione's; I am to be at midnight upon the threshold of the house; a cab will be waiting for me; Cinelle will bring me

the girl asleep,—by what means I know not—and I can carry her away with ease, as there is no porter in the house. After that, comes my share in the business. I am to carry her to the cab and watch over her, should she awake and cry. To what point the cab will take us I am ignorant. It is useless to tell anything further, as I am firmly resolved no longer to follow out my allotted part."

"On the contrary," said Joseph, "you will follow it out—that is up to the point of taking her to the cab.""

"Where will the cab be found?'

"At the corner of the market. There are always vehicles at hand before the night saloons, about supper time."

"Good. There will then be another cab, several paces distant, but headed in a different direction. As soon as the young girl is in your power, this carriage will come towards you, and the driver will enquire; 'a cab, sir.'

"And then?" enquired Jacquemin.

"Then," returned Joseph, follow your directions all the same, you will ascend into the other vehicle, that's all."

And as Louis hesitated, the other insisted, "is it not agreed?" Nevertheless Jacquemin continued in his hesitation.

"Look you, Louis, fear nothing," remonstrated Rozel, warmly.

"The work for which I have engaged you is one of good. It is to countermine the infamous plot of Le Gigant and his associates. That which I have desired you to do can be accomplished without remorse. I have promised you a rich reward, the labor of this night may prove a good beginning. Go, Louis, trust in me, aid me; aid me; respond to the endeavor I have incessantly made for your redemption, and when returning you to your mother I may say; 'Louis, you have regained Celine'."

"Celine!" exclaimed Jacquemin, "is she not dead?"

"Who knows?" replied Joseph with that sweet mysterious smile habitual to him.

"Never mind!" answered Louis, "that which I do is for your good, and from the moment you assure me there is no evil in it—"

"I swear it," interrupted Joseph seriously.

"Then 'tis done" returned Jacquemin.

In the other apartment Clement had reached his third glass of cassis in water.

"Time has arrived," said Joseph rejoining him, "to-morrow will doubtlessly be too late."

"Then," quoth Clement, "it is for this evening."

"At midnight. Now we must seek out a cab and a driver."

"Look after the cab, as to the driver—"

"You have one?"

"Oh," said Clement, with a frank laugh, "you know when in earnest I can conduct a thing as well as another, and in an affair like this confidence begins at home."

"At midnight, then."

"At midnight."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LOVE—SORROW.

(THE BLUE DIARY.)

"'Go seek your mother.'

"'Don Jose remained immovable upon the threshold. I repented of my lack of confidence, despite the hour and the unusual pace of his walking I felt myself in security near his loyal head. 'My mother is doubtless asleep,' I replied to him, 'moreover should you have anything to communicate to me it may be as well that I alone should become cognizant of them. The poor woman has abundance of her own personal sorrows without bearing mine in addition. You can enter. Monsieur de la Cruz, I will listen to you.'

"He advanced two steps—not one step further.

"Ah! Cyprienne," he exclaimed 'can it be possible that you have consented to espouse that man?'

"There was an accent of grief in these words so sincere that it touched the very chords of my heart. I preserved nevertheless, sufficient control over myself to conceal a trouble, which I ought never have suffered to appear.

"Yes, Don Jose, I have consented. I have consented, and I do not repent of it. That the wild imagination of my girlhood could have entertained other dreams I am willing to admit, but those dreams no longer. You yourself have made every endeavor to demonstrate that they were incapable of realization, and I take it kindly of you, inasmuch as you have in this wise determined me to sacrifice myself for the welfare of my family."

"I!—it was I who—oh hold! you would not drive me mad by uttering such words.—Would you that I lay bare my

heart and reveal in its magnitude, the extent of my misery—well, well, be satisfied; know you that, separated from you by all social agreements—for alas! this pledge of confidence the other day is too well founded in fact, I will adore you like a maniac. Yes, I love and adore you; nevertheless were I to see you united to a man worthy of you, I would rest content and smile with the arrow of despair in my heart. Who knows? perchance I may be forced to admire him whom you have chosen. But this Matifay!—what! have you not read upon his features the infamy of his soul—He is a monster, vile and crawling as a toad—dangerous as a viper. Ah! if you only knew his life—if I only had the right to reveal it to you.'

"'It is your duty,' I replied, pale and trembling, 'otherwise you will stand in my eyes a calumniator. Declarations prove nothing, Monsieur de la Cruz, and upon the footing you have placed yourself there is necessity for proofs.'

"He replied not; but bestowed upon me a glance of pride, replete with tenderness and reproach.

"Oh! pardon, pardon me," he said. "What would you have me do, say or think? You declare my future master to be a monster (and I, alas, am too prone to believe it to be so) and on the contrary every one around does naught save sound his praises. Can that man be a monster, the death of whos adopted daughter has smitten him as severely as if he was his own?'

"'Can that man be a monster?' replied Don Jose, 'that man, who having transferred his own crime to the shoulders of the mother, enriched himself with the spoils of the child, abandoning it in distant parts, murdering it perchance? And to accomplish still another crime, one like Matifay will never pause.

"'Rest assured, Cyprienne, if I made accusations as grave as these, I must be convinced they must be well founded. If Matifay remembers them, it is not to expiate them, I swear to you, but to quake in terror. Phantoms, haunting him, are not those forgiving shadows, coming perchance to the bedside to awaken memory of dear ones ever lost to us: they are wild and threatening spectres, avenging images of remorse—'

He turned pale himself and shuddered, seemingly as if he viewed one of those phantoms he had conjured up.

"'Hold! I, with pure hands and undisturbed conscience, I hear in my own ear a cry of agony which should often times resound through the dreams of that man. I tell you I have never been a murderer. Had I been one it would have been to have saved the life of the wretch whom they assasinated.

"I had not the power, alas! I was but a mere child.

"Oh! the child has grown to manhood and since Matifay attacks, to-day, all that I have in this world, I too will become one of those spectres, pursuing him, a spectre in flesh and bone, a living incarnation of vengeance and Justice!"

Could he speak falsely with an accent of sincerity in both voice and gesture? The drops of sweat, rolling from his brow, were they those of falsehood? His wide opened eyes, fixed upon vacancy, as if fascinated by some monstrous vision, could they be intended to deceive? No! Then I recalled to me the desultory confidences of Baron Matifay, his nightly walks amid the vacant apartments of his hotel, his "reminiscences" as he styled them, which I had accepted as regret but which I am certain, at this hour, to be the produce of remorse!

"I believe you, Don Jose,' I exclaimed. "I believe you.'

"Then aid me in your salvation, Cyprienne, or rather save yourself.'

"Be it so—counsel me! speak, I will do as you desire.'

"Well! well!" he ejaculated.

But soon he stopped, allowing his arms to fall in the attitude of one deeply discouraged.

"But no!' he said "you will never consult—you will never believe me. How shall I know, my heavens, how to persuade her that this step alone will lead to her salvation!'

"What am I about to propose to her? To abandon the house of her parents, to elope in the night with a stranger? To seek out, far from hence, from her mother, a protectress, more powerful, more devoted certainly, but one who I am not permitted to reveal—no! not even her name! Oh! Cyprienne, that which I ask of you at this moment is a miracle of faith in my honor and in the purity of my love. Yes! it behooves you to quit this house now and forthwith. You must consent to leave it, suffering calumny to prey upon your reputation. It is necessary to plunge your kindred into mortal fear—not to see them for many days perchance, until I and mine have smoothed away obstacles now separating us. Oh! it needs, moreover, in addition to all other requirements, to have con-fi-

dence, to believe that in all this I am instigated by no personal incentive; that from the threshold of this door I will depart to see you no more without an appeal from you. I love you, Cyprienne, as I would have loved my mother, whom I have never known and who is now in heaven. I love you, as the mariner, in the hour of shipwreck, regards the buoy to which in the midst of peril he clings with desperation. However I swear to you and, you must credit me, that never for the advancement of my own love would I give you like counsel. It is not my happiness which is at stake but your salvation. And from the moment that I see you seated in the carriage, to be conducted to your new protectress I will leave you—forever, if you so will it."

This unexpected proposition for flight, for an elopement (for that would be the proper name for it) caused my distrusts to regenerate. As he continued to speak they were dispelled, so communicative was the frankness of his accent. But at the same time, Ursula, I pledge you, my resolution became more unshaken.

"I believe you, Monsieur de la Cruz," I replied when he had terminated. "My soul can never conceive for a second the idea of a treason on your part. Still I will not depart hence. At least," I added impassionedly, for I know not but that the glance of despair, traversing his countenance affrighted me, "I will not depart without taking counsel of her whom you yourself at the commencement of our interview appeared desirous of accepting as an arbitrator.

"Your first words upon entering here, were:

"'Go seek your mother.'

"Should you feel courage adequate to repeat your advice in her presence and she approve of it, I will follow it."

"I anticipated this obstacle," he replied to me in calmness, "and had I not found it you would not have been the noble and pure creature whom I adore."

"Go seek your mother, Cyprienne, and as certain as my advice leads to your security, I will repeat it before her."

My apartments and that of mamma are separated by a vast anto-chamber. Still a secret passage way, used by us and Postel in the day time, establishes in the rear a direct communication between the two rooms.

A feeble light gleaming beneath the door upon the hall floor, decided me to knock and to enter.

Mamma had not as yet gone to bed, neither was she in her night attire, both her elbows upon a lacquered desk, she meditated profoundly, upon a letter spread wide before her.

At the noise caused by my entrance, she raised her eyes, appearing in no wise surprised in finding me up at that late hour.

"You here," she said.

After a slight silence my mother added:

"I am awaiting you."

I longed to reply, to stammer out an explanation she did not demand, she left me not the time but advanced to me.

"I entertained a strong dread," she said to me, "of not seeing you again. You know with what profound joy I perceive that I have judged you rightly —Yes, Cyprienne, I am awaiting you. Yet, however, if you had departed without consulting me, without bestowing upon me a kiss, at least, I am the only one without a right to condemn you."

I was mute through stupefaction. Mamma relapsed into the meditation whence I had aroused her.

"You love," said she, afterward taking me by the hand, "you love Monsieur de la Cruz?"

I blushed to the white of my eyes.

"Oh you can tell me all," she continued, finding in the middle of her sorrows a smile to reassure me. "You need but tell me nothing of which I do not know a part—for example concerning this evening—and I can quickly divine the balance. You love him, and abandoned by me, abandoned by your father, you have not deserted us!"

She drew me within her arms and kissed my forehead. I felt my lips tremble as I murmured out a simple word: "Thanks!"

All this was most strangely assuring, and convinced me more and more as to the intervention of some mysterious and superior being in the affairs of our existence.

"I would not depart, mamma," I replied, as I neither would do so, or wished so to do, before consulting with you. Such has been my answer to the present argument of Monsieur de la Cruz who is awaiting, at this moment, your reply."

Without taking time to listen to anything more, my mother rushed to the corridor. Despite the rapidity with which I attempted to follow her, when I arrived at the door of the chamber where I had left Jose, she was already near him and reading a letter, which she was upon the point of presenting him,

the same which she had transferred to the bosom of her dress when I entered in upon her meditations.

"You preceive, don Jose, I was warn- of your design upon Cyprienne, and nevertheless I interposed no obstacle." I reached that moment the illuminated threshold of the door. She turned towards me:

"Know well, both of you; know well, Cyprienne, that for a long period of time I have abandoned all maternal right over you.

"I have orders to give you. You have none to receive from me. Hence, you are free to determine your own destiny. All that Monsieur de la Cruz has said is true. I give you a guarantee of his sincerity and honor. However I pray of you not to follow his advice until after you have listened to me. That which I may say, may alter your resulution."

Don Jose had finished reading the letter and returned it respectfully to my mother.

"What reply is needed, madam?"

"Reply," she cried, "reply to her sending you that she shall be obeyed. To-morrow the decision of Cyprienne will be determined—mine has been already. As to her and—and she waved me her hand—I only desire that she shall see her way in all possible certainty. By right I should uplift from her eyes a corner of the veil which has already passed from mine. The ordeal is painful but necessary. Go, Don Jose, say to the holy woman protecting us, that it is by this mournful task I will prelude others which it may please her to enforce upon us."

I was so surprised at discovering my mother secretly in conversation with my unknown protector I scarce perceived Monsieur de la Cruz salute us profoundly, and it was only through hearing the distant clang of the garden gate, closing behind him, that I became aware of his having disappeared.

My mother gazed upon me with a pensive air. When I raised my inquisitive eyes up to hers, she took me by the hand without saying a word and conducted me into her chamber. She appeared to endure on my behalf a painful struggle, for she paced the room, ever mute and in agitation.

At last, elevating her eyes to heaven, clasping her hands convulsively as if in the act of communicating some heart-drawn prayer, she summoned me to her by a glance.

"That which I am about to impart to you is grave. Listen to it attentively: for from this moment you become my confessor and judge."

"I have been guilty, and it is upon you alas, poor innocent child, that from day to day falls the weight of my fault. It is through you that I am smitten. Do not however hasten to judge too severely. Since you yourself love you can imagine to what impulses a weak creature, abandoned and avid of affection can be made to yield—ah, my Cyprienne, this narrative can be for you a warning and at the same time a melancholly secret.

"You, likewise, my little one, I see you on the point of gliding down that fatal descent, dangerous alone for generous souls, such as yours, needing love and compassion — Oh! you are truly my daughter! Alike as are our features so find I our characters and between our existences I detect a resemblance, terrifying to me.

"I was brought up as you been in an almost absolute isolation. In default of father and mother, I was entrusted from earliest infancy to the care of my grandmother, the dowager marchioness of Simeuse. She was not, to speak the truth, a wicked creature: I have ever ample reasons not to doubt the prodigal bounty of her heart. But the poor woman was not in the least adapted for the education of a child, susceptible, headstrong and enwrapt in herself as I then was.

"She had preserved the grand manner of the last century as well as a dearth in affection, peculiar to that generation, which the thousand intrigues of the Emigration had rendered fatally reserved even to egotism, distrustful even to skepticism. Ambitious beyond control, she reproached, in common with many others, a court, which she conceived had not recompensed her according to her merits and maintained, at Nantes, a voluntary exile, conducted with a sort of royalty. More than eighty years of age, she received in her saloons malcontents of every species, enacting the part of Talleyrand.

All these slight measures, whose importance she exaggerated, seemed as a necessary element in her feverish activity. The day she would be compelled to renounce them I thought would be that of her death."

"You can understand that, in the midst of all the pre-cocupations, she had no time to think of me. Did she love me? I am ignorant if she did. Sometime I thought so, as others I had my

doubts. I supposed (for reduced everything, affection or hatred, to a fixed ideal that she saw in me a useful instrument for the future. Hence, in her hours of condescension, she would take me upon her knee, look upon me for a length of time and sing to me, making me beat time with her trembling wrinkled hands.

"You have beautiful eyes, miss; you will be at least a duchess."

For the moment, despite her beautiful eyes, the duchess was but a wild hoyden, making terrible havoc amid the austere apartments of the Simeuse Hall. Hence my grandmother soon occupied but little of me. I grew very rapidly, with large hands, and arms so thin as to cause fear. Madame de Simeuse, who admired that which was handsome, could not dissimulate her bad humor at my condition. Consequently the pretext of illness availed her for change of air. I was sent to shed my feathers, as she expressed it, upon a little farm among the environs of Saint Etienne de Montluc.

"In this canon were located the principal properties of Madame de Simeuse.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MARIE DES ALIZES.

"Oh! that lonely farm of Noizilles!" continued my mother. It has been the convent of B—to me. Alas! the five years thereupon passed are the only one memory of which I can, at this moment, recall without a shadow of sadness nor a trace of anguish or remorse.

"The house was plain but delightful. A long basement first floor, covered by a pointed roof and overgrown with flowering hop and grape vines. In front, a garden of the olden style, with apple trees in rows, pear trees, cropped after the fashion of a distaff box, ranged in borders, and yew trees, serving as pilasters. At the base of this enclosure a terrace looked out upon the broad Loire and its feeble meadows of sombre green. Behind the house was a piece of woodland, ravined throughout by rain courses or the burrows of rabbits. Such was my domain. Within we dwelt in solitude. I with my governess, an old maiden lady of the ancient nobility who, since the emigration, had served as instructress, for a livelihood, at London. She styled herself Mademoiselle de Saint Lambert, oftentimes abreviated into Lambert. We had frequent visitors at Noizilles; but, far from meddling with me as at Nantes, when beneath the supervision of my grandmother, they were a source of great enjoyment. My natural gaiety, so long circumscribed, took a free flight, and I enjoyed rare pleasure in laughing at the formal perukes and superannuated manners of our casual guests.

"Moreover, I had a companion a comrade, a friend, the little Chevalier des Alizes.

"Marie— he was called Marie as if he were a female was very near my own age but he was more delicate, diminutive and child-like than myself. I think I can see him yet, with his long flaxen hair in clusters, and his full blue eyes at the same time sparkling yet dreaming. Under a feminine exterior he was nevertheless a valiant little man, for nothing daunted him, and his blue eyes became instantly expressive of energy and courage. At that moment they changed in hue almost to a black, lancing forth flames, before which the most daring receded.

"We spent our entire days in company. My first question, upon arising in the morning, was: where is Marie?' And in the evening when we separated, we never said 'adieu' *au revoir*, but alway son the morrow!'

"Like me he was an orphan, and inhabited, at a quarter league from Noizilles, a miserable little farm, his sole patrimony. In truth, the little chevalier Marie was poorer than many of the peasantry; but in faith that made no difference to us. Isolated, both we loved as in second nature, and as little misses are more audacious than petty masters, I was wont to style him, my little husband."

"These infantile loves were productive of no consequences, as Lambert heeded them not, but smiled only upon them.

"However, proportionately as we grew up Marie became the more reserved. One day at a formal reception at Noizilles, he addressed me as 'Miss,' I divined from the instant, that a new element had entered into our relation, and I wept the live night long.

"I had promised myself to interrogate Marie to-morrow, and demand from him whether he loved me no longer that he should treat me as a stranger; but when he arrived, I found that I dared not do so.

"He wore a sad air, sad enough for me at least. He spoke to me without affectation, concerning his own poverty and my future. "Time," he said, "is

passed when a name compensates for every thing. He must concern himself as to his future! Then, without ostentation, he commenced discontinuing his visits at Noizilles, at first coming every other day, then not for weeks and finally at very rare intervals.

"I was, al ady, quite a little woman. I comprehended his motives and admired the chevalier more dearly.

"It was at that juncture in time that my grandmother recalled me to present me to the higher circles in society at Nantes. My marriage with your father had already been determined upon, and I alone remained to be apprized of it. One evening Monsieur de Puysaie arrived; I was presented to him; we were married within twenty-four hours. On the same day with the nuptial ceremony he departed for England, summoned thither upon some diplomatic mission, and I awoke as it were out of a dream, to find myself Countess de Puysaie.

"I was in my fifteenth year, but so diminutive, so delicate, so frail, that I was regarded as thirteen at the utmost.

"I discovered, at the bottom of my wedding casket, an enormus sack of sugar plums.

"My marriage accomplished, my grandmother ceased to present me to society. She deemed it advisable that I should make my re-appearance on the arm of my husband, and she did no more, in that, than to consult my own inclinations, in asmuch as society had grown distasteful to me. I had contracted at Noizilles unrestrained habits, which could not be adapted to that bustle, in which, on the contrary, Madam de Simeuse, discovered her true element. She could not dissemble her disdain for what she was pleased to call my stupidity."

"'Ah! you were most fortunate in having been with me, she would frequently remark, otherwise you would have been, my poor Hortense, but a simpleton, luckily you will now find yourself provided for.'

"I was the first to manifest a desire to return to Noizilles, there to await my husband's return, and from my knowledge of my grandmother's humor, I was aware that she was not the woman to oppose such a project.

"I refound, for a time, my darling little farm and the obliging Lambert. But I refound not my poor Marie des Alizes. With difficulty I perceived him at mass upon Sundays; still, for a long year, he never set foot within Noizilles.

"Intelligence from the world without did not readily penetrate into our secluded province. We learned, almost simultaneously of the revolution, overthrowing the throne of Charles Dix and the insurrection of Madame de Berrei in la Vendee.

"For several months the chevalier had disappeared and none could say as to what had become of him."

"I myself divined the cause as I had divined the cause of his reserve and sadness. And I said to myself, not without some anxiety, that he had embarked in some desperate enterprise either to seek distraction or death."

"Self love in woman is insatiable. This idea flattered mine, still at the same time it proved a source of melancholy.

"Hence, up to that period I had been indifferent to all things, but then I suddenly became impatient and burned to learn the most insignificant details of that enterprise, as heroic as it was futile.

"By day, by night, in all places, and at all times, I was dreaming of the handful of men, wandering around the brushwood of the Bocage. While, with the end of my negligent needle I counted the points upon my worsted work, my soul was with them in their leaf-covered huts, wherein they sought shelter during long, tempestuous nights; with them upon the farm, where they found an hour's asylum, if not a betrayal; with them in combat, likewise, wherein, alas! the warmth of their devotion could alone compensate for numbers in enemies.

"One night—Lambert had been on a visit of some days to a neighbor and I remained alone—with my work upon my knee and eyes fixed upon vacancy, I was dreaming of the sole object absorbing my constant meditations. Suddenly I trembled; some one knocked cautiously against the venetian blind.

"I was silent; I watched anxiously; my heart beat with a singular anguish.

"The knock was repeated, stronger than before, and a voice, feeble as a sigh, pronounced my name. I could not be deceived; that voice belonged to the Chevalier des Alizes.

"I ran to the window, and opened it wide and there in the shadow beneath, I beheld an indistinct, moving, form.

"'Oh mercy! mercy!' I exclaimed, 'who is there?'

"This time an unknown voice responded, 'open to us quickly, he has fainted away.'

"I hesitated not a moment, for I was convinced that it was the figure of Marie I had seen. And a few moments afterwards, the poor fellow was resting upon

the long chair, in the corner of the chimney place, ordinarily used by Lambert.

"His comrade, a handsome and noble looking youth, with a very cautious hand laid open the vest, concealing a bleeding breast, and with the tact of a soldier, skilled in the management of wounds, renewed its dressing.

"I, mute with anguish, I aided him mechanically, without thinking to enquire into details preluding this incident.

"Marie des Alizes opened his eyes; a pale, sad smile rested upon his lips. Then seizing my hand, by the same effort, he placed it within that of his companion.

"'Behold,' he said, 'the two beings I hold dearest upon this earth. Octavius, this is Hortense of whom I have spoken so frequently. Hortense, this is the Count Octavius de Rancogne, my best, my only friend.

"'Tis well! 'tis well,' said Count Octavius in a tone of assumed scolding. 'But now that one is in safety for some hours at least, we must think of that which is the most pressing; that is to say, repose, of which you stand in the greatest need.'

"Then, by a skilful turn of the hand, a bed was prepared in the little dark chamber adjacent to my own, upon which the Chevalier was put to rest. While perfecting these preparations, Count Octavius related to me the incidents of the last few days. The little troop of Madam de Berri, had been wholly worsted at Burg Neuf, and, with Madam herself, a prisoner at Nantes, the entire insurrection had been suppressed at its inception.

"A pressing necessity recalled Count Octavius de Rancogne to his own province, but before quitting his friend he had determined upon leaving him in some secure asylum and he doubted not but that for a time at least, such could be afforded Marie des Alizes during a sojourn at Noizilles.

"Under like circumstances we neither calculate nor hesitate. I was assured of the discretion of Lambert, neither were our domestics numerous; while our sedentary habits were such as to preclude possibility of an indiscretion being suspected. Consequently, I gave the Count formal assurance that Marie des Alizes would incur no danger while tarrying beneath our roof. On the morrow morning, Monsieur de Rancogne, in the garb of a peasant departed, transferring to us his charge.

"For six long weeks Marie remained at Noizilles, and during those weeks we that is Lambert and I, succeeded in concealing the fact of his presence, for he was seen by no one, not even by our most trusted servants. Happily, his wound was not of a dangerous nature, although his condition borrowed some gravity from the large quantity of blood he had lost. We had not even occasion for the visits of a surgeon, and Lambert and I were his sole nurses. However all the strange circumstances of mystery, the pity inspired by the wounded man, the love which I was aware he entertained for me, the political danger he had incurred—a danger which we all three exaggerated with the best faith in the world, caused my heart to beat with singular emotion.

"He had the habit of looking upon me with those long and grateful eyes, which shook me to the soul, and I even desired to be looked upon in that self same manner and forever more.

"During those six weeks he neither pronounced that solitary word, 'love,' nor sought to bring up, through the most distant allusions, images of the past. Nevertheless, I recall to mind memory of those six weeks, as a prolonged duett of chaste adoration, of honorable, confiding love. And still at this very instant my soul lingers upon recollection of those delicious hours with a tender commiseration, for innocence and pity marked the flight of those moments of mutual affection.

"Neither one nor the other of us had aught wherewith to reproach ourselves, during those weeks of radiant joyousness. Our love was so calm and fraternal that Lambert could remain with impunity a witness of it. I believe that in no one instance, even in the most remote corner of our innermost hearts, would either the Chevalier or I have found her supervision inopportune.

"I did not comprehend the grandeur in sentiment with which he inspired me, only from the blank created within my soul by his departure. The moment of parting was most cruel, the more cruel indeed as both of us were constrained to appear simply sad, while desolation reigned within our souls.

"The Chevalier requested, as a sole favor, that I would present him with my portrait—a medallion—which I did not deem it to be my duty to refuse him. This medallion is now suspended upon my breast and it will never leave that place—no! not when I am within my tent.

"Poor little Chevalier!"

My mother suffered her head to fall upon her breast and remained pensive for the moment, as if to linger upon the last image of those happy hours of her youth.

Then she resumed:

"This was the last occasion upon which I saw the Chevalier des Alizes. He set forth at the stated time. A week later Monsieur de Puysaie, recalled in all haste from London, joined me at Noizilles to conduct me thence to Paris, where a high position awaited him. He was at this interview, which I consider the first in our married life, as I was at the time of my nuptials a mere child, that which I have ever after found him, that is to say a perfect gentleman. He had the goodness to inform me that he refound me grown up and accomplished. He passed upon me a thousand compliments upon my grace and beauty with that air of delicacy you have ever observed. In fine, if he could not obliterate memory of Marie, he at least pleased me greatly.

"Married against my will, I was nevertheless happy in finding a master both kind and agreeable. How many other girls, in a like manner sacrificed, find nothing but ugliness, stupidity, old age or viciousness?

"Beneath an elegant exterior your father possessed a soul capable of sincere love. I soon percieved that he adored me, and it did not appear difficult for me to return, if a not a love as passionate as his own, at least an affection, solid and durable.

"This Chevalier des Alizes had only been an accident in my heart's existance. I forgot him, or I imagined that I had forgotten him and with the gravest sincerity I persuaded myself that I loved Monsieur de Puysaie with a pure and honest love.

"Moreover, are you not both of you upon the point of giving birth to, and establishing a union equally as binding?

"Alas, Cyprienne, from your birth, which should have been a blessing to me, dates the commencement of my misfortunes and of our disruption.

"Through a fatal accident you were born at seven months.

"Natural as this fact is, it disturbed the unquiet imagination of the Count. He instituted computations as to the date and examined into the minutest details concerning my life at Noizilles. He came to learn, from what source I know not, particulars regarding the clandestine sojourn which the Chevalier des Alizes had made there.

"He was, in truth, too much of a man of the world, and of too great delicacy not to conceal from me suspicions, which he had himself conceived. Yet, without being aware of the real cause of his change, I perceived with sorrow his character transformed itself day by day. He became bitter, almost insolent, in tone, if not in words, which from our earliest intimacy had partaken towards me, almost of a maternal solicitude. It was you, Cyprienne, above all whom he could not endure.

"The sight of you recalled memory of my imaginary transgession.

"In fact, a woman, more experienced than I was, could have quickly divined the motive for these sudden changes in humor. She would have provoked an explanation, whence doubtlessly would have extorted evidence of her innocence. But I dare not. The Count demanded no better than to be convinced and I avoided opportunities, offered for my justification. One day, even, he spoke to me in a callous manner with regard to the Chevalier des Alizes chancing to die in Germany. I became red and in my tribulation committed the blunder of resorting to falsehood, feigning to have no recollection of him.

"Consequently, each day created a gulph, ever widening between your father and me. Once, a long time ago, he exiled you to B—, and as for me he maintained for me respect to the world at our residence, but I was as distant as you were from his affections. However, when perchance a reconciliation between our troubled hearts was not impossible, an evil genius for all three of us entered into our mansion."

A ray of light traversed my brain:

"Colonel Fritz!" I exclaimed.

"My mother looked upon me with an air of astonishment.

"What!" murmured she, "have you solved it? Yes, it is he who has become our veritable evil genius. Yet, however, he first presented himself in this house as a conciliator.

"By what means he has conquered the position he holds here and which he holds in society I am ignorant. His resources are unknown and even the condition of his birth. Nevertheless, he was forthwith accepted. He owes this rapid success to his incredible assurance, which he knows how so skillfully to disguise beneath a film of pretended modesty.

"Monsieur de Puysaie is wholly in-

fatuated with him, receiving him in a familiar manner without distrusting that he has introduced into his household the most malignant of enemies. And I myself—Ah! how I have been duped? He presented himself beneath so touching a recommendation? He had known, according to his own statement, the Chevalier des Alizes during his exile. It is he who had been his last friend, his final comforter. He had received from him on his death-bed this medallion to return to me!—and this man, this monster of infamy to abuse the confidence of the count, to abuse my weakness, to take advantage of my despair and of my indiscretion. While upon the one hand he exasperated the jealousy of my husband through reports of my relations with the chevalier, so that he could cast him into the embraces of some nameless female, he played towards me an opposite character through simulating compassion and offering to my poor broken heart the support of his sympathetic affection. And I, fool and wretch as I was—I believed him!"

In a similar strain my mother continued for some length of time. But that which she added, Ursula, I have neither the right nor the strength to indite. It is among those things we can murmur to ourselves but which transferred to paper breathes the spirit of impiety.

Ah! dear martyr! guilty or not it is not for me to judge you and from your history I desire merely to recall memory of your sufferings."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THAT WHICH THE BLANK PAGES WOULD HAVE CONTAINED.

And we likewise as impartial narrator of this history, we will throw a veil over this sad confession made in confidence by a humiliated mother in the presence of her daughter. Well, that we have promised ourselves, in the commencement of this narrative, not to recoil from any truths, still certain social truths are both dangerous, if not useless to the unfathomed—the divine Shepherd of souls did not enquire of the Magdalen wherefore she had sinned. He pardoned her for that she had loved. For like cause Cyprienne was unwilling to evoke memory but of her mother's sorrows, and for the same reason we do not desire to speak save of her remorse.

Guilty she had been certainly, but only of folly, and of imprudence.

Still they have been expiated heretofore with counting this supreme humiliation! Become not only the slave but the tool of a wretch; denounced by him to her husband for crimes of which she is conscious of her innocence, without power of defending herself; constrained to suffer, pass to her fireside the legitimate daughter for the one of adultery and to purloin the other—the little Lilias from the suspicious researches of the miserable father, who has wrought an arm of it—she lives in perpetual dread, chewing, without respite, and to her last breath, the galling cud of calamity.

How many useless efforts has she not made to extricate herself from this serfdom? We have already seen her drag herself to the knees, in turn of her master and of her tyrant, without being able to excite the pity of either one or the other.

A single being among these surrounding her remained, still filled with love, confidence, and veneration towards her, and to that being, sprung from her loin, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood, she was about to say:

"You love me—you are wrong. It is I whom you will discover to be the fountain head of all your sufferings. You have confidence in me—you deceive yourself—I am weak and without arms, it is you, on the contrary, you who have called upon me for succor, who alone can save and defend me! you pure soul, venerate me, and I am the most guilty of wretches! Now, curse me and I shall become the most m serable of mothers!"

Is not this expiation sufficiently complete?

Yes, she comes in this way to speak to her mild and chaste Cyprienne.

And now, crushed beneath the weight of her shame, concealing her burning brow with her hands, she awaits the decree of that Judge whom her innocence renders the more terrible.

Cyprienne receives her within her arms, in her turn as a mother, for woman is maternal through nativity, and kissing her forehead, murmurs out but two words.

"Poor beloved!"

* * * * * *

The grey light of dawn gleamed through the curtains. Cyprienne is still abed upon her snow white sheets: she sleeps, she dreams, and in her reveries she smiles!

Of what dreams she, this beautiful and pure child? To what angel, descended from the heavens for her consolation does she respond with that smile?

In her confused spirit every thought is commingled; the confessions of her mother and the apprehensions of her own heart.

She imagines that she is walking in the grand garden of Noizilles upon the arm of the little Chevalier des Alizes. And the little Chevalier des Alizes appears to her under form of Don Jose, while the formal garden resembles, unmistakably that of the convent of B——.

Ursula herself is there—partly concealed behind a flower-bed spying about her with one finger upon her lips.

"Ah! why weep? why doubt the future?" her companion demands of her. "Courage, have confidence in unknown friends."

Suddenly the air is filled with indistinct floating forms which, little by little, assume a body, a physiognomy, a resemblance.

These are the beings beloved by Cyprienne and who love her. The excellent superior with her benevolent countenance —then Ursula; then her mother. The group gradually approach and encircle her. All their lips are half open. All their hands are stretched forth to seize upon and embrace her. At last the group falls in twain to suffer, Madam de Monte Cristo to pass between them, proud and serene, leading Lilias by the hand.

"Wherefore weep? wherefore doubt the future? Confidence! Cyprienn! have confidence in unknown friends!"

* * * * * *

As for Madam de Puysaie, she continues her vigil, she has not even gone to bed. Leaning in her weakness upon an arm-chair, with blood shot eyes and palid complexion she slumbers and dreams. Before her eyes, too, pass the garden of Noizilles and the pale Chevalier des Alizes. She too evokes in memory all those intermingled with her life, the dowager de Simeuse, at one and the same time so complaisant and arrogant, a blade of steel in a velvet scabbard; the good Lambert; Monsieur de Puysaie and at last, last of all, the cause of all her tears and of all her remorse, the tempter and tyrant, Colonel Fritz.

And all for her have naught save menaces or reproaches, anger and maledictions. One alone, the little Chevalier pardons her. He weeps in silence, as the angels of paradise weep, when a star is extinguished or a spirit succumbs.

Alone, he pardons. Not for a vision, pure among all, noble among all, arises in the midst of these despairing images.

Her finger of one hand is uplifted towards heaven, and with her other hand she held that of a child—the hand of Lilias.

"Weep, sinner: steep yourself in the gall of repentance. You will be fully pardoned, i. you weep bitterly."

And Madam de Puysaie has arisen and upon the table she has seized a torn letter, oftentimes perused in many hours, and she exclaims:

"Yes, salvation is there if not oblivion. This one alone can repair everything which is not irreparable.

She is the saintly consoler, Madam de Monte-Cristo!"

And does her vision still continue? As if she had pronounced the cabalistic formula of an incantation, in raising her eyes she beholds, standing before her, Madam de Monte-Cristo herself.

Madam de Monte-Cristo, clad in black as a spectre rescuitated from I know not what funeral world—such, in fine, as we have seen in front of Jose in his mysterious oratory.

Behind the half opened door, we can detect the anxious profile of Postel.

It was evidently the faithful waiting woman who has introduced despite the unusual hour this material visitor.

"I was not able to see you yesterday," said Madam de Monte-Cristo, "a sacred duty to which I have failed not to pay attention for many years detained me. At this hour I am free and here I am. What have you resolved upon?"

"To remit my destiny wholly into your hands," exclaimed Madam de Puysaie, warmly. "For you are the only being, conscious of the gravity of my transgressions who has consoled me and refreshed my soul. Tell me then, what you require of me and it shall be done."

"Be it so!" said Madam de Monte-Cristo, seriously. "I have just seen Don Jose and anticipated this determination. In the name of the Deity, my dear soul, I come to say to you: You have experienced expiation and sorrows sufficiently. Your fault has been washed out by your tears. Your remorse has worn away your crime as rust wears away the steel engendering it. For a sufficincy of time have you battled against the tempest, poor tossed about vessel, to you now I open a haven of shelter. *Sister of refuge* come with us!"

And as, in astonishment and doubtlessly without comprehension, Madam de Puysaie arose, Madam de Monte-Cristo resumed the self same tone of powerful emphasis and then addressed her prophetically:

"Come with us! You will re-find all sisters in misery:—victims and repentants, those who have suffered and those who have caused them to suffer. Before the first the door is opened wide as soon as they choose to knock. An ordeal stops the others upon the threshold for a length of time. You have undergone that ordeal and I am able to cause you at last to participate in our calmness and in the divine consolations of our work."

"What work?" stammered Madam de Puysaie.

Upon a gesture from Madam de Monte-Cristo, Postel entered.

"Hold," continued the Redemptress, "look upon this woman! She has never faltered. Even a victim, she has never responded to tortures otherwise than by the greatest humiliation in the presence of her executioners. Unfortunate wife, still more unfortunate mother, her life has been but a prolonged sadness; when I first met with her not a hand was extended towards her. Well, and was that just? Is it not the duty of every christian being to seek out and to console those undeservedly afflicted? To sustain these poor agonized hearts, who might some day succumb beneath lassitude and respond to injustice by maledictions?

"Well! To seek out concealed sufferings, to console those in despair, behold one of the duties of the *Sisters of Refuge.*

"It is likewise their duty to visit those who, like you, have given way; to interrogate patiently the depths of their hearts: to discover therein and to fan alive the spark of repentance half stifled amid moral ashes. It is their task to forewarn error; to cause the young maiden to escape the ambuscade ever placed for her feet; to discard from her ambition the fatal suggestions of vice and of misery.

"To prevent from falling: to raise up those who have fallen; to bestow upon valiant souls, which, without reproach or wounds, have traversed the trial of life, a nourriture for their strength and courage; behold therein the trifold obligation of the Sisters of Refuge. Alas! we are as yet weak. Still I have already encountered willing hearts. The day will come when united in a common bond we will be strong! Then will our missionaries overrun the land, visible only through their blessings, visiting all classes in society. These sisters of charity, these surgeons of the soul, will fly before no misery and turn away before no disgust."

"In each hamlet we will have a Magdalen; in each saloon a Madam de Miramon. And then, leading the humble life devolving on woman, we shall be, without sacrifice of strength to vanity, all powerful for good. Oh! sisters, relinquish without regret to men their proud work as civilizers of humanity. Leave to them displays of triumph, fevers of combats and the drunkenness of power. Humble auxiliaries in the great human work let us in obscurity pursue our mision of love."

Madam de Monte-Cristo spoke and, with forehead inclined, hands conjoined, the two sisters of Refuge listened to her and felt their heart-strings curl at the contact of this kiss of amour, as does a sheet of paper brought near to a burning flame.

"Oh!" sighed forth Madam de Puysaie, "could I ever imagine myself worthy of being an assistant to a saint like unto you?"

"You are already my sister," responded Madam de Monte-Cristo, pressing her affectionately within her arms. "However a final trial is reserved for you. Destined to return some day to society, there to follow out that part of the mission indicated to you, it is necessary for a time, days perchance—maybe weeks and years, to sever yourself completely from it. From this day forth a new spirit must awaken within you. As the butterfly changes in breaking through its chrysallis, it is necessary to forget that you have loved, that you have been hated. In our conduct, my sister, we suffer no egotistical or personal tendency to subsist. For all we work and not for ourselves alone."

"Fear not, however, that interest, dear to your heart will be abandoned. Others will watch over Cyprienne faithfully in your stead. In quitting her you do not render her an orphan. You bestow upon her, as a mother your sisters in God—the sisterhood of those of the Refuge."

"Command," simply said Madam de Puysaie, "and I obey."

The day had thoroughly dawned and within the cabinet of Monsieur de Puysaie transpired a scene of a character totally different.

Loredan, baron Matifay, and the inevitable Colonel Fritz discussed the articles of an agreement.

Title deeds and evidences of proprietorship encumbered the table. They talked about the value of this real estate, the rental of this farm and the probable decease, at some distant time, of this uncle and of that aunt.

There was a solitary piece of property upon which they did not dream to set estimated value—Cyprienne. Perchance they did not dream of doing so, because she was priceless?

I believe, however, that among this trio of business men, Baron Matifay alone entertained that opinion.

He bargained merely thorough habit, simply to keep his hand in. For a long time he had resolved to make every sacrifice to secure the aim of his ardent hopes, perchance of his final desires—to marry Cyprienne.

This burning passion, this physical fever. he vainly endeavored to dissemble beneath wheedling intrigues and hypocritical pretentions. Yet it exhibted itself in the flashes which, from time to time, involuntarly lit up the pupils of his eyes, in the nervous movements of his hands and in the trembling of his lips.

Colonel Fritz well perceived his situation and that skilful dealer in human flesh profited by it to wrench fresh concessions from the banker.

As to Loredan, humiliated and disgusted with this bargaining; he feigned an air of frivolity and of indifference. But his unquiet eyes could dissemble the trouble of his mind, and perchance it needed but little entreaty for him to eject from his house, at a single stroke the entire party, the colonel and the banker, the bride and the go-between.

Then, to give himself courage, he repeated to himself as if to deaden sense of shame:

"What matters all this to me? I would be a fool listen to the protestations of the countess—Cyprienne is no daughter of mine!"

Cypriennne, no daughter of mine!

This suggestion, which heretofore would have set him wild with grief and anger; this idea which had for a long time pursued him in the night-mares of his nights of despair, was at this moment the plank to which he clung with all the energy of which he was capable.

Then—at least he so promised himself—he set himself to work. The whirlwind of public affairs had not permitted him to over look treason in his one household. No more passion in life henceforth save ambition—bless ambition!

"This discussion terminated; everybody was in accord; Matifay, enclosing the documents in a shagreen case with a silver fastening, charged himself with communicating to the notary the basis for the covenants. The colonel rubbed his hands and winked his eyes to Loredan as if to say,

"Eh?—how we have sweated him?"

"By the way," observed Matifay, retracing his steps, "when are our signatures to be appended?"

"With all convenient speed," replied Monsieur de Puysaie, "to-morrow evening!"

To-morrow evening! Poor Cyprienne!

It was thus that, in this solitary idea, he summoned strength to sacrifice Cyprienne, and beyond this sacrifice all method for salvation failed him.

He was absolutely ruined, shamefully ruined. His entire fortune, realized upon the spot, would not have sufficed to liquidate one half of his debts. The course of life he now pursued was but the result of artifice, an illusion of credit piled upon credit. Distrust once generated, a rumor set abroad, and shipwreck would overwhelm him most disastrously.

Then—then would come misery, yes, worse than misery, bankruptcy.

Moreover, the king has no affection for bankrupts, witness the recent condemnation of illustrious speculators whose rank apparently assured their impunity.

But even acquited, one of the de Puysaies a bankrupt!—could such a thing be possible?

By his connection with Matifay, on the other hand, he re-established his fortune, and found himself on the morrow in a more prosperous position then ever. The considerable influence of his son-in-law, added to that which, despite his faults he had preserved, would form an alliance, difficult to be resisted.

Oracle of the faubourg Saint Germain and father-in-law to a Lafitte, resting one hand upon the nobility and the other upon the broad shoulders of the middle classes—what position was too elevated to be beyond his grasp?

CHAPTER XL.

HAPPY, THE RICH!

On the morrow, the hotel de Puysaie was in festal attire; the grand saloons were illuminated; valets were decked out in most gorgeous liveries; the court of honor was filled with carriages.

One by one, equipages arrived before the balustrade leading to the portico; and their noble proprietors, diplomats, with starched cravats, junior *attachés* of a minor degree in aristocracy, superior officers, stout and pus-bellied, dowagers fat and forty, freeholders with contracted shoulders, all slowly ascended the ten stone steps, affording entry to the vestibule.

While this procession filed majestically between rows of lacquies in knee breeches, beyond, upon the sidewalks of the street, a crowd congregated to admire without covetuousness. Happy, the rich.

"That's a marquis at least!"

"An Ambassador!"

"A cabinet minister!"

"Hold, the duke of Lenoncourt!"

"Who? that little fat man?"

"No. The lean fellow! a famous millionaire, although he is as thin as a rail. It is said he has five hundred francs to devour every day."

"That should fatten an ox."

"He cannot make away with the whole it at one meal."

"Two beef-steaks at each repast is about the most, even if he was Emperor of China."

"What a magnificent carriage!"

"That one, there?"

"No, this one!"

"Is it an evening party?"

"Or, a marriage?"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"I know all about it, that I do" interposed a little clerk, standing upon the tips of his toes. "It is the friends of the family. This evening there is to be signed the contract of marriage between Mademoiselle de Puysaie and Baron Matifay."

At this revelation from the notary's apprentice, a murmur of admiration, as a fresh breeze ripples the surface of a pond, swept along the entire assemblage.

Only think: the name of Matifay is mentioned, of "the most honest and richest man in France!"—Three magic syllables, conjuring up before the eyes of the multitude in imagination—iron safes wherein heaps of gold lay against bolts of massive steel—piles of louisdor higher than columns,—guineas in wooden bowls as we see in the money changers window—five franc pieces, removed by the shovelful—and bank bills, weighed by the pound, as we dispose of waste paper.

Happy, the rich!

There circulated among the gossiping neighbors, in low and earnest tone of voice, passages from the popular legend of Matifay.

He always carries, narrates one", in the left hand pocket of his overcoat one million five hundred thous and francs and a promissary note for a like amount in his watch case.

"It's as true as gospel," interposed a second, "I tell you so."

Who can dispute it? Similar anecdotes—even the same—are ever current with the people attributing them in turn to the illustrious of the moment.

Such as peaches in mid winter, in the first instance found too dear, bringing double price, when the vender politely cuts off a piece from one that he might taste the fruit.

Such as that of a pocket-book, remaining for a few seconds in the hands of a messenger from whom the baron in a pleasant humor reclaimed sixteen thousand five hundred francs for interest and then gave him a piece of gold for guarding it a short minute.

And countless others which have as successive endorsers financiers of all ages, Bourets, Louis, Lafittes, Matifay's were they from the thousand and one tales of contemporaneous Arabian Nights, whose hero is named Rothschild.

Others—behold the strength of imagination!—who were in ignorance five minutes before as to the cause for the rolling of all these vehicles, or for whom these chandeliers had been illuminated and these lacquies decked in gala garb, pretend forthwith to communicate exact and minute details of the affair, even to the splendor of the bridal presents.

And hyperbole came to their assistance.

There were, according to their eloquent speeches, streamlets of diamonds and rubies; topazes and rare pearls measured by the bushel. Amethysts counted for nothing! as to cashmeres, pshaw! they were reckoned by the dozen like wash rags, and then there were more laces then cashmeres.

Then, at a recital of these marvels, eyes from beneath gear, blonde or brunette, eyes black, or eyes blue, lighted up in astonishment and with a roguish leer.

Many bosoms palpitated through covetuousness beneath dresses of coarse stuffs and many voices murmured low, in honesty of heart:

"How happy must she be!"

Happy, the rich!

Ah, if they could only see Cyprienne, pale and listless, awaiting the arrival of that fatal hour as the criminal watches

the coming of the executioner! If they could only read within her soul the story of her sorrows and agonies. If they could only see her writhe in disgust and terror beneath the glances of Matifay, while vainly endeavoring to be stow upon him without trembling her plighted hand.

Ah, truly then would not the young girls of the people, whose fingers have been pricked with needle points, but with smiling lips however—neither for cashmeres by the dozen, nor English lace wrought by fairy hands from spider webs, nor diamonds or rubies, nor for all the treasures of that bewitching marriage casket, would they be willing to exchange that little gown of course material, beneath which beats a free and joyous heart.

The days are long, it is true, and the nights cold and chilling, when the evenings are lengthened, your eyes smart more frequently beneath the yellow light of the lamps—Yet toil is irksome and the wages are small.

That is true! in the illuminated windows of the stores satins glisten, jewels sparkle and we covet them. But, likewise, we have the power of loving whom we please. No question of interest or of caste interposed to seperate hearts called together. Their entire wealth being labor, if brides are chosen from among the daughters of toil it is because they are worthy of love and are beloved.

Go then, young girls! Complain not of your destiny. More than once has some lady, in silk and satin, dragging after her a gouty millionaire, turned around to see you pass blithsome and light hanging upon the arm of a handsome young man—your husband. She has envied you, and you would envy her! You know not how often, children of sadness, desiring your freedom, have wept for it! Oh! those tears, my dear girls, have fallen in silence upon satins and upon velvets! Yes, tears such as these have moistened the cheeks of duchesses and often times, alas! those of more august victims—sacrificed for state reasons, which like riches, takes the form of dowry!—

The invited guests entered, one by one unto the grand saloon where the Count de Puysaie received them. The Count appeared ill at ease and, from time to time, glanced with visible impatience upon the door through which his wife should make her entrance.

Madam de Puysaie to keep him waiting under such circumstances!—Madam dePuysaie absent when the invited guests had already flowed in—it was a heresy in ettiquette, too flagrant to pass unnoticed.

There was chatting in the corners of the saloon.

Twice already had the Count sent messengers to apprize the Countess none of these lacquies had returned and the countess was not as yet forth coming.

They awaited no one else however. The notary had already opened his portfolio of black shagreen, and placed upon the table before him ,in a methodical manner the sheet of stamped paper on which was written the contract.

The count then threw an expressive glance upon Colonel Fritz, who comprehended its meaning and shortly after went out of the apartment.

Two minutes after he returned, his brows knit, and walking directly to Loredon, whispered in his ear.

The Count shrugged his shoulders, a movement which did not escape notice. But he immediately resumed his marvellous control over himself.

"The Countes is slightly indisposed," he said, 'and prays to be excused for a few minutes delay. Let us trust, moreover, that this inconvenience will be of short duration."

Making a sign to Dr. Ozam, his physician, who had been standing near the end of the chimney-piece, he took him familiarly by the arm and went out with him.

Immediately upon his departure, the buzz of conversation augmented. The guests spoke in subdued tones on account of the presence of Cyprienne and Matifay.

Enwrapt in his amorous reverie, the banker had scarcely noticed the incident and he wasted himself in protestations to the young girl to which she listened with downcast eyes.

This marriage had caused too much jealousy in the circle wherein Monsieur de Puysie moved not to cause the unexpected incident to be construed in the most unfavorable manner against his intentions.

"The Countess," remarked one of the guests, "must be a hysterical creature not to overcome a slight indisposition under circumstances as grave as these are."

"It maybe," murmured another, tossing her head. "I believe she was never particularly partial to this match."

"The fact is," added a third, "it is shameful to sacrifice a young creature in this manner."

This third interlocutor, it is useles to say, had upon her arm a larger girl of twenty-one years, whom she would have been willing to have sacrificed in place of Cyprienne.

"All this," croaked an old gentleman, in a second group, "is mere comedy. Madam is just as ill as I am."

"How so?"

"How so? she refuses her consent, that's all, she is at swords point with poor Loredan, ever since she learned of his pranks with the female, and she finds it easy enough to give a Roland for his Oliver."

"Refuse a son-in-law like Matifay! If he only made a sign all the mothers here present would throw their daughters into his arms and even marry him themselves to make the bargain complete if it should be absolutely neccessary."

"I think you calumniate us, sir."

"Heaven forbid, madam! I only spoke of those having marriageable daughters, and you are far from that."

"Eh! not so very far—Lucille is already six years old."

"And set down as fourteen," murmured the sceptical old gentleman, "and we will say no more about it."

Loredan and Dr. Ozam had ascended four steps at a time, the staircase leading to the apartment of Madam de Puysaie, and already the doctor, who was acquainted with the habits of its inmates, had his hand upon the knob of the door.

The Count stopped him.

"Doctor," said he, "you are an honest man."

The doctor raised his handsome face, crowned with a thick head of white hair and looked upon the Count fixedly with his large and clear blue eyes,

"I believe as much," he answered.

"Were you entrusted with a secret, upon which depend the happiness, the honor of an entire family, think you that you would be capable of guarding it?"

"To me, during my life time," responded the physician, carelessly, "more than a hundred secrets of such a nature, have been confided and I know not how it happened, but I have forgotten the whole of them."

"More than forgetfulness is necessary," continued the Count excitedly, "in this instance. You must become an accomplice in a falsehood."

Dr. Ozam gathered his thick-set bushy eyebrows.

"Oh! the falsehood I own to you, shall be a perfectly innocent fabrication. By a falsehood alone you can accomplish that which I just now required of you—to aid me in protecting the welfare, the honor of my family."

"I alone," returned Dr. Ozam, "must be the judge of my own conduct and duty. All that I can promise you, at this present moment, is to hold my tongue—hence I neither agree or refuse to come to your assistance."

"Let us see, then," exclaimed Monsieur de Puysaie, opening the door with vehemence.

The apartment was empty: the bed scarcely disturbed, as if it had not been occupied for sleeping, and only rumpled, as by some one laying down hours before without divesting herself of her clothing. A large wardrobe stood open, but it was devoid of contents. A few stray articles of female apparel, seemingly overlooked, lay around upon the arm-chairs.

"Well!" quoth the doctor, interrogating Loredan with an inquisitive glance.

"Well," responded his companion, "eh! can't you see that she has gone, flown away!—what a scandal!—Yes, doctor, flown! I believed her conquered. She had to all appearances consented to everything—but, behold! what has she reserved for me!"

He drew forth a scrap of paper which he had carried in his breast pocket and tossed it, crumpled up, to the doctor,

"There! Read that which she has written to me."

"Count," read the doctor, "I feel myself too weak to resist your menaces, and to face your anger in person. But I am too strong to consent to the sacrifice of our child for the reconstruction of your fortunes."

"Our child!" bitterly interposed the Count.

"Not being able to say 'no' openly," continued the physician, "I have fled from the trial. Seek me not: your researches will prove fruitless."

"We'll see about that!" foamed Loredan."

"You will only see me again upon the day, when your determination with respect to Cyprienne has undergone a change. Oh! for a last time, my friend, believe me I have been guilty, towards you, do not cause the weight of my transgressions to fall upon an innocent head. Cyprienne, I swear to you—Cyprienne is your daughter!"

The Count threw himself in the arm-chair, his arms swinging by its side.

"What is now to be done? How to explain this flight?"

"Easy enough," replied Dr. Ozam with a smile, "prolong the expedient you have so ingenuously invented."

"At least, there has been nobody here?" he added.

"No one excepting myself and Colonel Fritz."

"Can you trust the colonel?"

"I am sure of him."

"Ah!" said the doctor, casting around anew that singular glance from his clear blue eyes, bright as a flame, and most peculiar to him.

But, without being pressed remarked:

"I have it; nothing can be more simple for gaining time. Madam de Puysaie is ill; I will affirm the fact; and each day I will come upon two or three professional visist. At the end of some time, if it proves necessary, we will send her to the country, to the watering places, —to what not."

"That device will not last long," exclaimed the Count. "You know well that the world has eyes capable of reading behind stone walls, and ears susceptible of gleaning even your most intimate thoughts. Before fifteen days have gone by our secret will be proclaimed from housetops."

"Then," coolly replied the doctor, "it becomes necessary to rediscover Madam de Puysaie before the fifteen days are up."

"But how? where? by the police? I have thought of that in the first place—but would it not be just the means for spreading abroad the more quickly that which we would desire to conceal?"

"Then I would not consult the police."

"In that case what means are left me?"

"It is indicated in this letter, Count. Renounce the marriage of your daughter."

"Never!" exclaimed Monsieur de Puysaie violently.

"Then you can do as you please," responded Dr. Ozam. "However I repeat to you, I who know this Monsieur Matifay thoroughly, because I have attended upon his adopted daughter—I counsel you, personally, to renounce this marriage."

"And what is that you know?"

But the doctor interrupted him again.

"Just nothing, as it is my rule to forget all secrets entrusted to me. Nevertheless, Count, reflect upon the matter. For the moment I charge myself with dismissing your guests, without allowing any to suspect the secret of our little medical comedy."

Five minutes after the termination of this interview the heavy *porte cochere* of the mansion closed noisily behind the last departing carraige and the Count de Puysaie remained alone, in the midst of an army of servants, within his desolate home.

Alone, yes alone, since he had convinced himself that Cyprienne was no daughter of his!

In such a manner as this his plan was destroyed, his ruin rendered inevitable, and his dishonor assured. And in this disaster, no one near him took pity upon him; and not a solitary compassionate hand clasped his own.

As to Cyprienne, unenlightened as to the truth and not suffered to penetrate to her mother, nominally upon plea of contagious illness—she saw it is true, her marriage postponed, but not broken off. Moreover this mysterious illness, attributed to her mother, plunged her into an abyss of gloomy suppositions.

Who could tell as to what the Count might not have been guilty during a moment of anger.

And then again the poor girl accused herself. She should have concealed more craftily her repugnance so as not to have provoked a contention between her father and her mother.

Hence, this rich hotel, so luxurious in appearance, concealed naught save misery, ruin and despair!

Happy the rich!

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HOUSHOLD OF THE GOSSES.

The moment has arrived when we can introduce to our readers more especially two personages with whom they have become slightly acquainted in the earlier portion of our narrative.

Monsieur and Madam Gosse guardians *ad interim* of Ursula, inhabited the fourth floor in a house in the rue Rambuteau.

Above their apartments were simply the garrets, the one occupied by the wretched lodging of Signor Cinelle and the other by our friend Joseph.

The apartments of the Gosses were like unto those in vogue among petty capitalists: an antechamber, narrow and dismal; a dining room furnished in

black walnut: an alcoved chamber, which Madam Gosse somewhat ostentatiously styled a parlor, and at the side of the kitchen a dark bed room occupied by Ursula.

Monsieur Gosse, whose blue coat, gray hat and heavy cane served as a subject for comment from every young scamp of the district, remained installed within his bin as a public writer the live-long day near St Eustache, while his wife had retired for some years from practice of her profession as mid-wife, and now lived upon her income, from out of which she contrived to make herself many agreeable presents.

The presents aforesaid displayed themselves with due dignity upon the ledge of her sideboard in the guise of sundry flasks, or bottles with illuminated labels, cherry bounce or curagao cordial, flower of tea and "perfect love," and such delicacies, contained within characteristic enclosures.

"These set the stomach in order," soliloquized the good dame, and heaven only knows how many times every day she discovered her stomach to be troubled with weakness.

Whence these presents and that income? The jealous gossips of the neighborhood were in tribulation in solving so momentous an inquiry—and could only discover a clue to this mysterious fortune through an hypothesis most humiliating to the honor of Monsieur Gosse.

There were rumors, given out in subdued tones, circulating among these excellent neighbors, concerning a large gentleman, enveloped in a vast maroon colored overcoat, a very substantial-looking man in a word, who appeared voluntarily to select for his hours for visiting those when the "dear wolf," as Madam Gosse affectionately termed her lesser half, was secured within his box as a public writer.

Nevertheless this was pure gossip. The virtue of Madam Gosse remained immaculate; a passion for brandy cherries and vespetro was her only weakness, well established, and if Monsieur Le Gigant came from time to time to visit her without the knowledge of her husband it was simply to talk upon business.

But what business could possibly transpire between Madam Gosse and Monsieur Le Gigant.

The gossiping neighbors recollected distinctly that his first visit occurred at that precise juncture of time at which Madam Gosse renounced her functions as midwife. This coincidence was rendered more remarkable from the fact that almost simultaneously she was absent several months, and upon her return brought with her a fine baby, well wrapped up, in her arms.

At the time she related a very mysterious history concerning that identical babe—"It was the child of a great lady," she said, "with whose bringing up she was charged—that, some day or the other, the child would be very rich," and such like nursery tales.

The gossips pretended to believe all this, but, as the visits of Monsieur Le Gigant, became less regular, they did not conceal their ridicule but made irreverent gestures at Monsieur Gosse as he passed by them.

Subsequently the child, grown larger, as suddenly disappeared as it had arrived, and the visitor with the maroon colored over coat with it.

And still more recently, at the conclusion of several years the unknown visitor reappeared and Madam Gosse accomplished and her absence, returning with Ursula, since which event Monsieur Le Gigant had not missed a day without a visit to Madam Gosse.

Only as Madam Gosse had grown old and her stout cheeks became pimpled, with the aid of the vespetro, the good neighbors accredited these visits no longer to Madam Gosse but to Ursula.

It is useless to say that this new interpretation, of the gossips was as errroneus as the first one.

Le Gigant no more dreamed of assailing the virtue of Ursula than he had designed to compromise that of Madam Gosse.

Nevertheless, at the hour when we left Joseph in conversation with Louis Jacquemin these charitable gossips, friends to Madam Gosse and admirers of the contents of her variegated bottles, manifested the greatest emotion; groups being found along the passage way, at the stairs, at the doors, everywhere. There had chanced to happen an incident here, tofore unheard of in the annals of the house. The man with the maroon colored overcoat had gone up to Madam Gosse's outside of his habitual hour, and there existed a strong probability that, returning from his box, the "beloved wolf" would run counter to him.

What would the "adored wolf" say? What would the man in the maroon colored overcoat attempt to do?

Exasperated curiosity was at it height and might have reach a higher point, when they observed, regular as the town clock, Monsieur Gosse himself, his hat cocked in a martial style over his ear, his cane stretched forth in advance, a smirk and a smile upon his lips, turn the corner of the street, cross the threshold of the house and ascend the steps of the staircase leisurely, his cane striking upon each step as he passed up.

Each of his movements were scanned, so to speak, by a sigh of agony from his neighbors, since, when the sound of his foot-steps were deadened among the upper portions of the spiral stair, all were in a condition of delirious agitation of impatience and of joy, as they anticipated a scene, a species of gratuitous theatrical display in beholding Madam Gosse caught in *flagrant delit*, yes, this Madam, Gosse, proud of her vespetro and of her income!

In fact some voices were raised in her favor by timidly affirming Madam Gosse to be an agreeable neighbor, and her vespetro an excellent cordial, yet they were stifled almost as soon as they were upraised by the indignant murmurs of the gossips.

Then came complaints that the poor, dear Monsieur Gosse "had no more malice in him than a lamb"—"that it was about time this unworthy scandal in an honest house was put a stop to"—and I know not what. It was an unanimous conceit which would have turned, I warrant, against the "beloved wolf" himself, had a flagon of mixed cassis been distributed for that purpose by his better half.

Now then, five, ten minutes elapsed; not a noise, not a sound of quarrelling descended from above stairs. Silence reigned supreme, every head inclined, every ear expanded, and all in vain. At last a door opened; a heavy step resounded upon the stairway, then the rattle of a cane reverberated against the sonorous steps; there could be no doubt but Monsieur Gosse was descending: yes it was Monsieur Gosse, and coming down alone.

He descended the stairs, the good man smiling as ever perfectly unmoved, his grey hat poised upon the side of his head, his cane held perpendicularly at the end of his arm, as calm, in a word, as if he had not encountered in his own domicile a man with a maroon overcoat or as if this going out contrary to his usual habits had not been an exceptional event in the even tenor of his daily life.

Suddenly disappointed curiosity turned to rage—for what good, I ask you, is it to interest oneself in so pacific a husband? After all, he had only received what he deserved. The irritated neighbors did not pity him I swear.

Without appearing to pay the least attention to the chatterings, to the glances of those below, the ironical smiles saluting him along the passage-way, Monsieur Gosse traversed, lukewarmly, the assembled groups, recrossed the threshold, turned the corner of the street again, and proceeded tranquilly—an event more surprizing than all the rest—and assumed a seat in a coffee-house.

Yes, Monsieur Gosse took his seat in a coffee-house and what is more: he ordered refreshment.

When the little boy, charged by the neighbors to watch the acts and deeds of Monsieur Gosse, came to report this astounding intelligence it was received with a mournful stupefaction.

In truth, it was well known that for a long time within his own household the "beloved wolf" was far, as they said, from wearing the breeches, but to retire discreetly and leave his wife in a compromising *tete-a-tete*, and to sell out his dignity for the price of a glass of brandy was a something exceeding all bounds, even in the matter of a Gosse.

Let us leave the gossips to expend their Jeremiads and suspicions, and ascend to the fourth floor and to the household of the Gosses. We will find there, seated at the dining table, with their elbows resting upon it, a flask of cordial uncorked between the two, the ex-midwife and our ancient acquaintance, Le Gigant.

Their conversation was doubtlessly important, for, although alone, they spoke in low tones, and Madam Gosse had taken the precaution, at the commencement of the interview, to arise and close the hall door which had been left open.

Le Gigant spoke positively like a matter of fact individual, and Madam Gosse, from time to time, interposed a timid objection, only to be speedily refuted.

About that time the neighbors, grouped beneath the shadow of the corridor, spied the entrance of Monsieur Gosse in expectation of a quarrel and a scandal.

Monsieur Gosse mounted the stairs, stopped at the rug upon the front floor, and then timidly rang the bell.

"That is Gosse," exclaimed the retired midwife.

Le Gigant did not even turn pale.

"You know, my dear madam, that it is for your interest as well as mine that your husband shall know nothing of our secrets."

"Poor dear lamb!" exclaimed Madam, "oh heavens! what could he do with our secrets."

Then, half opening the entry door:

"I am busy, my adored wolf," she said, "return in an hour; hold! here is thirty sous to furnish you with a demi-tasse!"

And this is the way it came that, for the first time in his life, the adored wolf went to a coffee-room and there ordered refreshments.

CHAPTER XLII.

MADAM GOSSE ENTERTAINS SCRUPLES.

Monsieur Gosse had, moreover, ample reason to repose full confidence in his better-half; for she was a model wife, this Madam Gosse.

Thanks to her and to her alone, the household had, up to this very hour, been maintained without encumbrance: it was not in truth, from profit of letter composition that had been paid this flood of "perfect love" and countless *carafons* of brandy cherries.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that in one sense the gossips were correct, for the relative fortune of the Gosse household was due almost entirely to the man in the maroon colored overcoat, that is to say to Le Gigant.

The retired midwife was one of those dancing-jacks, which that formidable worker of puppets operated upon according to his whims; she was one of the most infirm, yet at the same time most necessary wheels in his combined machinery.

Already, the conversation of Fritz, of Dr. Toinon and of Le Gigant in the office upon the rue Faubourg Montmarte, has given us a clue to the part she was destined to play in the obscure plan foreshadowed by the three accomplices.

It was she who in the commencement had been charged with furtive bringing up of the little Lilias, and, when the day arrived they reckoned upon her to establish the legal *status* of that child.

Research into paternity is forbidden, but not that into maternity. Daughter of Madam de Puysaie, born in wedlock, Lilias would naturally become sole heiress of Loredan and of Cyprienne, her elder sister.

Madam Gosse had not been entrusted with the drift of this deep laid combination; she believed herself to be mixed up with certain love dramas—of adultery, to say the word, too common, unfortunately, of occurrences in large cities.

She was not an evil disposed woman this Madam Gosse, still her probity was not sufficiently energetic to repel a gain, acquired with so little difficulty. Moreover she was a woman and a midwife. Midwives in our day are the direct heiress of the Lisettes and the Dorines, and always prefer espousing the cause of the Valeres against the Arnulphs.

What harm after all had she committed in carrying off Lilias and in receiving the clandestine visits of her mother? Now, forsooth! She had saved the life of a miserable little one, reserved doubtlessly for the foundling hospital or, perchance, for some fall more horrible: she had consoled a poor disheartened woman, and what was better, she had accumulated a nice little income as the reward for her charitable doings.

It is most true that that this income, recompense—somewhat exaggerated,—should have caused Madam Gosse to reflect; she should have known that persons paying so generously, would doubtlessly upon some future day, exact some corresponding return.

But Madam Gosse was poor; Madam Gosse doated upon flower of tea and "perfect love." Had she means of escaping from such formidable temptations?

Again, this Monsieur Le Gigant was, in truth, a perfect gentleman, so frank and cordial that it was impossible to distrust his counsel or to resist his demands.

In the present instance, the business did not concern Lilias but related esclusively to Ursula.

This good Monsieur Le Gigant never tires when he undertakes te accomplish something good.

Ursula according to his account, is threatened with a stroke of misfortune. From the self-same danger whence he desired to shield her through placing her beneath the protection of this good Madam Gosse. He has therefore come to forewarn Madam Gosse that she need not be astonished if on the morrow she saw Ursula no longer. It would even prove advisable were she herself to cir-

culate reports of her absence. Oh! it will be like the absence of a few days. Ursula, for example, has taken an idea to go revisit the excellent nuns who had educated her. Monsieur Le Gigant relies entirely upon the tact and intelligence of Madam Gosse to discover, for the disappearance of the young girl, some explanation which will prove plausible.

Still, in this instance, Madam Gosse, experiences some repugnance in conforming to the desires of Le Gigant. The illy defined misfortune, threatening Ursula is not sufficient to convince her. Although possessing no absolute right over her chance pupil, habit united her to the poor child, whose guardianship she assumed with no idea of it being thus speedily taken away from her. In truth, she has full confidence in Le Gigant, so much confidence, indeed, that her self-interest impels her to accept as ready cash the expenditures which she cannot exact but which he consents to give. However, at the bottom of her heart, a doubt arises in face of so many mysteries, accumulated seemingly at will.

She revolts: she desires to know for herself and not to act as a blind instrument.

A first time Le Gigant came to her, and said:

"You are to bring up the child of a noble lady of fashion to whom knowledge of a solitary indiscretion will prove ruinous. We have confidence. By educating the child you will gain a competency in addition to rendering a service to a powerful family which will never be forgotten."

A second time he returned and said to her:

"Do you wish to serve as a mother, as protectress to a poor abandoned child, to consider her as your own, to be responsible to me for her as I am responsible to her family?"

And upon this second occasion she responded: "yes."

This was all she knew about him to whom she engaged herself, and in her engagement there was naught repugnant to her probity. But what now was it Le Gigant came to demand from her when she had come to know Ursula, and to be attached to that kind affectionate child? He came to request her to lend her hand, to an abduction, of whose nature and aim she was in ignorance.

He had no lien, then, upon Ursula, if he was obliged to carry off by force; and beside what was he going to do with her?

Nothing good certainly! Madam Gosse was obliged to avow that suspicion in a low tone of voice.

The little income, the many glasses of cassis had, without doubt, attractions. Still to betray a poor fellow being, who had her for a sole support in this world! That was hard!

Le Gigant gnawed his finger nails with impatience. A few hours only remained before him and he despaired to overcome the obstinacy of Madam Gosse.

The lady, in fact, entertained a slight dread of the full eyes of Le Gigant, but she renewed her courage through copious draughts upon the numerous cordial bottles, alternating from mint water to cassis, and from that to noyaux and anniseed.

"Come, come, my dear Madam Gosse."

"No, no, no! my dear sir; we have had enough of mysteries. In the first place all these *magnifices* displease Gosse. Only yesterday the dear good man said to me, said he, "bebbele" that's his affectionate term for me; "no more mysteries we have had enough of them."

"But I assure you, dear Madam Gosse, there is no mystery in all this. After all who confided Ursula to you?"

"You, my dear sir, and with the blessing of God!—I don't want to stand in your way.—But, see you, Ursula is contented with us. Gosse is attached to her and would cut off his right hand before any harm came to her.—Well I don't distrust you! oh, heavens, no! but this carrying off at night without knowing why or wherefore. It is cowardly! it is villanous! and what am I to say to her patroness when she comes to reclaim her? Ah! that's it! That she has returned to her family! a pretty excuse! besides the little one has not been without chatting and all the world knows, she has has no one else but us to defend her. No, no! I tell you it is impossible!"

"It must be so, however," grumbled Le Gigant and then he spoke aloud. "Let us, Madam Gosse," and he took a seat beside her, "I have another proposition to you. You are attached to Ursula, I can well understand that for so am I, she is so kind and gentle and although I have scarcely seen yet I must say I love her—well! we all love her for the matter of that.

"There can be no doubt on that head. Well: what say you to several days passed with her in the environs of Paris?

A few days only, that is all that is necessary. You can be certain that in your company no harm can happen to her. Is not that so? Be rational, for this is the best I can do, a disappearance for a few days will anticipate the danger menacing her, a danger the true nature of which I cannot reveal to you in any manner."

"Oh! without doubt," responded Madam Gosse conciliated.

"If I only accompany her. Still think you she would consent to leave here without any explanation?"

"That is just the idea," returned Le Gigant, "and upon that account I want to carry her away without notification, otherwise she would be running about babbling, bidding farewell to her shopmates, and for all I know, leaving some trace of herself behind, and thereby spoil everything. It is incumbent for her to go willingly or unwillingly—do you understand? Should you disappear with her, I have no objections, but it is absolutely necessary that before the morrow's morn she shall not be found here; neither shall it be known whither she's gone."

"Well," observed Madam Gosse, pouring into a final glass a strong resolution, "you must carry us both off, otherwise you abduct no one—that's my last demonstration."

"It is accepted," said Le Gigant "it's the best that can be done, and you know too much that indiscretion on your part should prove dangerous. You can throw dust in their eyes, while Monsieur Gosse can say—"

"What, the poor dear man?" replied Madam Goose, "when the adorable creature knows nothing."

CHAPTER XLIII.

PIPPIONE AND MISTIGRIS.

It is about nine o'clock in the evening. Pippione is sleeping upon her little bed.

Nothing can be more miserable than the narrow garret wherein have dwelt for many long weeks the two human beings, Pippione and Cinelle; a table of black wood laden with grease and the ends of extinguished candles; a clothes-hook upon which hung some checquered rags; in one corner the disjointed material of Signor Ponchinelle's tent; in another the Signor himself, lying fraternally with his enemy the police officer and his maltreated better half—herein constituted all the furniture of the domicile.

No fire—the air from without entering into the squalid garret through a solitary window, pierced through the slanting roof at the end of a sort of alley-way. During the day this opening afforded but a glimpse of the sky; at night nothing penetrates through it save the cold.

Pippione slept with painful slumber, agitated by fever. Her harsh respiration raised with agonies the emaciated surface of her bosom. She sleeps, but no one watches over her slumber but Mistigris, the black cat.

That poor black martyred cat, the cat of the police officer, perpetual and resigned victim to the club of Ponchinelle, as Pippione is the perpetual and resigned victim to his *padrone*.

Hence between these two beings, the cat and the child, a strong friendship was generated, and during the long and dreary days when Signor Cinelle is—we know not where—and the Ursula is at the workshop, the unfortunate beast, with its large eyes wide open and fixed upon the least movement of the bed clothes, watches over the sleeping Pippione. Poor Mistigris! poor Pippione!

She has moved beneath her flimsy coverings; she gathers together her frozen limbs as if to concentrate their heat, a sharp cough, like a sob, tears her throat, she opens her eyes and in front of her sees glaring and wide open the yellow eyes of Mistigris.

"Mistigris! come here, Mistigris!"

Then stretching himself out upon his long paws, making a curled back, modulating his view to its caressing tone, Mistigris leaps upon the bed to rub against his little mistress. Poor Pippione! Poor Mistigris!

They understand each other, that I tell you. Ah! those long, sad glances, oftentimes exchanged in the wind and snow, while Pippione vainly held out at the ends of her blue fingers the pewter saucer, or when the cat, dreaming in one of those profound reveries in which animals sometimes indulge, could not restrain a howl of pain beneath the club of Ponchinelle.

And the street urchin would laugh!—Laugh at Pippione and her attitudes to avoid the cold, laugh at Mistigris and his frantic bounds,—

Poor Mistigris! poor Pippione?

They played together, the animal and the child. The cat, across the bedclothing made joyous leaps, accompanied by joyous claps of laughter from the girl, in-

terrupted, alas! by the deeply settled cough. Jump, Mistigris! jump here! jump there! and Mistigris jumped, while Pippione laughed, sad, hacking laughter, invariably terminated by a wail!

Ah! poor Pippione! poor Mistigris.

At the hour we speak of Pippione shivered and quaked—it was the fever. She pressed against her bosom the intelligent beast who held himself imoveable against her as if to warm her chilled frame. She speaks to him in low tones—very low—what says she?

"You remember the fine weather and that beautiful country where it was so warm, and these villages where the folks were so good! They applauded you when you went through your tricks, the good ladies passed their hands over your back and the little ones gave you their cakes. The old gentlemen in their green dressing gowns caressed my cheeks, saying: "is she not pretty!" The good dames kissed my forehead and slipped into my hands silver pieces. Oh! fine folks and fine weather then, my poor Mistigris!"

And Mistigris seemed to comprehend, as rubbing against Pippione's arm, her soft purring appeared to repeat:

"Ah! the fine weather!"

"At that time," continued Pippione, "Papa Cinelle was not wicked. All the good bits were for me and I always kept for you a share."

"In the evening by the inn fireside he taught you a thousand pretty tricks, and the hostess, astonished at your cunning, always saved for you the bottom of the porringer; again, during the day time, do you remember? I upon the front of the cart, you upon my knees, did you not notice how we defiled through meadows covered with flowers, and woods filled with birds and sweet smelling shrubs. Everybody knew us on the road, our fame preceeding us from fair to fair, crying out: "there's the equipage of Papa Cinelle; there's little Pippione, there's Mistigris, Ponchinelle's cat," and everybody would laugh and make us happy! Ah that beautiful, happy time! and Mistigris purred most melancholicaly, in her turn, seeming to say; "ah! that beautiful happy time!"

"Here," resumed Pippione, "it is cold, and the world is wicked. No good, white milk to steep our rolls in; no black bread smelling of the hazel, no beautiful meadow, nor green woods.

"Ah! these sad, long, dismal streets! Even the *padrone*, like the rest, has grown wicked. Even to Ponchinelle, before this such a joker and fine fellow. How he'd make us laugh, don't you remember? He let you scratch his big red nose and was never angry.

"Now he is angry and you afraid of him; instead of pleasing, he seeks to do you harm. Ah! this miserable country, this villanous country! my poor Mistigris!"

And the cat mewed piteously as if to repeat; "Listen, Mistigris, This villanous country!" again said Pippione, mysteriously lowering her voice, "listen to a beautiful dream I had to-night. I dreamt that I was rich, rich! and that I went to sleep in a large bed, all of silk, and that beneath the coverlid upon the headboard and everywhere there were beautiful toys such as we see in the shop windows, and you were there, too, my poor friend, near to me with your fur polished, a red collar around your neck, and I took you in my arms, just so, and I rocked you until we went to sleep together, both of us, and I was so happy, happy! oh, yes, happy!"

Oh! it was thus that they loved each other so dearly, Pippione and Mistigris, alone all day in that cold and desolate garret wherein a ray of sunlight or of joy never penetrated, she had time enough to love that poor animal grotesque and intelligent as he was. At the same time he had but one playmate, one friend, one confidant of his sorrows and of his hunger. It was to him that she complained of the bad usage of Cinelle, and to her, in turn, with his back half broken by the club, his ears covered with blood, clipped by reason of a new exercise badly performed, that the poor animal would come to complain, which she only would dress.

She had taken the cat between her emaciated arms, and he, the sagacious beast, had drawn in his claws through fear of injuring her, and with his long, rough tongue licked the shoulders and tiny hands of Pippione.

Then Pippione fell asleep again and Mistigris, with his eyes half closed, clung close to her as if to warm her shivering little body.

But, behold! a clear voice sounds from the staircase, a rustle of a gown is heard without, and a light step glides, with a shiver, along the passage way; the door opens—it is Ursula! with a chafing dish in one hand and a full cup of milk in the other! cric, crack, a match grates upon the plaster; behold, a candle lighted.

"Well, my little one, how have you spent the day? drink this milk—by lit-

tle swallows, if you please—you find it good?—had enough? the rest will do for Mistigris.

"Br-r-r—how cold it is! wait a moment until I make up a fire."

And babbling in this wise, Ursula went hither and thither doing the work of the household, while Pippione, with her hands clasped, followed her with her eyes as if a celestial apparition, and Mistigris, bounding to his seat, arched his back and purred like a humming top as he rubbed against the garments of the little sister of charity.

And that chamber, but a moment before so obscure, became radiant—that garret so sad, appeared to the marvel-stricken eyes of Pippione a heavenly abode. Ah! it is angels such as these who carry with them everywhere a reflection of their immortality, as if in that garret had descended a being from the realms above.

Charity!

Alas, a charm, this festival, this source of joy lasts but little time. Ursula suddenly observed Pippione to turn pale; the affrighted eyes of the child turned towards the door attracted hither by an invincible loadstone as she suffered herself to fall in the arms of the working woman.

"He is here!" she murmured.

Mistigris, too, had doubtlessly comprehended the approach of a similar danger, for with hair on end and haggard eyes he took refuge beneath the bed.

A loud and staggering footstep caused the stairway to tremble, while its owner stumbled against the bannisters; it was the master of the lodging, Signor Cinelle, who was returnin home.

"He is drunk!" murmured Pippione, all in a tremor, "he will beat me."

"We'll see that, we'll see that," said the sweet voice of Ursula, "don't tremble so hard, he'll not beat you, I promise you. I'll not leave you as long as he is here."

Already Cinelle was at the threshold of the door. Pippione had not courage to thank Ursula, but between her clasped hands she had seized those of the young girl, while gazing upon her fixedly. Oh! with what touching and inexpressible gratitude!

Cinelle entered. He was not alone: a gentleman in a bottle-green coat, with gold buttons, pearl-grey pantaloons and and a switch in his hand accompanied him.

He was an old acquaintance of ours—Doctor Toinon.

"Is this the patient?" he asked in his flute-like voice with the most seductive of smiles.

"Yes," responded Cinelle, glumly.

And without speaking another word he seated himself upon a leaf of the table, almost ready to overturn beneath his weight.

He was atrociously drunk, for he had drunk to give himself courage.

"Very well," said the doctor, "we'll see about her."

And he went towards the bed, near which Ursula was standing, surprised at seeing this stranger visitor.

"Dr. Ozam," said he, by way of entering upon details, "cannot come here this evening and has sent me in his stead."

This explanation, being quite natural, satisfied Ursula, who moved away, gently inclining her head.

Then commenced something most lamentable.

The doctor stripped naked that wretched body, emaciated by consumption, so that they saw this frail body, weakened by suffering, transparent like an ivory slab, shiver in the chilly current of air.

Doctor Toinon was, after all, a man of science and not adamantine. He could appreciate the gravity of sickness,—coming to make a fictitious examination, he found, that he had been furnished with a case unfortunately too real.

He terminated his auscultation without uttering a single word; only from time to time shaking his head in a discouraging manner.

Cinelle, who at first appeared to take some interest in the examination of the physician, had finished by suffering his chin to fall upon his chest. He was fast asleep.

At last the doctor caused Pippione to re-clothe herself, reassuring her—in such a tone—in the light and frivolous tone habitual to physicians in desperate cases, that it was absolutely nothing. Then he took Ursula aside in another part of the chamber.

"Are you the nurse here?" he enquired.

"No," replied Ursula, "poor people have no nurses. But, doctor, if a nurse be necessary I will serve for one."

"It is indispensable, "quickly returned Dr. Toinon, "and on the morrow we can procure one for the poor thing. But for this night—"

"This night, replied Ursula in all sincerity, "I will watch over her."

Thereupon the physician entered upon

minute details as to the cares to be bestowed upon the invalid. It was necessary every hour to administer a teaspoonful of such a syrup—then do this, then do that—and with a serious and attentive air Ursula bent her head, treasuring up memory of the manifold medical prescriptions.

"Come! come!" said Dr. Toinon, upon termination of his instructions, "you have the frank manner of willingness, and for this night everything will go well. Now I must visit my other patients. Do not disturb yourself with respect to the apothecary, I will stop in on my way and order everything necessary to be sent up."

"I do not wish to leave her even for a minute," said Ursula, lowering her eyes, "and if you will only have the kindness to let them know down stairs——"

"Your relations, doubtless, my dear little maid—without doubt it must be so. You must keep a good fire in this stove, do you understand!—I'll send the wood—to pass a night when you're not used to it is hard work. You will sup about midnight. The devil! it is not necessary to make oneself ill in taking care of others. What is your relation's name?"

"Gosse, doctor—Madam Gosse."

"Good! I will tell Madam Gosse to send up your supper. *Au Revoir*, my pretty little nurse. Eh! Cinelle, old drunkard! light me down stairs, instead of snoring!"

And the charming physician left the apartment after executing a most gracious salutation.

Moreover he extended his courtesy to the utter confusion of Ursula, to reascend in person to bring to his "handsome little nurse" the covered basket containing her supper.

As to Cinelle, he went out with the physician, under pretext of going to the apothecary's to seek the necessary medicaments; but they saw him no more during the evening for it was the druggist's errand boy who brought up the prescriptions.

An hour later, the little chamber of Pippione presented a comfortable aspect pleasant to behold, so true is it that the presence of a young and handsome female transforms, immediately the aspect of all things surrounding her.

A clear fire blazed up within the stove and joyous tinges of flame flashed through the half opened door; the lamp burned clearly beneath its green shade, constellated with black designs, and upon the table, spread over by a white napkin was disposed the frugal supper of Ursula.

The bed had been remade, Pippione, well wrapped up with her head resting upon a clean pillow case, could not tire herself with blessing, through her glances, her good, handsome little guardian angel.

Monsieur Mistigris, reassured at last, had come forth from beneath the bed, one foot first and then the other, and finally by a single leap he assumed his habitual place at the foot of the coverlid.

The kettle singing, its quivering bubble joyously clicked the cover, as a gossip in good humour. Oh! the charming little retreat, created out of that misery-stricken garret at the sole mandate of that kind little fairy called Ursula.

"There," quoth she, emptying into a pewter teaspoon the potion, and making what she called "wicked eyes," "you will swallow that immediately and go to sleep! Close those long eyelashes quickly or I will be angry. Oh! but I don't like people to disobey me, that I don't, and I tell you now I will scold for good if you don't go to sleep right off. Look at Mistigris, he is not sick and he is asleep already, come, Mistigris, come hither, I invite you to supper."

"How good you are, Miss Ursula," sighed out Pippione.

"Yes, yes, I know that. You pay me compliments because I prattle instead of letting you sleep. But this time that will not succeed. In an hour's time you must take another teaspoonful, and then we can have a good chat. Until then, good night. Come, close your eyes or I'll scold!"

Pippione closed her eyes, yet the little deceiver did not wholly shut them, for with her head upon the pillow, beneath her long lashes she looked forth, contemplated, and never wearied herself with drinking in the sweet smiles of the tender Ursula.

The young girl, with Mistigris in her lap, cut up the bread and meat of her frugal supplies into petty morsels. She was but a child, a silly yet intelligent child this Ursula; she amused herself with the droll actions of the cat, with his covetousness of his paws, as he stretched them out and withdrew them upon detection: then she made him smell the cork and took it away from him to put it upon his nose without letting it fall before the signal given. The animal, well brought up, submitted to all these infantile pleasantries with the gravity due his education.

"And now, Monsieur Mistigris, since we have supped let us take a drink—that is if you have no objection."

She poured into a glass a portion of the bottle which Dr. Toinon had brought with her supper. On the outside, upon the mat, Signor Cinelle had his eye plastered to the keyhole.

But this time he had been heard ascending the staircase: he had taken off his shoes so as to make no noise.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO CABS.

HALF-PAST eleven o'clock sounded from the belfry of the church of Saint Eustache. A heavy cabriolet, of the private order of cabs drawn by a horse more vigorous than those ordinarily employed for that sort of vehicles, halted a little above the *Cafe des Escarpes* at the juncture of the Rambuteau and the market.

The sidewalk was covered with pedestrians, the public establishments were brilliant with lights, still the presence of such a vehicle in such a spot was of too common an occurrence to attract general attention.

Le Gigant descended from the cabriolet and the coachman followed him to the sidewalk, both speaking in a low tone of voice. Le Gigant doubtlessly was giving him instructions, for the other listened to him attentively and nodded his head in sign of assent.

Then the driver resumed his seat upon the box and Le Gigant advanced several steps in the directiou of the coffee house.

He did not enter, but leaning near the door-post vividly inspected the interior of the establishment. This movement sufficed to demonstrate to him, in one corner of the saloon, the presence of the Gosse couple. Madam Gosse evidently awaited this signal for she had seen Le Gigant and replied to him by a sign of the head and a most amiable smile.

The worthy dame was in travelling costume, enveloped in a thick plaid dress with a well filled wicker basket upon her knees. She was drinking a parting cup in company with the "adorable wolf," who contented himself with a glass of sugared water, while his better-half compounded conscientiously an admixture of grog and brandy.

However, at the corner of the Rambuteau and the rue St. Denis, a scene transpired—a brougham, of an obscure color, had stopped, and the coachman, descending from his seat, spoke in a subdued voice to the passenger he had been conveying.

This last, wearing the grey blouse of a working man, designated to him with his finger a window in the garret of some houses on the opposite side of the street.

"I will enter the house," he said, "and watch everything going on in there; from the chamber I inhabit above I can see everything transpiring in Cinelle's apartment—when the instant arrives, that window will be lit up."

"Then," responded the driver, who was no other than Clement,

"I will walk down the street at a slow pace, as he had agreed upon, and cry out to Jacquemin: "a carriage sir."

"Then you will set out forthwith—you know where."

"All right!"

Joseph—for our reader must have already recognized him—quitted Clement after this hasty dialogue, traversed the street, buried himself in the shadows of the houses, as he discended towards the market. Hearing his step a dark form detached itself from beside the wall.

"Is that you, Louis?"

"Yes, Monsieur Joseph."

"Well! attention! the time is at hand."

And Joseph with the unsuspicious air of a tenant, returning home after a long-day's work, entered the house whistling a popular air.

Very soon after he was followed into the entry by a man staggering beneath the weight of emotion and of drunkenness. It was Signor Cinelle.

In the coffee house, Monsieur and Madam Gosse indulged in a tender parting. The dear lady, in whom the grog had infused singularly exalted ideas, could with difficulty tear herself away from the arms of her "adorable wolf," who in a like manner appeared averse to witness the departure of his "adored bebelle."

He was the most tender and least indescreet of husbands, was this Monsieur Gosse, honest fellow at heart, and in truth his wife would have been an ingrate not to have adored him. Never a reprimand, never a question and provided that his dinner was cooked to a particular turn, his bed well made, his fire properly lighted, and his pocket garnished with a couple of silver pieces, you

would never hear him scold or meddle with busienss, which did not concern him.

Hence, for example, he never troubled himself in the provision of these silver pieces nor the dinner, neither did he pay the wood dealer nor the landlord. All these little domestic arrangements he confided exclusively to the sagacity of Madam Gosse.

This evening she had said simply:

"It is necessary I go away for several days with Ursula."

And he replied to her equally simply:

"That is your business, you know better than I what you have to do."

Touching confidence, and may all Parisian husbands imitate his example—to talk in this wise to the wives of Paris.

It was not for that the inuendoes of the gossips had never reached him, for he had oftentimes remarked their disdainful pointings, their laughter in low tones, and the ironical chattering which they indulged in on seeing him pass.

But Monsieur Gosse laughed in his sleeve at all these trifles.

His wife had brought to his household a comfortable income and that sufficed this worthy public scribe. Madam Gosse, in fine, was worth more than all these babbling tongues, and why then, I pray you, should he believe evil *of her*?

And more than that, believing in it, farewell to the good cheer, the blazing fire, the tiptop supper, the snug bed, and the desirable little silver pieces in the fob pocket,

Long live philosophy! Monsieur Gosse was a philosopher.

"Then it is all understood," repeated Madam Gosse for the tenth time, who, doubtlessly credited a mediocrity of intelligence in the "adored wolf"—"should any one enquire for me?"

"You have gone to the country."

"With whom?"

"With your neice, Ursula."

"You comprehend perfectly? We have gone to visit a sick relation at Nanterre—and we will return?"

"In eight days or a fortnight," continued Monsieur Gosse, repeating his lesson.

"That's it. From time to time, every two or three days, you will give news of us, in a careless manner, just as if you had received a letter."

"Yes," said Monsieur Gosse.

"I do not know whether you will receive one, for example, still if I am unable to write be not uneasy upon our account."

Monsieur Gosse snapped his fingers in the air as if to say,

"It's all the same to me."

"Nothing will happen to us, neither to me nor to Ursula, that I promise you," continued Madam Gosse, raising her glass with a martial air.

The "adored wolf," mistook himself at this gesture and touched his sugared water against the grog.

"Your health, adorable bebelle!"

"What a duck of a man!" exclaimed Madam Gosse enthusiastically. "He is as stupid as a cabbage head, as faithful as a rabbit. He's just the husband for me. But let us make haste, the time flies apace."

She arose, settled at the counter for the sugared water and the grog, assured herself that nothing was lacking to the basket, readjusted her fallen plaid and walked out upon the sidewalk.

The cabriolet was stationed directly in front. She walked towards it with an air of deliberation.

"You are waiting for me, are you not?" she enquired.

The coachman quickly raised the leathern apron, Madame Gosse made a final gesture with her hand to her husband and established herself in the most obscure corner.

As for the public writer he stood for the moment upon the sidewalk, as if uncertain which way to turn, then wheeling sharp behind the vehicle he took the direction towards the Pont Neuf.

"You can go where you please," muttered this faithful spouse. "I'm not to pout about it; I have the money and I'm bound to have a time of it."

Then, assuring himself that he was no longer in sight, he poised his hat over his ear with a swaggering motion, pulled up his shirt collar with the gesture of a dandy, pirouetted his cane in the air and compressed his lips and whistled a roystering melody.

"That sugared water sets uneasy upon my stomach but I know a place where the beer is good."

He smacked his tongue against his palate two or three times.

"Eh, eh! she imagines she gives me uneasiness. You are at liberty to go, old woman, go! Liberty for ever!"

He caused his hat to spin a couple of times as he executed a *pas de zephyr* on the sidewalk in front of the statue of Henry Quatre.

Madam Gosse would not have recognized her "adored wolf"—but many men are naturally born monsters. During all this time the good dame, arranging herself as easily as possible in the corner of the cabriolet, imagined with tears in her eyes the sorrows of poor Gosse, whom she had left in single blessedness, far from his "adorable bebelle."

"How can he get along without me?" she sighed, "the poor, dear, adored wolf!"

Quarter to twelve struck from the clock tower of Sainte Eustache.

CHAPTER XLV.

POOR MISTIGRIS!

Let us reascend to the garret of Pippione.

The scene has completely changed aspect.

Ursula, leaning easily upon her chair, her forehead supported by her two arms crossed upon the table, sleeps with a heavy, painful slumber.

The lamp burns dimly, its wick encrusted through lack of trimming, throwing upon surrounding objects, flickering in its trembling light, a red sombre glare.

Pippione, likewise drowsy, is alone, gathered up upon the foot of the bed, Mistigris, the black cat, was also in obscurity and silence.

The lamp suddenly throws off an expiring flicker, as if a door in having been opened precipitately, agitated a current of air; then it went out filling the atmosphere with an acrid smoke.

Mistigris, as if started by a spring, leaped upon his four paws, and nothing could be seen in the darkness but his yellow eyes, sparkling like diamonds.

A deafened sound, stifled, almost undistinguishable, quivered through the garret. Such as we might conceive to be a cautious tread, the footstep of a burglar or an assassin.

A chair, stumbled against, glides with a crash upon the floor, then all is silent.

Pippione is wide awake, and, upright upon her mattrass, with dilated eyes, seeks to perceive something amid the obscurity of the room; she is immovable, gaping with terror.

She is petrified through fear.

Who can be coming to this chamber, at this hour of the night, and with such precaution? Where is Ursula? Why is the light gone out?

The noise is heard again. An arm stretched forth gropes among the furniture. At this moment it has touched the stove. Now the table—another silence—In her slumber Ursula draws a long, harassing sigh.

No longer able to master her fear, Pippione in a weak and hesitating tone of voice, demands:

"Who's there?"

No one answers.

"Who's there? who's there?" again demands Pippione, and her fear turns into frenzy. She appears to see before her a knife drawn upon her, and raising herself up suddenly she cries out in the full strength of her weak lungs:

"Help! help!"

Then, in the darkness, she feels the fingers of a brutal hand, encompassing her neck, pressing into her flesh, swelling up her veins. A warm breath passes over her face, while a coarse voice, low and deep, murmurs in her ear, with a bitter anger:

"Silence! devil's brat!"

It is the voice of Signor Cinelle, of the terrible *padrone!*

The poor child struggles to free herself from his frightful grasp. She stammers forth more and more feebly: "help! help!" when, suddenly, Cinelle, in his turn gives vent to a horrible shriek of fright, of anger and pain combined. His hand released the neck of Pippione, who sinking upon the bed clothes, loses her senses.

Mistigris has leaped to the succor of the child; solidly planted upon the back of Cinelle, he belabours his cheeks and shoulders with his long nails and tears his flesh with his sharp tusks. Cinelle struggles, seeking in vain to seize his quick assailant and overturning tables, striking against walls, blinded by the blood flowing from his face, he chafes around that narrow garret like a wild beast in a cage.

Finally he gives vent to a cry of exultation; he has seized the animal by the back and tearing him, clothes, flesh and all from his shoulder, hurled him in frenzy to the floor of the chamber.

Then, the cat, with his back broken, mewed most lamentably, whereupon to suppress this pitiable noise, Cinelle, drunk with pain and rage, uplifted his foot and crushed Mistigris' head beneath his heel.

It was time; the church of Saint Eu-

stache sounded the hour of midnight—less one quarter. Henceforth there would be no obstacle to the accomplishment of the enterprise, which Cinelle feared the poor animal's cries might render abortive.

He wiped his bleeding face with the first cloth coming handy, and shouldering Ursula within his arms set about descending the staircase.

However, dark as it was, the garret on the opposite side of the passage way had not been without a tenant. Against the door, standing ajar, a man held himself in position.

No sooner had Cinelle descended a few steps than this door was opened wide, a head leaned inquisitively over the balustrade of the stairway, and two watchful eyes penetrated the darkness.

"It is him, indeed!" said the spy to himself.

Despite this self assurance, the man continued to listen, and with such attention as to lose no sounds, even the most vague, circulating throughout the house.

Cinelle walked barefoot, yet, notwithstanding, the stifled tread of his feet could be distinguished; in fact the man counted the steps of the staircase as Cinelle passed over them.

Ten long minutes elapsed in this watching; for Cinelle, carrying the slumbering girl, progressed slowly through fear that a false step or other noise might alarm some one who could denounce him.

Finally the spy raised himself up.

"She is in the entry" he said, "now is the time!"

He reentered his own garret; in the lapse of a thousandth part of a second, a candle was lighted, passed quickly through the narrow opening of the skylight and extinguished.

Then climbing upon a table, arranged in advance for this purpose, the young man looked out, leaning over into the street, half his body resting beyond the roof, in a manner sufficient to produce a dizziness.

The thousand noises of the street, the indistinct and confused sounds of passers by, of hasty steps upon the sonorous sidewalks, of the distant roll of carriages and carts, ascended up to him, yet amid all these conflicting noises, he appeared to watch for one alone, and the better to hear that he held his breath.

At last a smile passed over his lips; the street door opened and closed; he recognized the grating sound of the bolt as it shot into the lock. Then, quickly beneath him the rolling of a carriage sounded from the street; the rolling ceased; the door of a cab closed with a clamor; this done, the rolling of the vehicle recommenced.

The spy leaned forward, leaned forward to see all. Had not one of his hands firmly grasped the leaden gutter pipe he would certainly have been precipitated to the pavement.

But he threw himself back—he had seen enough! He had seen the vehicle turn, at a rapid pace, the corner of the market place and take the direction of the wharves.

Madam Gosse, on her part, lay tranquilly asleep within the cabriolet.

Midnight sounded—the hour indicated to the coachman. He was aware that another person, a sick young lady as he had been informed, should likewise be taken into his vehicle, but he knew likewise that he was to move at midnight precisely, and the young lady had not come.

He went as far as the coffee house to hunt up his customer who had hired him and paid in advance. Le Gigant, seeing everything in proper train, had departed—he was no longer to be seen.

"Bah!" said the driver to himself, "they have changed their ideas; anyhow I must take the old lady."

And, bestowing upon his horse a vigorous cut from his whip, he drove off rapidly in the direction of the rue Montmartre.

It was then midnight and a quarter. Madam Gosse snored within her cabriolet and dreamed that Gosse was upon his knees praying her never to leave him again.

Nevertheless at that moment the

"adored wolf" was luxuriating in a brewery of his acquaintance, his sprightly hat inclined more and more over his ear;—to the deuce with sugared water, long live John Barleycorn!

At the bottom of the cellar of the *Cafe des Escarpes*, at the table where we have seen him some hour before, seated in front of Louis Jacquemin and Le Gigant, Cinelle was not alone.

Oh! in faith, had one of those curious seekers after strange characters, who had hitherto visited this place, whose bad repute was so little merited, entered this evening, he would have cause to believe himself in the presence of a hero of some drama of dark deeds, such as we read about in the columns of the *Police Gazette*.

Still pale from terror Cinelle wiped with his coat sleeve his scarred countenance, while emptying, glass after glass, the bottle of brandy placed before him.

There still rang in his ears the savage, almost humun, cry, emitted by Mistigris, crushed beneath his foot upon the floor. He heard, likewise, the strangled voice of Pippione as she cried:

"Help! help!"

This voice, this feeble voice, suddenly ceased, and why? In his drunkenness Cinelle remembered to have been in a furious rage, his clenched hands stifled cries. Oh! if he had killed Pippione! if he had compressed her throat with such violence and she so weak!

Still to assure himself as to the truth of this suspicion, it was necessary to reascend to his garret, and do this the miserable wretch dared not.

CHAPTER XLVI.

POOR PIPPIONE.

All in that house in the rue Rambuteau was silent and dark; not altogether dark, though, for a light appeared still at the top of the façade from the sky light of one of the garrets.

It illuminated the domicil of Joseph.

There was his refuge, his priveliged retreat, wherein, during hours of lassitude and of doubts he shut himself up in solitude to re-emerge, some hours afterwards, as the Jose of other days.

There, ne had none of that luxury surrounding his sumptuous apartments of the rue Chausse d' Antin. A simple beadstead, a long pine coffer, sufficing to contain his clothes, and hanging from a nail, a leathern belt, the sole souvenir, remaining to him of Biasson.

For the moment he appeared immovable, his eyes fixed upon this belt, as he meditated:

"Ah! Jose! rich, powerful, but were you not more happy, as the poor and free child, before being saddled with the enormous task of reestablishing the name of Rancogne?"

"Truly, is not this a dream? Was it not yesterday, when, girded with this belt, you set forth to discover the treasure! was it not yesterday that burning with fever, the old mendicant exclaimed in agony:

"'Believe me! Rancogne, Rancogne is saved!'

"The millions discovered. Helena, released from a tomb of infamy, yourself a miserable ignorant child transformed into an accomplished gentleman, long nights spent over books to learn that of which you were ignorant, long days expended in arduous and fervent works and in multiplied characters, what is all this, my poor Jose. You have loved but two beings in the world: Helena and Cyprienne. To Helena, you have been unable to restore her child, dead alas! And you still doubt whether you can rescue Cyprienne from the marriage destined for her."

Oh! willingly would you give life, everything, even to honor—that honor, of which an enlarged soul now comprehends its price—to see again the

joyous smile illuminating the forehead of Helena, or for Cyprienne to stretch forth her sweet white hand in saying to you:

"'I thank you, brother!'

"And how many the tasks imposed upon me by the generous, the passionate desire of Madam de Monte-Cristo! To save Ursula from the meshes of Le Gigant; to lead Jacquemin back to good; to make both happy and in this wise console Nini Moustache and Madam Jacquemin. To snatch Madam de Puysaie from the jaws of despair, to restore Lilias to her condition in society, to liberate Cyprienne, and other sacred duties. To dream of the happiness of all, and not to reserve a minute to yourself; ever even to work for the good of your race and perchance with no avail.

"Why are there so many wretches on the face of the earth? This work of yours would be pleasant to the soul were it not that to secure peace to the nestlings, we must trample on the road, the vipers, "And such vipers to bruise beneath our heels!"

"Le Gigant, Dr. Toinon, Colonel Fritz, Matifay, all rich, powerful, ready to sting, yet all condemned through the inexorable justice of the Countess de Monte-Cristo."

And in this wise sadly ruminated Jose, when suddenly his eyes rested upon another relic, upon a rose, a little ornamental rose, fastened to the frame of a mirror. Then, replete with power and good intent, Jose, throwing back his chair, exclaimed:

"Come! It is decreed that through their destruction she shall be saved; no distrust; no relaxation; no respite—on with the work!"

He had slowly taken off his blouse, and in front of this little fifteen sous looking glass, he accomplished a veritable dandy's toilet; pantaloons of black casimere, white waist coat, an embroided shirt, a coat glistening with decorations: nothing was wanting. Then, descending his step, he opened the door and made ready to descend the staircase.

The transformation was complete! It was no longer Joseph but don Jose de la Cruz.

But at the head of the stairs he stopped and listened.

On the other side of the partition towards the home of Cinelle was a confused murmur, a sort of dirge, fantastic and plaintive.

The handsome grave countenance of Jose suddenly became overcast with sadness as he murmured:

"Poor Pippione! I was going to forget you. Now Ursula is no longer with her."

He reentered his chamber, lighted a candle and knocked gently upon Cinelle's door.

No one responded.

Then he opened the door wide, for it was only closed by a latch, and this is what he saw.

The chairs were overturned; the lamp broken in a corner and the bed unmade—Joseph felt his boots slip upon the floor. He looked; it was blood!

Blood everywhere, upon the backs of the chairs, upon the walls, upon the sheets; in the middle of the chamber lay a napkin which had served as Ursula's table cloth and that was full of blood.

The bed was empty, and in the most obscure corner, concealed, hidden behind the wings of Ponchinelle theatre, Joseph perceived at last Pippione.

She looked upon him with eyes wide astonished and haggard, and had upon hearing him enter ceased the singular song which resembled a dirge.

Joseph advanced towards her. At first she recoiled. But evidently she was fascinated by the compassionate gaze of the new comer, for immediately she parted from her face with one of her hands the long hair, flowing in disorder, the better to look upon him, the better to smile.

"Come, Pippione, my little one," murmured Joseph in the most assuring tone. "You must be reasonable and go back to bed."

The child replied not, seemingly astonished at hearing her name pronounced.

She bore in her arms an indistinct object, wrapped in a piece of the sheet, which she rocked too and fro, as a child uses her doll.

"What have you there?" continued Joseph, making a step nearer to her, and extending his hand to take the package which she pressed against her bosom.

But she pressed it still more closely to her breast — while melting into tears.

"It is Mistigris," she said, "my poor Mistigris."

She seemed to have forgotten the presence of Joseph and, resuming that slow dirge which he had heard without the door, she rocked the animal whose bruised head and bleeding paws hung down lamentably.

"Sleep, Mistigris! my poor Mistigris! he'll do you no more harm! he is not here! sleep, sleep, my poor Mistigris."

Then she recommenced weeping bitterly.

"He has killed him, sir, the wretch has killed him. He has carried away Ursula, he has killed Mistigris, Oh! some day or the other he will kill me, too, for sure!"

Joseph reflected as he took a sudden resolution.

"No, Pippione, he will not kill you if you come with me."

"With you?" she asked fixing her clear blue eyes upon the frank and generous countenance of Joseph, "and where will you take me to?"

"To some one who loves you without your knowing it," replied Joseph, "to some one who likewise loves your good friend Ursula, and whom Ursula venerates."

"And shall I see Ursula?" inquired the little one with distrust.

Joseph nodded his head softly.

Pippione drew herself up straight, but she cast her glance upon the cat lying upon the floor.

"And Mistigris!" she said in sadness.

"We will carry Mistigris likewise with us if you desire it," responded Joseph soothingly.

"Oh, then!" exclaimed the child, leaping into the middle of the chamber and stamping her naked feet upon the floor, "we will go, right away, if you please, Sir."

"Not in this manner, replied Joseph, "you must dress yourself."

Then, for the first time, Pippione, perceived that she was almost naked. She threw upon Joseph a long look, the true glance of a female, and endeavored to conceal her flushed face within her hands.

"Come, dress yourself quickly," said Joseph, who either saw not or did not comprehend this look.

"Oh, sir," remonstrated Pippione, attempting to unfasten her wretched petticoats of Italian make.

"And," continued Joseph as the trouble of the girl began to inquiet him as he observed it and felt the necessity of talking on for mere sake of talking. 'Are you too afraid of me, my little Pippione."

"Oh! me," she replied with a trembling, shaking her entire body as a tree bent by a storm. "I have never seen so kind a face as yours and never has, anyone spoken to me as you have spoken. You are good, I am sure, and I know that I love you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHAT PASSED IN THE CAB.

The carriage rolled on. For a long while it no longer rattled over the pavements of the interior streets, and through the windows of the cab Jacquemin could perceive to his left the long black line of wharves, and to his right the high tops of trees, obscurely profiled against the grey tinge of mist.

Not a sound! from time to time the tramp of some pedestrian upon the flagging of the sidewalk sounded sonorously and that was all—all save the uniform roll of the carriage over the softened soil.

The vehicle rolled on, on. With

heavy head, as in a dream vainly endeavoring to collect scattered ideas, Louis pressed against his heart the body of the child, hastily wrapped up, from which he felt the heat escaping.

"Should she die," he said to himself, "if to be certain of her sleep, they have administered the narcotic, if on the morrow morning, if when day breaks, fatal dawn, I should find myself with nothing but a corpse."

Then, at this frightful idea, he rapidly tore aside veils, cloaks, shawls, handkerchiefs and approached his burning cheek to the lips of Ursula, when, feeling upon his overheated face the fresh breath of the young girl, he felt at the same time I know not what species of reassurance and of calmness.

He had not seen her. The dim light of the street lamp when he had thrown her like a lifeless mass into the cab had with difficulty disclosed a portion of her pure forehead and a ringlet of silken lustrous black hair. Never mind! she should be beautiful, divinely beautiful, and the prophetic words of Joseph rung upon his soul; "Who knows? this night may perchance restore you Celine!" Celine! was this the promised Celine? and his arm pressed convulsively against the body, this stiff body which yielded.

Celine! how many times had he dreamed that he held her in this wise all against him sleeping and smiling. How many times in those blessed dreams had he maintained himself fixed, immovable, fearing lest he might awaken and dispel the vision.

Today again it appeared to him that he was dreaming and that this was Celine. Celine herself conquered at last and wholly his own, whom he was about to carry away to some quarter of the globe where no one could come and force her from him.

The vehicle rolled onward ever. Now it went at a slow pace, ascending the hills at Passy, then it turned to the left and entered the wood of Boulogne.

Ursula made a movement in her sleep and drew a deep sigh; the moment for awakening drew near.

This movement, this sigh reconducted Jacquemin to a more real appreciation of his situation:

"What shall I say to her?" he thought to himself, "when she shall awaken and put questions to me?"

The carriage had crossed the bridge at Saint Cloud and, ascending the rugged slope of the old town, gained the crest of the abrupt shore which runs along that part of the Seine, that bank side, woody and flowery, which is embellished at the same time by those charming hamlets of Bellevue, Louveciennes and Mendon.

The cab jolted at that painful moment while crossing the badly constructed avenues through a small wood and at each of these jolts the ringlet covered head of Ursula gently leaned upon Jacquemin's shoulders for support.

And the dishevelled ringlets brushed 'gainst the moist neck with such sweetness as might betoken a voluntary caress.

More and more deep drawn the sighs of Ursula heaved the bosom of her dress, while her rose tinted lips parted in rapid breathing. It was evident that the moment of awakening was not far distant.

Day commenced to break; the light of dawn penetrated dim and misty within the interior of the cab, lighting up here a portion of a white cheek there an ebony buckle, and lower down a thin delicate hand convulsively clasping the corner of a cloak. Jacquemin had a desire to gaze upon her face, still he had not courage to do so.

He feared to unmask that face, throw aside that cloak, or violate the secrecy of that veil.

He gently disengaged the arm encircling the girl's waist and transferred her to the corner of the carriage; then he disposed himself in the one opposite to watch over the still sleeping beauty.

Her slumber grew more and more agitated and she peopled it with dreaming images. She pronounced several names, those of Pippione, of Cyprienne, and in a lower tone that of Joseph: while her active respiration

caused a rustling of the shawls wrapped about her.

Joseph! Why should Joseph occupy a place in her dreams? Joseph, had he not then spoken falsely to Jacquemin? Did she love Joseph? Or was it Joseph who loved her? And was it for the profit of Joseph that this abduction had been planned?

All these ideas traversed the brain of Jacquemin like whirlwinds. All these questions were propounded to his mind simultaneously. All the bad, preverted or malevolent qualities of his nature awakened at the same time. Jealousy reached his heart, tore his breast, and overturned his blood. For a second he wished that he had Joseph in a corner of that cab that he might strangle him by the way of revenge.

Revenge! yes, for more and more the illusion, hallucination—call it by what term you will, this singular phenomenon—took possession of his brain that this indistinct form, half seated upon the cushion, touching his knees with her feet, intoxicating him with this wild influence of her presence could be no other than Celine.

And unable longer to resist he tore aside all, shawl and handkerchiefs, wrapper and veil, and Ursula was revealed to him sleeping, a smile upon her lips, her bosom heaving, and moving the lashes shadowing her beautiful eyes.

The effect of the narcotic was almost at an end for a livid paleness was apparent. A light rose colored cloud showed itself upon her cheeks and neck. Her lips opened slightly exposing to view behind the humid coral the sparkling brilliancy of pure white teeth, through which passed, as sweet and balmy as that of an infant, the calm breath of her slumber.

Then Jacquemin in extasy clasped his hands, exclaiming, "Celine! yes it is indeed Celine!"

The carriage stopped. It had passed through a gate way, painted in green, closing behind it. Its driver leaped from his seat and came to open the carriage door. Jacquemin recognized in him our friend Clement.

"Come, quick," he said, "pass me the girl. The doctors drugs have caused her to sleep well, but a soft downy bed will rest her far better. Besides we have no time to lose, within an hour we must be in Paris."

Jacquemin obeyed without saying a word. He no longer lived; he no longer thought. What! during all this night he had existed in a dream, a beautiful dream wherein he held his love within his arms and now he was to lose her, to surrender her to another.

For he doubted not that Joseph loved Ursula. If he loved her not, why all this interest he exhibited in her behalf, why this mystery, why his abduction?

Moreover—and this is manner of reasoning with all lovers—none could see Ursula without loving her; consequently Joseph loved Ursula.

And this idea, deeply rooted and established in a dream, took possession of the judgment of Jacquemin that that which he was destined to see this morning would eventually come to pass.

The door of the house, a charming cottage, garnished on the exterior with woodbine and virgin vines was open, and a small sized woman, warmly muffled up in a shawl, advanced briskly to the side of the carriage.

"Well, well!" said she, running up, and paying no attention to the dampening of her pretty feet upon the green sword, glistening with the morning dew.

"Well!" exclaimed Clement joyously, "here we are! I see you have your princess, emancipated from the wicked enchantress. But, for the moment the princess has need of a good bed, well warmed.

"All is ready inside. The dear creature! she must be cold."

And the charming little Madam Rozel, for it was indeed her, leaned over and implanted a kiss upon Ursula's brow.

"Alas! alas!" thought Louis Jacquemin, "it is to his sister that he has confided her! he loves her most certainly!"

But a new and better resolution prevailed within him.

"So much the better," said he, this time, "you have not merited her! you, you have not merited a like happiness! Joseph, has a brave heart; he is worthy of her, and she knows it, for she has been dreaming of him."

And with downcast brow, swallowing his bitter disappointment, he carried Ursula within the house.

After a lapse of five minutes he re-emerged in company with Clement, who smiled at perceiving him so sad.

"Well! my boy, what are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," responded Jacquemin, "that there are some who always have the good luck to be courageous and honest."

"Ah! bah!" retorted Clement. "God is good. Regret for faults and the determination to do better; and there you have the key to Paradise."

And he repeated, casting his eye upon the little house.

"Think well over what I say, Jacquemin, "it is the key to all sorts of paradises."

Then, jumping up upon the box, Clement resumed the reins and starts off, singing gleefully a song, the burden of which was a description of a happy home, adorned by an honest wife as a terrestrial glimpse of Paradise.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WHERE LE GIGANT SEARCHED.

Upon the morrow of the day upon which transpired the events, recounted in the preceeding chapter, a grand council was held in the directors cabinet in the rue Faubourg Montmarte.

The three heads of the association, Le Gigant, Dr. Toinon, and Colonel Fritz, were therein assembled.

Colonel Fritz had important intelligence, disastrous to the projects of his associates, which he desired to communicate to them, touching the disappearance of Madam de Puysaie, and the consequent breaking off of the marriage of Cyprienne with the baron Matifay.

Toinon had to relate the result of his mission to the house of Signor Cinelle.

Le Gigant was to give an account of the abduction of Ursula.

This abduction, adjudged in the first instance to be of secondary importance, assumed a more serious aspect after learning of the unexpected flight of Madam de Puysaie.

It became absolutely necessary to maintain Loredan in his primitive resolutions until after his wife should be re-discovered, and to accomplish this aim it was necessary to secure by all possible means the co-operation of Nini Moustache.

This co-operation could be assured as long as Le Gigant held Ursula in his power and away from her sister.

Hence more and more this adroit individual felicitated himself upon a precaution he had assumed by chance.

He did not conceal the gravity of the information imparted by Colonel Fritz, but nothing could be lost as long as he was assured of the persistence of Monsieur de Puysaie, and this persistence could not be a matter of doubt as long as his weak and hesitating brain had near him such counsellors as Nini Moustache and Colonel Fritz.

It was in fact a temporary check, an affair of time and patience. A woman of the rank and fortune of Madam de Puysaie could never disappear without leaving some traces behind her; the count would assuradly move heaven and earth to refind her and the three associates promised *in peto* to use their best endeavors that the husband's search after his wife would not be fruitless.

Le Gigant and the Colonel set about discovering the means to arrange the work in the most prompt manner to accomplish this result, when they

were interrupted by the noise of a dispute in the antechamber.

The clerks were heard interposing to bar the passage of some indiscreet visitor, and a remarkably bitter voice, that of an irritated woman, dominated over the wordy tumult.

"I tell you," thundered the voice, "he is here. I saw him enter."

And in truth the door was thrown wide open, and in it's frame gleamed the empurpled face of Madam Gosse.

By her side, drawn along by the collar of his coat, which she grasped with a firm and vigorous hand, she had Monsieur Gosse, crest fallen, contrite, and twisting in his hands, in all humility, the brim of his pearl colored hat.

"Come, hurry up!" exclaimed the stout woman as she thrust the "adored wolf" forward with such violence as almost to cause him to stumble to the centre of the chamber.

Then turning in a defiant manner, towards the clerks in the antechamber she rattled forth:

"I told you it was so—that he was here, and so I've come in."

Then the redoubtable midwife poised her hands upon her hips in the attitude of invoking bodily assault.

"And now," said she, "I'll stand no humbug; so none of your sweet scented stories,—Where is Ursula!"

Le Gigant felt a presentiment of some fresh annoyance.

"You know," he replied, "as well as I do."

"Yes, yes," roared the virago, "I see through your flimsey fables, "but if you think to impose upon me with your hypocritical airs, you are most egregiously mistaken, my dear sir, That game wont work upon me, I'll let you know."

"There is no intention to deceive you, my dear Madam Gosse—"

"It was all very well to get me into a cab, that took me all the way to the Chaton," exclaimed the retired mid wife, in a paroxysm of rage, "when you dragged me about town the whole night long to accompany Ursula I know not where! At Chaton, no Ursula; at my house, no Ursula, neither! And see what I found on my return to my own home, Monsieur Gosse, there, dead drunk, vomiting beer and wine all over my best carpet. But I intend that you shall give Ursula back to me—do you understand that? I have been ready, up to this blessed day, to lend myself to your mysteries, but to become an accomplice in leading a sweet, young creature to the bad, by the faith of a Gosse, never! I will not allow it, and I'll never taste that kind of bread. Now, one word for a hundred, I don't leave here without Ursula, or knowing what's became of her." And out of breath through delivery of this long tirade, and red with wrath, Madam Gosse took a seat, resolutely to demonstrate that she was determined to remain to the day of the Last Judgment, should it please her sovereign power.

"For heaven's sake, explain yourself. What about Ursula?"

"Yes, yes, play the scoundrel! Ursula has been carried off, *pardi!* and the devil only knows where you were carrying her, while I was trolling about in a cab towards Chaton. You reckoned without your host, I warn you, and you will have to think over your game a second time."

"But carried off by whom?" enquired Le Gigant. "For I give you my word that everything should have been carried out as we agreed upon. So, if Ursula did not go with you, I am absolutely ignorant as to what has become of her. Come, come, I have as much interest as anybody in having this matter cleared up. Collect your senses, refresh your memory, find some indication, which may lead to a trace of her, and I swear that I will be the first to exert every effort to refind Ursula, and to restore her to you."

The manner of Le Gigant implied such sincerity that Madam Gosse could not doubt for an instant the veracity of his assertion.

"What do you want me to say! I know nothing more about it than I

went to sleep in the cab, and when I woke up in the morning still in the vehicle, I was on the bridge at Chaton.'

"And alone?" enquired Le Gigant.

"Positively alone!"

"And, when yo returned to Paris?"

"About eight o'clock," interposed Madame Gosse.

"Ursula was neither at your house nor with Pippione?"

"Nor at the workshop either, for I stopped there as I was coming hither. They havn't seen her since yesterday evening."

"They," said Le Gigant, becoming thoughtful, "some one has intermeddled into our business with the intention of embroiling it. But who can it be? Listen, Madam Gosse," he resumed, after a moment of meditation, "don't spread this matter abroad —an indiscretion will render all our researches in vain. Return home, question anybody, endeavor to find out what Cinelle knows about what passed in Pippione's chamber last night, and if you find out the slightest details let me know right away, I, on my part, will set about work, and I trust before night to give you some tidings of Ursula. Up to that time I believe it to be the best not to allude to her abduction; find some explanation to account for her absence, the first lie coming uppermost, for example that we agreed upon, and by the faith of Le Gigant, I promise you to bring her back, and that I will."

During all this conversation Monsieur Gosse was plunged into a singular apathy. From time to time he glanced upon his irritated spouse a piteous appeal which should have melted a heart of stone, as perchance, through fear of being mollified, she turned her head aside; then Monsieur Gosse, in despair, beat his fingers upon the crown of his hat, with a sombre melancholly.

The poor man had a perfect consciousness as to the enormity of his offence, and dreaded an inevitable *tete a tete* with his "adorable bebelle."

That morning, distracted as to the fate of Ursula she had merely opportunity to bestow upon the culprit a few cuffs, but now, with what reproaches, alas would she not overhim?

And laboriously, the great wolf, who felt himself no longer adored, ruminated upon some scheme to escape the suspended and inevitable scene. Moreover, if it was only a scene he would have met it with commendable resignation, but he foresaw in the future, a series of reproaches and privations almost sufficient to render life unendurable. No more savory plates, delicately served up by the skilful hands of Madam Gosse; no more Sunday excursions to the country; no more pieces of silver in his fob pocket.

And in view of these lamentable results of his disobedience the unfortunate Monsienr Gosse gave vent to sighs, any of them powerful enough to turn a windmill.

The ungrateful Madam Gosse feigned not to perceive all these signs of contrition, so it was in a tone, indulged in by a melodramatic gaoler, conducting his prisoner to a dungeon, that she addressed her domestic transgressor:

"Come, now! you precious rascal!"

Le Gigant with a gesture took leave of Toinon and Colonel Fritz, as he had need to reflect seriously upon the incident. Fools alone believe, in the first place, in the occurrence of chance, and Le Gigant was no fool. Hence he could only admit of the probability of an accidental hazard as a last extremity. Despite himself an intimate connection established itself between the disappearance of Madam de Puysaie and that of Ursula. This double embarrassment of his plans, within the space of a few days, was doubtless the handiwork of some unknown antagonist. Who was that antagonist? this should be determined at all cost.

Who was prompted, through interest, to break off Cyprienne's marriage? Who was concerned in the fate of Ursula?

To this double question Le Gigant could suggest but a solitary response, a solitary individual—Nini Moustache.

Nini Moustache, whose sister was Ursula; Nini Moustache, who did not hesitate to make known the repugnance she entertained towards aiding in Loredan's ruin.

After a reflection of some three minutes Le Gigant completely exonerated the doctor from all suspicion of animosity. In addition to his notorious stupidity, the poor fellow entertained too holy a terror for his good friend Hercules to ever enter into a strife against him.

The Colonel?

"Ah," here I have an adversary of a much more serious calibre, he is audacious, skilful, courageous, and, moreover, he was the mainstay of the place.

Le Gigant had made up his mind, in advance, as to the inevitable occurrence of a contest between the two from the day, whereupon the division of the spoils was agitated, for he doubted not that the colonel's intention was identical with his own; that is to say, that he as well as Le Gigant had inwardly resolved to divide nothing, but to pocket all.

Still, to keep a watch over him, it was necessary to keep him on hand. No marriage and Matifay's millions would be beyond the colonel's reach as well beyond that of Le Gigant: then the colonel had as deep an interest in bringing about Cyprienne's union with the baron as Le Gigant could urge; consequently the disappearance of Madam de Puysaie could not be justly attributed to that person's intervention.

This reasoning was too correctly established not to satisfy the logical spirit of Le Gigant; it was not upon the track of Colonel Fritz that the obstacle could be discovered, if any obstacle did realy exist.

But, then, where turn?

"Ah! Bah!" quoth Le Gigant wearied with aimless meditations, "we will see before long. In the first place let us sound Nini Moustache; if it be not her who has struck thee I can soon find out from her attitude all she knows, or else she is a better comedian than I gave her credit for. If not—well! her womanly instinct and her affection for her sister will betray her unto some clue, more certain than all the suppositions my brain can conjure up at this time."

"Let us wait!"

Le Gigant awaited no length of time—a half hour scarcely elapsed before one of his junior clerks opened the door of the private chamber, saying,

"That lady is here!"

And Nini Moustache entered like a hurricane.

"It is not her!" thought Le Gigant; "she would not be in such a hurry to present herself for a rigid examination. Nevertheless it may be so. The devil is tricky and woman kind a deal more so. As for me I'm sharp enough for the devil and the woman put together."

"What have you been writing me?" exclaimed Nini Moustache as soon as the door closed; "What about Ursula?"

"Ursula," responded Le Gigant coldly "Ursula has disappeared."

"Disappeared!—then it is too true!" The unfortunate woman wrung her hands with an inexpressable anguish. "Hold, Le Gigant! what you have done is downright infamy! You promised me aid and protection!—at what price, in God's name!—and behold the fruit of your promises. They told me truly when they said that your word was worthless and that I was wrong in making myself a slave to you in the hope of softening your hard heart through submissions. They told me too that some day or the other you would betray me—"

"Ah! ha!" they have told you all this," repeated Le Gigant, "who is this *they;* thats a matter to be found out."

"And I, like a fool, would not believe them, for I thought you would at least keep a sacred word of honor, as you

swore to me you would. Ah, fool! fool! and now my poor sister is lost to me by my own fault. Still, trust not to deceive me again. Ursula has disappeared for me, but for you; yes, not for you, and all things confirm this. Yes, everything proves to me that you, Le Gigant, are her abductor!"

"I!" ejaculated Le Gigant, shrugging his shoulders, "and I to be the first to apprize you of that fact, at the risk even of impelling you to some extremity which would jeopardize my own success—come now; be reasonable, my dear girl."

"Eh! do I not know myself what are your deep laid plans, and towards what an infernal aim you are progressing?

"And if the love of Ursula is necessary to your success, if I only know that, that you should make of her a slave to your intrigues, as you have made one of me! She, my Ursula! my white dove, descended to the degradation I am now in, a degradation wrought by you! Oh! no, no, no, Le Gigant, you are strong, I am weak, but I swear to you this must not—this shall not be!"

Le Gigant adjudged it not expedient to reply to this frenzied tirade; he shrugged his shoulders again and awaited her further action.

"Let us see," resumed Nini Moustache, "what is necessary to be done to reclaim her for you, to redeem her to me. They told me—"

"Always *they*," murmured Le Gigant.

"They told me that this gold stolen from Monsieur de Puysaie, the price of my infamy, of my share in the booty, you seek to get back, and to attain that end you menace me through the welfare of my sister. Well! this gold I have brought with me. Here are the bank bills, the price of the house, the jewels, all!"

She threw a heavy package upon the desk.

"Take it. For this money burns my hand ever since I yielded to the temptation. I could not find rest nor sleep. But now since I can do nothing for you, now that I have nothing in this world but the gown upon my back, let me melt your heart! Restore to me Ursula, restore me my sister! and who can say? Perchance I may have courage to pardon all the evil you have done to me."

Le Gigant continued to preserve silence.

"What more do you want? what do you exact? Speak! impose your conditions! What do you claim of me, to inflict upon me such horrible torture? Is there any one else to ruin? Must I become again handsome, wipe my eyes and smile? Well! I will commence again. I will sup, I will dance, I will sing, and you can call me again Nini Moustache! Oh! do not fear, I will revolt no more; I will never spoil your prospects by my scruples, but, but, for the love of God! give me back my sister!"

Of a surety Le Gigant was not tender-hearted; still, despite himself, he was moved by this sincere and bitter grief, and it was with an almost sincere emotion that he replied:

"I swear to you that were it in my power, I would restore her to you unconditionally, but I am in absolute ignorance as to what has become of her."

Nini Moustache had thrown herself at his feet, but she raised herself up suddenly.

"This is good," she said, "and since you are without pity, I know what remains for me to do. As long as you remained faithful to your promises, I would on my part have served you faithfully. I have been wrong, I have been wicked, but not for my sake, but for that of Ursula. Imprudent man! who believes, perchance, but that, to hold me in chains, you would not carry her off a second time! Adieu—I renounce you to save her. Well! lost to-day, lost to-morrow—she will become some day through you a thing with which you would not soil your hands! But, remember you, Le Gigant, I renounce not revenge. Your plans I know

them not, but I can imagine them, and rest assured that you and such as you will always find me to intervene. I have been your faithful tool and I will likewise be as faithful an enemy. This I swear to you, and if I be too weak in my own self—well! I know where to find those who will aid me."

And without awaiting any response from Le Gigant, who was astonished at her change in manner, she went out without even casting a thought upon the bank bills, as they lay piled upon the covered table.

"Go! go! my girl," murmured the business agent as he looked upon her exit, "thy little teeth are not sharp enough to bite through my coat of mail; as to your friends your own movements will make them known to me—and then we'll see if they prove so much to be dreaded."

"It is all the same," he continued, absorbed in meditation, "here is a deep game played and I have lost the first hand. It is clear that upon this mysterious *they* she reposes all hope. Who is this *they* who has appeared against me, this *they* who in the Puysaie affair inspired her with such virtuous scruples which she could not have discovered in her individual conscience.

"Well! we will see this *they*, for without doubt she cannot let this day pass without going to some one to descant upon her petulant affront."

While making these rapid reflections, Le Gigant took down his overcoat, the collar of which he turned up with care, closed the door of his office and descended the stairway of twenty steps; then with a rapid glance he inspected the sidewalk to the right right and left.

The skirts of a black gown were at that instant, disappearing into the passage of Jouffroy. Le Gigant instituted a brisk pursuit after this dress which he seemed to recognize, and saw with profound satisfaction that in this surmise he was not mistaken.

It was in fact Nini Moustache communing with herself and moving rapidly through the glazed arcade.

With an easy step Le Gigant followed her, taking pains not to hasten his steps so much as to allow her to perceive that he was watching her, remaining behind her, so as to escape her sight, but taking care that he should not lose view of the object he followed.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RAGE OF THE LIONESS.

At the same hour when Le Gigant, Toinon and Colonel Fritz assembled for mutual discussion of the steps by them taken, a council was convened, for a same kind of object, at the house of the beautiful Aurelia.

Don Jose de la Cruz there related in all its details, the abduction of Ursula and that of little Pippione, transported by him to the domicile of Madam Lamouroux, while the faithful Postel, who was no other, as our readers doubtlessly remember, than Madam Jacquemin, concealed beneath a false name to escape the brutalities of her son Louis, gave them the latest intelligence concerning Madam de Puysaie.

"The Countess," said she, "cried bitterly during the first day but now the calmness of the *refuge* has come to her relief, our sisters have strengthened and consoled her. She has confidence in you as we all have, and she remits into your hands not only her destiny but those of persons most dear to her—her husband and her daughter."

"It is well," responded Aurelia, "I have new instructions and will write. Await a little, my dear Jacquemin, you will carry my letter and I count upon you to decide whether the orders I shall send will appear too painful for execution.

"Go however with Joseph, who has

likewise many things to relate to you concerning your son, and I trust the news is of such a kind as to give you pleasure.

She extended her hand to take leave of Joseph and Madam Jacquemin. This latter took hold of it and respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"For all that you may do for him, madam, may you be blessed."

Aurelia remained alone in her dressing room; around her bloomed all species of delicate and luxurious flowers; silks and satins of brilliant hues covered the walls; upon the toilet table stood bottles of gold and enamel, breathing forth subtile and rare perfumes, while from the ceiling depended lamps, ornamented in the highest degree of beauteous art.

In this charming retreat everything spoke the senses delicately enervated. But she, pale and disdainful, indifferent to all the allurements of riches, in the midst of which she seemed to exist a a stranger, was wrapt in a deep and sombre meditation.

At that moment she was by herself and could give way to the impulses of her nature, for she had no part to enact, either odious or sympathetic. She was no longer the sumptuous Countess of Monte-Cristo, nor the cynical Aurelia, nor the angelic Madam Lamouroux; she became herself again —Helena.

Poor Helena!

No more comedy! Oh serene forehead! you cannot change the deep wrinkles wrought by incurable immortal sadness. Lips, you have no use for smiles; eyes, sad eyes, which have wept so much, you can accord to sterility of despair the consolation of a solitary tear!

But no, unhappy woman, resume the mission imposed upon you, put on again your mask—of indifference or of raillery. To your part! Your duty is not finished! Forget your own sorrows, think of those of others.

The sound of a voice is heard on the outside of the door closed for this morning against all the world. Aurelia recognises the knock of Nini Moustache and hastens to open it for her in person.

"What do you desire of me?" she asked coldly.

Worn out by excitement and fatigued by the rapidity of her march, Nini threw herself, at the moment of entering, into an armchair. The question caused her to start.

"What do I desire! That you give me a proof of the power of which you have boasted, by returning to me my sister. That is what I desire."

Aurelia smiled imperceptibly.

"Your sister! go ask her of Le Gigant."

"Oh! I have not deceived myself! it is him, him indeed! but you will aid me, will you not, Aurelia? Tell me where he has hidden her and I will go myself in search of her and wrest her from her abductors, and this time I will not leave her until we are both far away from here! Oh! that they should come to retake her when I held her here—between my two arms and against my breast."

This passionate prayer could not move Aurelia, and contracting disdainfully her lips she bit them with her white teeth.

"You have had more confidence in Le Gigant" she responded, "than you had in me. Therefore from him to-day you should ask aid and pity. As to me I know you no longer."

"Oh! this is true," exclaimed Nini Moustache, throwing herself on her knees. "I have been a wretch! From the first step in the path you indicated to me and which I promised to follow I have hesitated, I have grown weak and I have deceived you. Oh! but if you are truly that which you appeared to me. That which caused me to understand words which appeared to fall from a divine mouth, you should be celestially merciful! What is there in common between human rancours and you who are so high above our level? yes, Aurelia, I have betrayed you and I have been most speedily and surely punished for it; but as you know this man and the

rod of iron beneath which he has ruled me for so many years, you will excuse and pardon me. He fascinates me, I tell you. In his presence I have neither will, force, courage, conscience, nothing, Oh! but I have at last broken my compact; I have broken it this morning even, and will never keep it again. I have menaced him, yes I have dared to menace him. From this hour a return is impossible and I have come to you, Aurelia, to be yours, yours wholly. I will obey no one but you, I will listen to no one but you. I will become your servant, your dog, anything if you give me back my sister."

"If I give you back your sister," responded Aurelia with the same implacable coldness, "on the morrow you will betray me as you have betrayed me before. Jesus himself was denied thrice. Believe you, that I know you now, your weak spirit and volable heart? Oh! it is true at the time I thought you strong, "I stretched forth a hand to raise you up, yet the experience suffices me, you are not sufficiently ripe to do good and your resolutions for virtue have no more consistency than heretofore had your caprices for debauchery. I await—"

"You await! what await you?"

"I await that your unreliable spirit shall be tried amid anguish and sorrow; I await until your theatrical despair to which I give no credence, shall become a sincere and calm grief, I await until your melodramatic exclamations shall be converted into silent tears; I await until your impetuous promises, of which I have already seen the result, shall become efficacious works. Then, and not until then, will I see you again and perchance may aid you—"

"Ah, you abandon me likewise! I am lost! you have abandoned me!"

She smiled bitterly.

"Have you only the right of sustaining me? have you the power?"

"I see clearly that you doubt me still," said Aurelia, disdainfully shrugging her white shoulders.

"And how cannot I doubt you? you came to me, you promised me a protection, so to say, providential. A protection, to which an ordinary being, gifted with mere human power, so great was it, dare not engage herself. You would do for me—miracles! I can find no other expression, for is it not a miracle to repair all the infamy I have occasioned, a miracle to bear me from the tenacious grasp of Le Gigant, a miracle to cure Jacquemin of that love which has torn asunder his heart? All that you have promised me."

"I have promised," tranquilly said Aurelia, "what next?" "What next?" when I enquire into the interest impelling you, you give me answer, through some kind of mission, I know not what, you have imposed upon yourself and you're transformed into some supernatural being, fallen here below to wash away the sins of the world—mere follies, in which I was silly enough to put faith.

"But now when I reflect, your white wings have fallen off, your halo is extinguished, and I find no more than a woman like myself—like myself soiled and debased—and then—hear, please what I have to say to you—you, likewise, to intermingle with with these intrigues, have some secret aim, to which you would have me contribute—good or evil, I am ignorant which, but I think evil, for they do not surround good works with so much mystery. To this work I consent, and still do likewise consent to associate myself, but, at last, I desire likewise to impose conditions. That which you desire, that in which I can aid you concerns me not, I will do it if you will only restore to me Ursula, if you can get her from the hands of Le Gigant."

"It is already done," with the same unshaken voice replied Aurelia; "Ah! you doubt me, you who have been the first to break our compact, you know not what I have accomplished for your regeneration, for that of Jacquemin, or for the salvation of your sister. Yes, Ursula has been abducted from the house of the Gosses, her ac-

cidental parents, people of a dubious probity, but with whom she would not be out of our sight. Yes, without me at this very hour she would be lost for ever, perchance sunk to perdition. Well! while you were betraying me, I remained faithful, for your breach of your word did not exonerate me in my eyes from mine. I watched for you, I worked for you, and this protection which you doubted has become effectual.

"Ursula is no longer in the house of Gosses that is true. Upon that night she disappeared. She is no longer in the power of Le Gigant. She is in mine. She has been conducted by my orders to a secure retreat, where she will be beneath a tutelage much more honorable than that of the Gosses, until the day, when confident in me and regenerated yourself, you can say to her without being obliged to blush:

"Ursula, my child, come to the arms of your sister.'"

"Is this all true, all that you have told me?" inquired Nini Moustache, who could not rid herself of a remnant of distrust.

"You still doubt what I affirm to you," replied Aurelia, with a haughtiness and diginity so potent as to convince Nini.

"Oh! then pardon me, pardon my distrusts and doubts, but since you know where Ursula is, since you can now reassure and make me happy, since you have accomplished one half of the miracle you promised me, for mercy's sake perform all the rest. Restore her to me. Oh! is it not so, Aurelia; will you not restore her to me?"

"No!" responded Aurelia, firmly, "I will not restore her to you."

Nini Moustache drew herself up as if moved by a spring.

"No," repeated Aurelia, "I will not restore her to you——"

"You will not restore her! Then in that case—Oh forbear! you will not force me to think—to say things——"

"Speak on," said Aurelia disdainfully, "from you I can hear anything."

"Well! I tell you then that you cause me as much fear, if not more than does Le Gigant, for you have his power, if not likewise his obstinacy. What, in fine, do you wish? What do you desire? Your mission of restoration is a mere nursery tale. To transform oneself into Providence! for nothing! for the sole desire of being useful to others—it is a dream, which can't enter into a human spirit! Each one of us pursue an advantage, a caprice, a vision; one seeks fortune, another love, another honor. And you, you would make me believe—ah! ah, ah!—Come, Aurelia, let us speak seriously; give me back my sister."

"I will not give her back!"

And each of these words fell clear and piercing as a blade of steel.

Nini Moustache cast a glance around to seek for some weapon, a knife or other instrument, overlooked in the arrangement of the apartment, with which to throw herself upon Aurelia.

"I will not surrender her to you," reiterated Aurelia, for the fourth time, with an emphasis, showing that her frigidity had not deserted her.

"And, once for all, what is your title? By what right do you retain my sister? To protect her? If such be the pretence, I do not wish you to protect her. Is she your sister or mine?"

"All women are sisters."

"Oh! I know, you are going to repeat your hypocritical sermons, but it will not serve your purposes—do you hear! I ask for my sister; I demand her return to me."

Wild with excitement, foaming at the mouth, she seated herself.

Aurelia scanned her with a long glance—such a look! a look replete with compassion and of infinite meekness.

Then as Nini remained seated in her silence, plunged into bitter wrath and heart-born hatred, she assumed a seat by her side.

"Celine! Celine," she murmured, in a soothing, plaintive tone of voice,

"why do you torture me, you one of my daughters of election? Have I not had sufficient trials to undergo? Have I not had sufficient struggles to wage against common enemies, that you, you whom I have chosen, above all others resembling you, for your salvation, you should come and place one obstacle, or stumbling block before me. You have not wounded me, my poor girl, in comparing me with Le Gigant; my heart has already received too many murderous blows not to render me callous. No, you have not wounded me, but simply afflicted me.

"Think well upon it, I have but a word to say, a gesture to make, to cause you to fall upon your knees and beg pardon from me for the injurious doubts you have conceived, for the insults you have cast upon me. But no, poor soul, it is to you alone that I would have you do your duty. Listen to me, Celine, you are a woman, you know to distinguish the manner of falsehood from that of truth; you know how the voice hesitates, how the most audacious look turns aside. Well, listen to me, look upon me and dare then to believe after that that I would lie to you!"

Nini Moustache lowered her eyes, vanquished by this sincere accent; but this movement lasted but a little while, for, looking at Aurelia full in the face, she said in a deep voice:

"Give me back my sister."

"Be it so then," exclaimed Aurelia arising, "you are then determined to drain the last dregs of the cup of bitterness which I desired to turn aside from your lips. You believe not in my sincerity; I will furnish you, an answer, such an answer that you can no longer distrust my word."

And going to one of the doors, leading to an interior chamber, she opened it wide:

"Come, Madam," she said, "come and pardon the evil which this unfortunate has caused me to inflict upon you."

Nini Moustache raised herself up anxiously, but fell back into her chair, humiliated.

"Madam Jacquemin!" she murmured.

Ah! it was the past resuscitated, and during that brief minute's time she reviewed her entire existence. Her father, her dear father, seated from morning to night, upon his humble watch-maker's bench, and the little Ursula, flitting around the chamber as a bird in liberty, and Louis, poor Louis, so industrious, so orderly, so loving, concerning whom she owed a terrible account to his mother.

She had concealed her head behind her hands to shut out this avenging spectacle, but Aurelia, with violence, thrust those hands aside.

"Look!" said she. "Be punished for your doubts! Your answer here you have it. It is her whose son you have destroyed and who has confidence in me to save him. It is the mother of Ursula, do you understand, for into her hands you have surrendered your authority over her.

While you were gadding about to festivals, burying your senses in revels, drowning remorse and despair in floods of champagne, exhibiting your sorrow full of misdeeds in carriages and equipages, she, seated by her humble hearth side, employed her weak eyes to procure for Ursula the daily bread needful for the sustenance of her body and exhausting all the treasures of her heart to sustain her soul. Would you speak to me, of your rights! would you cry out to me: 'my sister,' 'give me back my sister!' This woman can say of Ursula with more justice than you can: 'my daughter'—her daughter do you comprehend? for it is I who have confided her to her."

Madam Jacquemin gravely inclined her head.

Then opening wide her maternal arms she murmured:

"Celine! my child!"

The poor girl, hesitating, trembling, expected neither this word, nor this gesture. She threw herself, all tears,

into the arms extended towards her, and leaning upon the shoulder of Madam Jacquemin, pronounced but two words:

"Forgive me!"

Then she turned her weeping eyes upon Aurelia.

"And you likewise, oh! Aurelia! will you not forgive me?"

"You were right," continued Nini, after a short pause, "this is, indeed, a cruel trial which you would have spared me. Oh! let my tears flow! from this hour forth I will doubt no more; if doubts come to me I promise you I will drive them away instantly. You have understanding; I, I know nothing! I am so accustomed to evil; I have dwelt within the circle of wickedness all my life; in every action I see at a first glance a shameful motive; could I imagine that there existed in the world beings capable of forgiveness and devotion?

"Oh! madam, I believe in you, that you are in every thing you claim to be, a celestial being, descended from heaven to share in our miseries, to suffer with us in our sorrows, to redeem us from our faults. That, which is mysterious in your mode of life, I have no desire to fathom—I am now assured that Ursula will be better defended by you than she can by me, and I, who would have cursed you but a few moments ago, now bless you, bless you from the bottom of my heart."

"You are right, Celina," interposed the slow, grave voice of Madam Jacquemin, "for that your heart will counsel you better than your reason. And to assure you against future derelictions, listen to this one, I have the right to assure you, I who know all your secrets. Whatever you may see, whatever you hear, whenever even your eyes, your ears, your conscience may accuse her, give the lie to eyes, ears and conscience, ever saying to yourself:

"She is a holy being!"

"Say to yourself simply, Celine," corrected Aurelia, taking the hand of Nini Moustache, as it hung down listlessly, "Yes, say you truly: she is a friend. And now," she added, in a tone of affectionate reproach, "shall I give you back Ursula?"

Nini Moustache had no time for reply for the interview was suddenly interrupted through the entrance of Joseph. He passed rapidly up to Aurelia and whispered some words in her ear in a very low voice.

Then you could have seen this woman so courageous and resolute, suddenly grow pale, tremble and lean for support quivering in every limb, upon the back of a piece of furniture.

Nini and Madam Jacquemin flew towards her to extend assistance but with a gesture she moved them back,

"I had trusted," she said, "that this meeting could have been avoided; but since it is imperative let God's will be done."

Her voice gradually resumed its force.

"You can speak aloud, Jose,—You say—?"

"That a man has been here this morning, many times, questioning the porter as to the names of the tenants in this house. The porter having been selected by me for discretion and fidelity, has given him no information. The persistent questioner, however, still hovers around the street, and this inquisitive individual is Le Gigant."

"He has followed me!" muttered Nini Moustache.

"It is well!" said Aurelia, "give directions to the porter to allow himself to be tampered with."

"Think you so?" ejaculated don Jose, "you, to trust yourself alone face to face with that man!"

But Aurelia only smiled, yet languidly.

"God punishes me," she said designating Celine with a gesture, "I desired to conjure up, but a short moment ago, reminiscences to confront you, and behold! mine have arisen in their stead. Oh! memories both cruel and bloody—But what matters it, I con-

front them; they will cause me neither to grow pale or to shudder.—You have heard and understood me, Jose: it is necessary that Le Gigant shall see me, speak to me and at the same time imagine that his own ingenuity has brought this interview about.

"However, leave me alone; before entering upon this odious business it behooves me to reaffirm my courage; I wish not that upon my countenance he shall detect a solitary trace of weakness nor a single avenging glance in my looks; I desire that he find here a sort of clay, like unto his own, a will like his own invincible for evil; it is with arms like these that he must be combated. Have a care, Le Gigant, it is not a victim you will find before your face; it is an adversary. It is no longer Helena, but Ursula!"

Discreetly, her companions retired, and she, to deaden the too brilliant light of the apartment, lowered the curtains so as to fill the boudoir with a sort of voluptuous half daylight.

Then she seated herself before the mirror and tutored her lips to the most seductive of her seductive smiles,

A half hour passed before she completed arrangements.

The door opened— a waiting maid brought a visiting card upon a tray of old Swiss china ware.

"Le Gigant," read Aurelia, then in a clear voice she added,

"Let him enter! I await his pleasure!"

CHAPTER L.

WHAT LE GIGANT THOUGHT TO HAVE FOUND.

The sound of Aurelia's voice had touched within the heart of Le Gigant a chord which had not resounded for a long time. Immoveable, affrighted, hesitating, he held himself aloof seeming to hear in the past, in that terrible and distant past, an echo of that voice.

Aurelia, without doubt, had no desire that he should remember it fully, she adjudged it proper to disturb his dreamlike meditation by proffering him a chair.

"Monsieur Le Gigant, I am awaiting your pleasure."

The tone of voice, in which she pronounced this sentence was radically different from that in which she uttered the first, so much so that Le Gigant smiled with himself at his childishness. It was not, however, without some semblance of astonishment that he replied:

"You were awaiting me?"

"Doubtlessly," said Aurelia, "and you see I had reason to await you inasmuch as you are present."

Le Gigant bowed profoundly as if to endorse this irrefutable display of logic, conveyed in the answer.

"I awaited you," resumed Aurelia, "for the self same reason that you desired to see me. Dont you see, Monsieur Le Gigant?"

And she delicately advanced her fine white hands, armed with long nails, like the claws of a cat, upon the thick elbow of Le Gigant.

"Let us not deceive each other. At that game we know not which of us will prove the most potent, and I avow to you, on my part, with the esteem I entertain for your ability it will only be upon defence that I would engage in a contest of the merits of which I am entirely ignorant. However, I will accord to you what you would disdain—coquetry of the craft! You have not as yet informed me to what inducement I am indebted for the honor of your visit; will you permit me to guess at its object, or at least to form some conjecture concerning it?"

Le Gigant anticipated the question. He bowed his head anew in token of assent.

A short silence ensued which Aurelia was the first to break.

"Are you a sportsman, Monsieur Le Gigant?

"Yes, without any doubt—well, has it never happened to you, when out for sport, to find yourself suddenly

disconcerted by the unaccustomed movement of the game; in which case you stopped, called off your dogs and you perceived the hare, roebuck or wild boar to be hunted by some other pack, than your own? Then, it naturally happened, did it not? that you sought to make the acquaintance of the other hunter, of the rival, who crossed your track; so that, to prevent the sport falling through, you could arrange with him to hunt in company, or if you could not effect such an arrangement you sought to trump up a quarrel, with the aim of pursuing the game untrammelled and alone.

"Well, Monsieur Le Gigant, we find ourselves at this moment in precisely the same position as would these two sportsmen. We are pursuing the same game—the millions of Monsieur Matifay. Hence is it not evident that skillful as we are both of us, the day must come when our tracks would cross, when our efforts would oppose each other, when in fine we should find ourselves face to face friends or enemies.

"There is the reason why you have come, my dear Monsieur Le Gigant, and the reason why I have been expecting you"

"It remains to be seen," said Le Gigant, indulging in his most malignant smile, "whether we come to an understanding or whether we do or not."

"I hope that we will come to an understanding" replied Aurelia coldly. "For in a contrary case, the game may perchance escape me, but assuredly you will not bag it."

Le Gigant shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you doubt it? Will you afford me five minutes of attention, and I am persuaded that I will be able to convince you of the entire truth of my assertion, and, in the first place, if you please, we will examine into your plan, sufficiently well conceived as to details, but which according to my view, fails in a grave manner with respect to its *denouement*. To press Monsieur de Puysaie to his ruin so that in despair and overwhelmed, he will make of his daughter a Madam de Matifay and thus unite upon the head of Cyprienne, sister to Lilias, the fortune of her mother and of the banker, our point, was, I think, a well planned scheme. In that Nini Moustache has been an excellent tool, and I ought to add that you played your game admirably. But now the tool has escaped you, Ursula is not in your power, she is in mine. You see that I play the cards upon the table. Become my ally and I will continue your task. Nini will continue her part as demoralizer of Monsieur de Puysaie. If not, I warn you, the marriage is at an end. Within two days Monsieur de Puysaie will oppose it as strenously as his wife does at this very moment."

"If she opposes it," murmured Le Gigant. "I know not in what the consent of her husband can be of good."

"Wait now," replied Aurelia, "this is first what I was coming at. You will understand, my dear sir, that it is to my interest to place stones in your way, so as to have occasion to say, as I have said to-day:—Let us divide. It is with this aim that I have spirited away Madam de Puysaie, at the very moment when her presence is absolutely indespensable for the success of your plan."

Where is then Madame de Puysaie?"

"I know her retreat: it will not be more, if we sign the fast alliance I propose to you, than two days before Monsieur dn Puysaic will receive her consent, in due form, to the marriage of her daughter. Lilias remains."

"You can find her!" ejaculated Le Gigant.

"With great ease," replied Aurelia with a diabolical smile, "but for me she never would have been lost. They think me but a weak woman, Monsieur De Gigant, but they do not thoroughly understand a hunt after millions."

A glance of defiance passed from Le Gigant's eyes.

"If you are so very strong," replied

he, "if you have already so many trumps in your hand what intent have you in seeking after a nother? Why not chase up your millions all alone without dividing them with anybody?"

"Why?" responded Aurelia, "because I fear you, and prefer having you for an ally than an adversary. Beside, there are certain incidents in the past life of Monsieur Matifay of which I am in ignorance and which I am forced to know. You alone can give me this necessary information. Monsieur, as I told you at the beginning of this interview, in hunting each for himself, our efforts may doubtlessly re-encounter and our prey thereby escape both of us, while, hunting in couples, we are sure to bring down our game."

"That's all very well," said Le Gigant, who evinced no desire as yet to surrender. "But suppose I accept the alliance you propose to me, then it becomes necessary to conjoin to your plan, of which I know nothing, mine which you find defective. What are your intentions in that respect?"

Aurelia drew her arm chair close up to that of Le Gigant and looked steadfastly into his face—into his eyes.

"You are a man, you!" she said with a sharp and cynical admiration.

"The man I stand in need of, the same as I, without boasting, can say, I am the woman that you need! Us two, Le Gigant, we can overturn whenever we think proper, from top to bottom this worm eaten state of society, which is our common enemy. To us will come for time, luxury, light, power! but to attain this magnificent result we must remain faithful to each other, so that we permit no exterior influence to slip in between us and thereby to neutralize our energies, we must be alone; of what use are avaricious or indiscreet accomplice's cunning, useless and over ambitious, whose province is to draw us on to dangers!

"The first sacrifice I ask is that of Colonel Fritz, and of Dr. Toinon,"

"But" extenuated Le Gigant, "the Colonel is father to Lilias and consequently the only bond of union between us and the millions of Madam Matifay, that is supposing Cyprienne becomes at last the banker's wife, Hence—"

"Hence?" interrupted Aurelia, "I have already told you that your plan was faulty with respect to its denouement and that we must modify it. No more presumptive treasons, no more difficulties about division of spoils, no more bickeringe, no more outbursts of anger; everything tempting the eyes, influencing the ears, indirectly towards divserion, consequently to the checkmate of the most brilliantly conceived combinations.

"A complicity, Le Gigant, and by a complicity I mean a complicity stern and absolute, the welding of two human wills into one, of two ambitions into one, of two souls into one, is only possible between a single man and a single woman. With a man and woman only, no more antagonism but a firm alliance; no more divergence of opinion or of intent but an absolute co-operation as a unity."

"You have not dreamed of all this, you! A woman, possessing all your instincts, intelligent as you are, as unscrupulous as you are and dominated, so to speak, by the same soul that you have!—Oh! I have oftentime dreamed of such a man, who would have completed my aspirations. What power would not this androgynous being wield, to whom all means of action are accessible and who should boast, at one and the same time, strength and beauty, perseverance and courage, all the energies of a man, all the strategy of a woman!"

"Yes," said Le Gigant, lowering his head, "such a pair would be indeed all-powerful."

"Well! Le Gigant," replied Aurelia, "look upon me!—do you not find me to be handsome."

With a gesture, replete with cajolery, Aurelia had placed her two hands upon the shoulders of Le Gigant and beneath his fine linen, he seemed to feel pressed against him the palpitating marble of those white hands.

He raised his eyes and encountered those of the beautiful courtesan, two flames, full of ardent promise; a giddiness came over him!

Then the sweat drops appeared upon his forehead, and he felt himself growing feeble.

That man had loved but once and then after a terrible fashion; that woman, whom he had loved, he would have made an accomplice, and unsuccessful in that he had made her a victim.

Since that time, all women with him had degenerated into passive agents, instruments for intrigues; he had not even deigned to look upon them to see if they were beautiful.

But at this moment, the old passion reawakened, vivacious, burning, inextinguishable, for, wonderful incident, a singular consonance confounded within his heart, troubled amazingly, the memory of Helene with the person of Aurelia; it even appeared to him that there was present the divine body of the first annealed by the diabolical spirit of the second.

And it was she, who demanded from him in her turn:

"Do you desire my love, will you join me in complicity?"

"Ah!" sighed forth Aurelia, leaning upon his shoulder, "if you could only love me! Before you I have encountered only simpletons, idiots or dupes! In you I have at last discovered my ideal of discreet and powerful manhood! And know you not what I offer you in addition to my love, which is in itself a reward not to be disdained?—The millions of Matifay, and at the same time a reputation for probity—shall I say it? for unassailable generosity. The means you count upon to conquer that fortune are full of peril; I have already pointed out that of accomplices. Beside, what excitements! Cyprienne, once a widow, must be made away with; after a perilous suit at law must be instituted before the civil courts to cause the civil position of Lilias to be recognized legally. Certainly, this done, you will have gained, yet at the price of what dangers? Justice is inquisitive, the judge of instruction oftentimes goes farther than is pointed out to him and then—"

Recognising the appropriateness of these remarks Le Gigant bowed.

"Listen on the other to what I propose to do. I have consigned Madam de Puysaie to any asylum whence she will never emerge for, upon leaving it, she will make clear her shame and expose Lilias to the vengeance of her husband. Well! Madam de Puysaie looks upon me as a saint; at the moment I rid myself of her, when I prepare her ruin and that of her daughter, she will kneel at my feet; If I am calumniated in her presence she will turn the calumniator out of doors.

"I have carried off Ursula as you wished to do, have I not?—What has been the attitude of Nini Moustache in your presence? She has cursed you, she has threatened you, is it not so? There can be no more dangerous enemy than this Nini, I forewarn you of that. Well, at this moment she is no longer ignorant that it was I who planned that abduction, and you are aware how she received that intelligence? By bathing my hands with tears and by protesations that I am her guardian angel, her providence!"

"The same with Cyprienne! the day when she is a widow, I will take away her fortune, she will bless and protest that I have saved her. Ah! up on that day I will marry her to the man she loves, and that man she loves is my slave.

"I too have my colonel Fritz.

"But a colonel Fritz without a dangerous past life, a youthful Colonel Fritz, sharp and tricky, and who, likewise, venerates me and owes all to me. Without me he can do nothing and disobeying me I will crush him like glass leaving him powerless to avenge himself.

"An innocent accomplice, whom I took poor, ignorant, and nameless, to make out of him one of the most elegant gentlemen of Paris, and whom I intend to convert into a millioniare,

and bestow upon Cyprienne as a husband."

"Has he power then to refuse us, he?"

"However he may refuse," interposed Le Gigant.

"He loves Cyprienne," replied Aurelia, "and a word from me would shipwreck all his hopes.

"Consequently, we have not made allusion in my programme to Lilias, to whom we shall assure an honest but ordinary future— and the countess will be under eternal obligations for your silence—we will marry Cyprienne to my protege and render both happy while at the same time enriching ourselves.

"Upon the day of the marriage, we will discover the unknown father of don Jose de la Cruz and he will find that father in you and his mother in me and behold us entering the mansion of de Puysaie by the grand entrance, by that opened to his respected parents.

"A universal concert of benediction will salute us; not a suspicion, not a crime and nevertheless our aim accomplished.

"This is my plan!

"It merely remains to divest our selves of the accomplices you have stupidly introduced into yours.

"Dr. Toinon——"

"Oh! as to him," exclaimed Le Gigant laughingly, "there is nothing to fear from him, he is too cowardly! a little sop is all he wants to enable him to live as a retired tradesman, which with a threat, plainly set forth, must suffice him, but I take charge of the doctor."

"It is also necessary, if you please" quoth Aurelia with a sardonic smile," for you to take charge of Colonel Fritz.

"Oh! be reassured we should not be directly mixed up in this affair. It is necessary, when we present ourselves as the father and mother-in-law of the beautiful Cyprienne that your honor shall be as immaculate as mine."

"As yours?" said Le Gigant with an undisguised exhibition of raillery, as he pointed to the furniture of the boudoir, where nothing, to speak the truth, showed signs of honor.

"As mine," repeated Aurelia tranquilly. "At the point at which we have arrived I can avow everything, for I am certain at this moment that you will accept my propositions. Once my work accomplished, that is to say within a few days or a few weeks, the beautiful Aurelia, the impure being, will exist no longer, and there will remain at Paris but her living likeness—the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

"Thus, all the world knows that the honor of the Countess of Monte-Cristo is immaculate and that no person dare entertain suspicion either as to her or the persons she takes beneath her all-powerful protection and responsibility."

Le Gigant opened his eyes with stupefaction.

"The Countess of Monte-Cristo!" he exclaimed, "that great lady of whom all Paris has been speaking for the past six months."

"I am she," responded Aurelia coldly. "I am designedly wrapped up in mystery and everybody will be astonished when I reveal my veritable name of Countess de la Cruz and when I present my husband and m-- son.

"In all this I have done all, you may believe me, strictly according to rule. I have all the proofs, necessary without possibility of dispute the identity of us three, who dares doubt it beneath this royal authorization."

She went to a lacquered bureau and thence produced a paper carefully folded up within a large envelope, which she handed to Le Gigant. This letter signed by the King, was addressed to the Countess of Monte-Cristo and contained but a few autographic lines.

These lines made allusion to some great and passed misfortune, the fatal secret of which was known to his Majesty. Then followed assurance of profound esteem with promise of constant protection; in fine the letter

terminated with a formal authorization to bear the name and title of Countess de la Cruz.

Le Gigant returned the letter to Aurelia after having perused its contents. He could not conceal his admiration:

"From the first words addressed to me," he said, "I recognised your power, but now I bend to it; for, carried to this length it must be deemed genius."

"You are too kind," quoth Aurelia making an ironical reverence. "My secret is a simple one. It consists in saying nothing but the truth, but not the whole of it, it is of all methods of lying, invented by females, the very best.

"But let us return to the subject of our interview. Time is precious and so that no one shall suspect our alliance this interview will probably be the only one between us until the day of our triumph.

"We were, I believe speaking concerning Colonel Fritz whom we must destroy without either of us seeming to be mixed up in the catastrophe."

"Where are the proofs of the paternity of Lilias?

"In the hands of the Colonel."

"What influence!" murmured Aurelia, "is there no means of obtaining—a solitary proof? Oh! a moral proof will suffice as to the paternity in the Colonel."

"Perchance by the Gosse couple who know it."

"Then start immediately for the country, the sooner and the more discreetly you can, for it behooves us that your old associate shall entertain no suspicion of you. I will take charge, I myself, of this part of our plan; I will have enough to do elsewhere and I will entrust you with its execution, indicating to you the end to be obtained. It is necessary that the Count de Puysaie should commence to suspect his old friend, and when he acquires positive proof of the treason of Colonel Fritz—Then—"

"Then what?" interrupted Le Gigant.

Then—he will slay him."

"The count is a weak man," murmured Le Gigant.

"The other is very strong."

"That is of no consequence. Oh! you have ever since the glances interchanged oftentimes by these when off their guard? The Count hates the colonel, I tell you, with an instinctive hatred; think you not that he has no serious reason for this hatred? Yes the colonel is a good shot and a perfect master of the sword, but the other has his outraged honor and an infamous treason to punish, and a wife and daughter to avenge."

"And I tell you, that I do that despite his courage the colonel will turn pale, and tremble before this poor weak being and quivering, as his eyes drop, will hesitate and through his hesitation be shot like a dog."

"An accomplice the less!" exclaimed Le Gigant.

"One friend more!" added Aurelia, "for the count will be indebted to us for his vengeance, that is to say, for the final and only happiness henceforth possible to be enjoyed by him."

CHAPTER LI.

AURELIA'S LAST VICTORY.

Aurelia seated herself down before her toilet table, with elbows resting upon the embroidered cloth, trimmed with lace, her finger touching a dimple in her pearly cheek, her gaze lost upon vacuity she appeared to search for a continuation of her words.

"And Matifay? enquired Le Gigant.

Aurelia trembled as one aroused from a dream.

"That is what I was thinking about. Have you devised any means to get rid of him? If so, what is it?"

"I know not we should be inspired by circumstances; moreover between Matifay and myself there exists a long standing feud and no means, however

violent would stop me were I ever to be found with him face to face."

Aurelia made a gesture of disdain.

"That would be evil means," she said; "let us spill no blood, that stains; and such stains must show. No no Le Gigant, being slike us have better auxiliaries than daggers and poisons; these are the passions of our adversaries—Let us see how much ground we have covered and the arms I have employed: Against Monsieur de Puysaie his scandalous passions for Nini—Against Colonel Fritz, his treason—Against Cyprienne her love for Don Jose. And these auxiliaries, Le Gigant have this advantage; they never deceive, neither do they tire out. You may go off about your own business, disappear now, and they continue without your presence their concealed work, while the result being foreseen, the scheme ends of itself, the work consummated the woman lost, the man dead and as to her loss or his death we can accuse nothing except their own proper passion."

"We must try and discover the ruling passion of Matifay."

It was insinuated by Le Gigant, for he felt himself very insignificant with his rude combinations compared with the refined Machiavelism of Aurelia, that Matifay's weakness might be found in his admiration of Cyprienne.

"Doubtlessly so," responded Aurelia, or the Countess de Monte Cristo-for it is a matter of indifference henceforth whether we employ one or the other of these designations for our heroine. "I likewise lay much stress upon this love to serve my purpose. Still this passion, notwithstanding, it is that of an old man and consequently extremely intense, is not the dominant passion of Matifay, and this we have to find out. Yes, that which we require is the passion of his entire existence, that which peoples his dreams, animates his days, causes his heart to beat suddenly, to turn pale in the midst of most exhilarating festivals, to redden without an apparent reason, when a word, an intonation of voice, a faint resemblance, an accidental meeting with a person through chance arouses it, a passion, which sometime smoulders perchance but never dies. Every man destined for great things good or evil, has a passion of this sort, this passion is his strength and it likewise becomes his weakness when a persevering antagonist is sufficiently subtle to find it out. Thus, this secret it behooves us to imagine under penalty of finding an insurmountable impediment towards accomplishment of our enterprise."

She relapsed into her meditation and was again silent.

"This passion," she resumed, suffering her words to fall one by one, "I thought to have detected. But exact details were lacking to me. This passion should be fear—"

"Fear!" ejaculated Le Gigant.

"Yes," said the countess, slowly, inclining her head.

"I have my police likewise and I am acquainted with the dark side of the life externally so brilliant of the baron Matifay. I know that his nights are sleepless for long durations and tormented by painful terrors; what is the secret of his unrest and terror I desire to ascertain, and since you have known him for a length of time, you—for you should know him well to engender the long standing hatred of which you spoke of me awhile ago—I count upon your assistance in aiding me to learn his secret, which is the *Open Sesame* to his strong box."

Le Gigant likewise was pale and upon his damp brow, one might say, the cold wing of Matifay's night-mare had passed its shadow. He attempted twice to answer, but upon each occasion anguish strangled his voice.

"It ought to be—it ought to be—remorse!"

"That is probable," remarked Aurelia regarding him with a contemplative eye. "Then all is true—this story of Niormont?"

This time Le Gigant had not the strength to reply at all but contented himself with bowing his head.

Aurelia appeared not to observe his tribulation.

"I am not thoroughly acquainted with it," continued she, "at least I only know it as every body else does through the columns of the Police Gazette. I consulted it at the same time as well as the portraits, engraved during the trial, in order to perform in a drama—I suppose you remember it—founded upon the subject, and, in connection with this too real adventure I made a great success and I was especially complimented upon my resemblance to the portraits of that deplorable heroine—Did you, by any possibility come to know her?"

"Oh! yes!" exclaimed Le Gigant in an intonation of voice resembling a sigh wrung from him through horror.

Aurelia had leaned towards her mirror and appeared to be attentively occupied with her toilet.

She turned in this wise little more than her back to Le Gigant, who saw naught else than the nape of her neck white and fleshy, partly covered by a forest of luxuriant hair, hanging down in partial disorder.

But she in her mirror lost not a gesture of his hands, twisting convulsively, not a contortion of his shrivelled countenance.

She continued to talk in the most indifferent manner imaginable, all the while putting rouge upon her cheek, and other cosmetics to her eyebrows and lips.

"She was about my size, was she not?"

"Yes, madam—perhaps a trifle larger."

"That is because I am more slighter, but with a floating cloak—She was blonde?"

"Of a blonde, less brilliant than you are."

"Well! of an ash-like blonde—a matter of power—I have all that to perfection."

And the silky tuft of hair was agitated in the shade around her forehead at the end of her uplifted arm.

"How did she dress her hair?"

"In braids, I believe."

"That is the fashion in the provinces; here curls for the braids in that case. She did strive to look handsome.

"And the eyes?"

"Blue, of a celestial blue."

"There's what deranges me, mine have an approximation towards black. I will have to lighten up the tint beneath the eyelashes.

"Pass now to other details. How was she dressed during the trial?"

"Verp simply, a high necked black gown and a kerchief."

'I see that at once: a kerchief crossed after the style of Marie Antoinette. If I were accused of a crime it is thus that I would arrange myself It awakes touching reminiscences and operates upon the jury. And upon the head?"

"A simple black veil."

"In lace or in *tulle?*"

"In lace."

This last reply to her interrogatory came from the lips of Le Gigant like a cry of mercy. The spectre he had conjured up in his memory, whose costume he had dilated with memories of a prosecuting official, or romance writer, came to him as to Matifay oftentimes in his dreams. Only the one had his fortune to make, the other his intrigues to manipulate, his meshes to spread. He had not, like the baron arrived at conpletion of all his desires, to the summit of his ambition, he had therefore the leisure to waste his time in reminiscences.

When this dismal figure of his victim presented itself to his mind, he could still drive it off, but it returned day after day and at this moment he was constrained to arrest his attention upon this obnoxious subject, to reply, point from point, to the questions asked of him and to say:

"Let us see did she put on a black or brown dress? a veil of lace or of tulle? How were her eyes? her mouth? her smile? how did she arrange her hair— how can I know!" and the memory of the inexorable

wretch responded to his neutral enquiries with an implacable reliability.

He doubtlessly some day, like Matifay, would not have need of this fortuitous occasion for refreshing his memory.

He bounded from his chair. The voice of Madam de Monte Cristo clear and unaffected, was heard asking another question.

"You have said nothing concerning her manner of walking."

"Slow and dignified, like that of a queen."

"They played tragedy at that time," said Aurelia, laughing, "and under. stood the demeanor of Andromaches. Ah! still a word more—I know not how to ask it, but was there not in her face or appearance, or her gesture, some particular sign, a something, in fact, which belonged only to her, which designated her so to speak?"

"During the later times," stammered Le Gigant," she always carried a prayer book or a chaplet in her hands.'

"Those are uncommon objects here, I must confess," quoth Aurelia, "so for to-day, this collar must serve as a chaplet. Now up with the curtain—Is this her!"

She turned around suddenly and, pale, the black veil thrown back over her forehead, her eye fixed, and her hand extended as if to designate and follow up some guilty wretch she walked towards Le Gigant,

This latter arose slowly, stupified with horror; opening his mouth but unable to utter a cry; he recoiled backwards before the terrible apparition, but she walked onward and forced him into the window place. Then grasping upon the watered silk curtains to prevent falling upon his knees:

"Mercy Helene, mercy!" he cried out.

Mercy, Helene, mercy," ever rattled in the throat of Le Gigant.

A joyous outburst of laughter was his response.

"Come! it appears about time that I should cultivate the art of Rachel and of Georges; I only need the directions of the manager who, by the way, would give them to me upon paper."

"*Tableu!* what effect for a general rehearsal! Let us trust that the first will pass off as well."

Upon hearing these words, singular at least in the mouth of a phantom, Le Gigant raised his eyes.

No phantom was there.

The black veil, speedily thrown aside, lay upon one side of the cabinet; the sombre mantilla on the other, her thirty two teeth white as pearls, Aurelia laughed most vehemently.

"You were likewise mixed up in this history, my dear Monsieur Le Gigant, but I really do not recollect seeing your name in the newspapers in their accounts."

She suddenly became serious.

"This shows you how imprudent it would be to seek to disembarass yourself of Matifay through violence.

"The deuce! the poignard is brutal! it is no longer used, for when they search well, they find. Poison is still worse. The victim is rarely murdered outright, sometimes he speaks, and it is my opinion that in the case now under consideration, he will have a curious tale to unfold."

Le Gigant trembled in every limb.

He stammered:

"You are right!"

Aurelia bestows upon him, unperceived, a look of undescribable pity, of unutterable contempt.

"If a theatrical resemblance, somewhat overwrought," she continued, "has produced such an effect upon you, who are strong, who are brave and not superstitious, what power would it not have over a poor old gentleman, timorous and pusillanimous as the baron? Moreover, I know him, as I tell you, his mind is prepared and perchance in his long nights of dreaming he has seen some one passing behind his curtains who resembled me. In this manner we lay much more certainly than we do with the knife, ball or arsenic, my dear Le Gigant. At this very mo-

ment I am certain that Matifay is condemned."

While speaking she stripped off, little by little, her costume to resume her lace dressing gown, and her luxurious shoulders, provoking in their whiteness, showed themselves unveiled to the fascinated eyes of Le Gigant.

She turned towards him and added.

"Success is inevitable. You can from this day forth order our wedding wardrobe."

Le Gigant no longer stood in fear, although throughout his entire body a convulsive and nervous trembling continued.

He precipitated himself towards the extended hand of Aurelia.

She stopped him with a gesture.

"Await," she said with a languishing air, "and on the day after our victory the reciprocal reward we accord to each other will prove the more precious."

She wrapped herself chastely and warmly within her dressing gown of *point d' Alencon* so that Le Gigant could only kiss the tips of her rosy fingers.

He was so troubled, so overturned by his terror a few minutes before and his excitement at the present moment that he could not feel her fingers burning with indignation beneath his lips.

Or had he experienced that sensation perchance he would have said: "It is caused by love."

Fright, enthusiastic admiration, delirious fever of the senses, he could not exactly comprehend with what the beautiful and singular creature had inspired him, as the serpent fascinates the bird.

"It will prove my ruin perhaps," he said to himself.

Still he could not escape this fascination.

We can never efface old loves. He had loved Helene ever, this man who doated upon her even to crime, and who could say but that it was Helene he longed after in the person of Aurelia?

Who knows but that that resemblance, upon which he thought only in indescribable horror, was not in fact the most powerful motive in that attraction to which he felt he could hereafter find it impossible to implore assistance.

Aurelia however, after her outburst of tempestuous gaiety' had become, as she showed herself on the first nstance, calm, cold and resolute.

"I do not desife Le Gigant," she said "to cause you to undertake from this day forth a hasty engagement of which you will, in all probability repent on the morrow."

He made a violent negative gesture,

"I have unveiled to you my projects in all their scope and in all their details because in the first place I desired to convince you and because, in the next, it will be a matter of indifference, if perchance we become enemies, that you should know the more or less complicity."

"From the moment of your knowing only of my existance you were as dangerous to me as if you knew all.'

"That which I desire to say at this present time, is that, from hesitation no look back upon the past, no regret for your old projects, I ask much, but I give much likewise.

"Consequently your engagement will only date from the day upon which you will see Cyprienne united to Baron Matifay, to the end that you will have no reason to doubt a power which you only know at present through my assertions.

"Having accomplished that much I presume you will be convinced that I can accomplish the rest."

To start from that day, for example it is necessary that you be devoted wholly to me and my work, without so doing—well, I know likewise your ruling passion my dear Le Gigant, there will be one victim more—that is all."

She said this serenely with a placid authority, in no way boastful and Le Gigant, so proud, so domineering over his old accomplices, felt not within himself the power, much less the desire to revolt.

"Now that we have disposed of that matter, let us now arrange facts and the respective parts we're to play, for I repeat to you every interview between us will be perilous before definite success.

"I charge myself with the consent of Madam de Puysaie.

"Of Nini Moustache and of Ursula, concerning whom I pray of you not to engage your attention.

"In fine of Baron Matifay and of Cyprienne.

"There is my part of the work. Now tell me yours to see if you have comprehended me and not to forget anything."

"Mine," said Le Gigant, "consists in remaining to all appearnces the ally and friend of Colonel Fritz ingratiating between him and Count de Puysaie, by such means as seems to me best, in the first place a bitter animosity and secondly a quarrel to spring from evidence of Fritz's treason."

"Exactly so," said Aurelia with a smile of approbation. "Now a few words:

"From tomorrow, not only will Aurelia, who speaks to you, but her counterpart, the Countess of Monte-Cristo will disappear from Paris. The hotel of the Countess wil be to let with its furniture, which is almost entirely new.

"On the other hand Baron Matifay who believes his marriage to be indefinitely postponed has stopped the work upon his sumptuous hotel, which he has been building upon the avenue Gabrielle therein to spend his honeymoon.

"As to the hotel de Puysaie before two months you are well aware it must be disposed of at auction and the marriage, note this well, must take place on the day after the count's entire ruin.

"Consequently it is necessary, you must understand, that pending the definite construction of his own mansion Monsieur Matifay must hire that of the Countess de Monte-Cristo.

"It's for you skilfully to suggest this idea to Colonel Fritz through invention of an excuse plausible to his eyes, and without doubt he in turn will communicate it to the amorous baron, who will hasten to put it into execution for the purpose of pleasing Cyprienne.

"I believe this includes everything. You perceive there is nothing requiring further amplification for you to understand it. You came hither an enemy, regarded by me with distrust, and we separate both of us, both stronger in our faith. Now then fare thee well—or rather till we meet again."

This "we meet again," accompanied by the most seductive of smiles went straightways to the heart of Le Gigant. This 'we meet again,' so delicately foreshadowed; was it not, in fact, a delicious promise?

Within the charming boudoir every thing appealed to the senses; voluptuousness thence glided into the nerves through the pores, through the intoxicating throng a million of indecisive, bewildering, emanations, through the eyes, which the sombre light invited to dreaminess, through the ears, for no exterior noise reached this silk deadened retreat, in fine through every channel, conveying to the senses, a spirit of delicious lassitude, langor and love, which appeared to emanate from the mistress of the paradise herself.

Le Gigant reflected no longer, thought no longer, reasoned no longer, he was infatuated. Had Aurelia said to him: "you must die" he would doubtlessly have replied: "I will die."

"I will die, provided you extend to me again that hand, provided that again I feel its warmth and and softness between my own, provided my lips anew press the extremities of those white tapering fingers.

But the hand was not re-extended and it behove Le Gigant for this time to content himself with those words, so marvelously modulated:

"We meet again!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE COST OF VICTORY

When the leaves of the boudoir closed against Le Gigant, when the sound of his retiring footsteps died away upon the floor of the antechamber the Countess, worn out by this long effort, suffered herself to fall in turn into the arm chair he had occupied.

It was invoking a phantom before the eyes of the terrified man that she herself had conjured up one equally as terrible for herself, that of her own past!

What! she had alluded, she had dared to allude to those painful reminiscences! and she had not cried, wept or shed tears amid these sorrows of her heart.

She had the courage to laugh, to indulge in cynical railleries, to play at comedy in the midst of this drama, to say "my friend" to this assassin, to permit this monster to kiss her hand, to place her arms caressingly upon the shoulders of the murderer of her husband and his brother.

She had dared all this and still she had survived!

At this moment she paid dearly for this bravery.

Poor black veil, mantilla of the condemned, dear venerable relics, with what ardor did she kiss you, and how many tears did she not shed over you?

The door turned gently upon its hinges; Jose, with his arms hanging by his side, appeared in front of her arm chair, contemplating her desperation.

"I must avow to you," said he to Helene, "that this effort was too burdensome for your courage."

"Alas! yes," she sighed, "you are right. Ah! Jose, I truly believe that God has withdrawn himself from me; I feel myself stronger but for pardon, and I am no longer so for hatred. No! the desire of vengeance is not extinct within me; in the presence of that man I felt it awaken in all ferocity, for it appears that the beloved dead cried out to me; 'punish him!'

"Oh! I felt I know not what joy consume my heart, when I saw him here pale, terrified, sinking down beneath my extended hand, as if this frail hand had been charged with the weight of celestial justice."

"It was in truth, Helene," said Jose in a grave voice, "because you were one of the privileged instruments of that justice, your mission arms you with a double-edged sword, it is to deliver and at the same time to punish. One of these tasks is worth the other, believe me: the judge who condemns accomplishes a work as noble as the priest who pardons.

"Have no remorse, travel your road and do not turn aside your clement foot because you have met a scorpion.'

She listened, all absorbed in internal meditation.

"Oh!" murmured she with a shudder, "it is not that alone! but do you understand? not to a creature, living like others, loving like others, susceptible, like others, of sorrow and of joy. To become a phantom of the past, to incarnate the despairing spectre of remorse, to transform oneself into an apparition of night-mare, and to traverse life spreading broadcast terror and madness; such have I resolved upon, I, who have never believed to have thrown around me but consolations and peacefulness.

"To day I die for the second time; I cast aside all those semblances, connecting me with the living world. Some few days longer and the Countes of Monte-Cristo will exist only in the memory of those who know her; the brilliant and fascinating Aurelia will have passed like a meteor, the poor will see her no longer glide by the walls in the quilted mourning gown of the good Madam Lamouroux, and there will remain but a sad being without country, without family, without name, the image of the dead, which ever sleeps in a dishonored tomb within the cemetery of Limoges.

"Well, be it so since they forced me to it, since in their turn the Countess of Monte-Cristo, Aurelia and Madam Lamouroux, this triple incarnation of mercy, have found their work frustrated. So be it then, these clement elements will give place to an implacable image. The stone of the tomb which I trusted had for ever sealed my hatred, has been uplifted; the spectre emerges: no mercy henceforth for the accursed!"

She seated herself at a little secretary of tortoise shell, a marvel of art found there, and wrote feverishly as if she wished no interval to elapse between her resolution and its accomplishment.

The strongest spirits are those of persons faint-hearted, as they fear to experience change or to encounter the conflict of test.

"This word to my notary," she said in the sharp tone of an army commander giving orders to an aid de camp. "The hotel de Monte-Cristo shall be sold this very night.

"Oh, rather no," resumed she after a moment of reflection, "to be hired only as it is, ready furnished—fit for occupation to-morrow. You will add verbally, don Jose, to explain this sudden resolution, that the Countess of Monte-Cristo starts upon a journey, concerning the duration of which she is unaware, and that she only reserves in the lease the little partition at the end of the conservatory."

"We must likewise be advised as to the fate of Ursula."

"They think on it," said don Jose smiling, "Clement and the dear Madam Rozel are doing marvels. On their side at least everything goes on well."

"In that case," murmured Aurelia, "the work of Madam Lamouroux is accomplished. So much the better, for it appears to me that with the new ideas, filling my soul, I would sully it as much as I have hitherto done good. Arrange therefore in such a manner that Madam Rozel resume her place in the rue Vivienne as soon as possible and discover some reason, the best you can, to explain the disappearance of Madam Lamouroux."

To the first orders of Aurelia Jose had in no way replied save by a profound inclination of the head, but to this his voice was raised in respectful disobedience.

"No, Helene, Rozel will not return. The conversion of Jacquemin is in a fair way but not sufficiently solid to be absolutely proud of it; before remitting into his hands, if it is to take place, the happiness of Ursula, I have reserved a final and significant ordeal. Moreover—" and his words became touching, almost filial,—"moreover, you, upon entering upon this new phase in your trials, do you feel already assured of yourself? I know you, Helene; hatred will never suffice to fill up your existence; there must ever be a little corner reserved for affection.

"You have imposed upon yourself, beloved and sainted, the sublime duty of protecting and saving others; I have imposed on myself, yes myself, that of saving you."

"Thanks," said the countess shaking her head, "thanks, my good don Jose, but these miracles are not those destined to be twice accomplished, see you not? You have saved me in the first because it but behoved us to battle against enemies, invincible it is true in appearance, but over which a triumph can be ever assured with a righteous and energetic will; in this instance you will but dash yourself against an obstacle inasmuch as it behoves me to save myself."

"It may be so!" said don Jose with his pleasing and refined smile. "I only ask you to have confidence in yourself for a few weeks more and the reward for your obedience I will give you forthwith."

"Forthwith?" exclaimed the countess in astonishment, "and what reward?"

"And what other reward worthy of you," continued Jose "but a fresh action of goodness to accomplish? Only try it! You will soon see that in your heart devoted to vengeance

there is a little corner reserved for compassion."

The countess could not restrain a smile at the pleasant irony of the phrase.

"What concerns it?" enquired she.

"Pippione! This poor little one has no friend, now that we have carried Ursula away from her. She could not remain, all as she was, at the mercy of her brutal master, and I have taken the liberty of transporting her to the house of Madam Lamouroux. You are aware that Madam Lamouroux should not go away, having this sad being to console and possibly to save."

"It may be thus," said Madam de Monte-Cristo, "Is she then very ill?"

Don Jose nodded his head gravely.

"So ill that an angel from heaven could alone obtain a cure which every physician would regard as a miracle. Ah! it is not the body which suffers most—it is the soul."

"Poor child and so young!" sighed the countess.

"You see well that Madam Lamouroux is not wholly deceased!" exclaimed Jose, joyously, "and that my remedy operates. Yes, Helene, something told me that this child and you were destined to sustain each other. She is the sure aid providence has sent you at the very moment when you would blasphemously revolt. The proof that your resolutions for just vengeance are not looked up in wrath is that, to soften this work, better as it is in a heart like yours, this child has been given you to love. You saved the other in the agony of your grief: 'my child, my poor child is dead;' and I responded to you; 'who knows that?'

"A heart excessively maternal like yours, Helene, is sufficiently powerful to create illusions, almost strong enough to pass for realities. Pippione is the age of your child, she is as your Blanche, if she be still living; in the name of Blanche, Helene, love Pippione!"

The Countess of Monte-Cristo looked upon the face of Jose with her full clear eyes as if she would decypher upon his forehead the enegmatical meaning of his words:

"You are right, Jose," she said, "I will endeavor to do so."

CHAPTER LIII.

RUIN OF THE HOUSE AND OF THE MAN.

It is time to return to the other personages of our history whom we have too long neglected.

The affliction which for a long time had preyed in solitude upon the heart of Loredan de Puysaie had made rapid progress since the flight of his wife and his abandonment by Nini Moustache.

There only remained to him, for sustenance, the affection, at the time both painful and prized, of Cyprienne and the delusive friendship of Colonel Fritz.

This friendship had all the crafty attributes of a conspiracy.

Hence a day would soon come when, between the accomplices, however united as they may be, hatred would interpose and every observer could perceive plainly that already as between Loredan and the colonel it had shown signs of intervention.

The origin of their acquaintance had had for pretext a shameful service, a denunciation and a secret espionage, the spirit of Loredan was, despite his fall, too noble not to call this to memory, and although ever employing the colonel in his police service or as a go-between in his vile love intrigues, he despised him heartily.

This contempt, much as he had need of his services, he had dissembled, perchance even to his own eyes, beneath a light and elegant disdain; but, at this moment when Fritz could no longer serve him, he endeavored vainly to deny to himself the invincible disgust inspired by this personage.

Perchance this disgust was even more deeply sated than Loredan imagined within himself; perchance, on

the expression of instinctive repulsion, which he found himself forced to suppress at the the mere sight of Fritz, fed in it as much love for that which he had caused him to lose as of contempt for the nature of services by him rendered.

Perchance, he spoke to himself in the seclusion of his conscience, the voice of which he had truly stifled, that, however guilty she may have been—alas! after her avowal and flight he had received a painful confirmation of his doubts—Hortense was still to him a friend more faithful, more reliable and more noble than this Colonel Fritz.

Ah if this accursed colonel had said nothing to him; if he had not produced irrefutable proofs which compelled him to remain no longer with eyes closed but to act in consequence of his revelations! If, to his dignity compromised in the eyes of a third party Loredan had not been compelled to sacrifice his domestic tranquility, perchance some happiness might loiter within him yet.

Of a verity, he had carried at heart the grievous wound of his doubt, still Hortense was not of a vulgar spirit; she had in all probability devoted herself towards eradication of that wound, of which she felt herself the cause, then as in case of many others she had finished by slumbering in a lying quietude.

And of what matter that it should be a lying one, this quietude in which the soul slumbered!

Who could say! Cyprienne was returned, Cyprienne who believing herself the veritable daughter to the count—had treated in all respects as her father. Oh! grateful, young affection of a child of sixteen years, who binds her arm each morning around your neck and bestows upon your lips one of those rare kisses which are never falsehoods.

The kiss of a daughter!

But no! even this affection, the sole one to gild his olden days, he had shattered as the others!

He had shattered it through the fault of Colonel Fritz.

Oh of a verity the dear child loved him still. He felt it well in viewing her sad eyes, whence she wiped away her tears to conceal from him her sorrows. But in this affection even there existed a perpetual reproach, the resigned complaint of a dog beaten by his master who looking upon him seems to say:

"Why do you beat me, I who love you?"

And vainly the count repeated to himself seeking to revive his anger:

"What matters it? She is not my daughter I know her not, I will avenge myself upon her for the treason of her mother; for the odious reminiscenses of my rival!—"

Despite himself, as soon as his sad eyes were turned towards that side, his heart beat in agony and he exclaimed to himself:

Ah! wretched man! what would you do? you would sell her, her who would have loved you!"

If at least the price of this sale had turned to his profit; but, it was like unto that through which Judas delivered over Jesus, the money seemed to him to become of no service. The thirty pieces of silver, stained as they were with blood and filth, only served to generate tears and remorse.

This money, he had firmly believed would recompense him for the losses of happiness he had sustained; the intoxication of power and that of pleasure, mornings upon which we feel, beneath our hand, human wills and conscience fold up like petals of flowers, nights upon which we drain all sorts of drunkenness, and indulge in all sorts of excitements, of excitements, at that hour, feverish satisfactions of boundless power, he felt himself incapable to taste the enjoyment.

No energy within his soul, his spirit, his body, nothing! Nini Moustache had carried everything away with her.

Nini Moustache. as to that name, at the same time abhorred, and adored

when it entered his brain it was again upon Colonel Fritz that he expended all his anger.

Who had thrown into his arms this vampire, draining his gold and corroding his conscience, who, step by step, had forced him into this intimacy, frivolous at first, then sincere, then passionate? Colonel Fritz.

Colonel Fritz always! Loredan re-found him as his evil genius, as the source of all his sadness, of all his remorse and of all his desperation.

Alas! the thing was shameful to avow, perchance, but it was necessary that all the secrets of that troubled soul should be completely unveiled: Loredan, in all probability cursed the colonel less for his broken existence, his dead ambition, his ruined fortune, his sacrificed Cyprienne than for the treason of Nini Moustache.

It is not with impunity that a sensitive mind ventures to drink at the cup of easy loves.

That, which, for the least delicate, is but a subject of mockery or of *ennui*, quickly dissipated with consolations of a similar nature, becomes in a tender heart a subject for despair, perpetually renewed at each attempt at destruction.

Hence, what ailment is the more energetic in passion if it be not that of despair?

Loredan from the first day had plunged himself into it with frenzy. The affection of Nini Moustache was the last branch to which he could cling with his hand, the last, upon which to retain his hold upon the shore of the torrent, whose bewildering stream was bearing him along.

This branch once broken he felt himself lost.

And, for evermore, as fools fool, wedded to the research of an insoluble problem, he returned to the same sterile idea:

"If at least she had loved me!"

Love! she! a Nini Moustache!

Oh! vile, truly he knew her vile! This conviction was even the subject of his first sorrow; but by degrees he became habituated to his indignity as fish become accustomed to the brandy with which the vase is impregnated in which they are thrown; but to discover her ungrateful!

Honest woman, capable of an honest love! he had never forced his delusion far enough to believe that, yet to be obliged to avow some day that she possessed not the common honesty of a robber—!

And, every delusion dispelled,—the wreck of his heart, his intelligence, his fortune, his dignity, he suffered himself to be carried away unresistingly by that terrible flood.

From morning until night he promenaded through the grand halls of that hotel which had been his home but which within eight days or on the morrow, perhaps, could be his no longer. He thought not even what he should do when the hammer of the auctioneer would have knocked down the sumptuous articles of furniture and nothing would remain to him save consciousness of his forfeited dignity.

What matters it as to what would beeome of him? there would always remain a pistol and a charge of powder—should he treasure sufficient energy and negative courage for suicide!

As if they had divined the profoundity of the moral and material wreck, the servants had decamped from the presence of the count and even Cyprienne renounced as hopeless the task of consoling an inconsolable heart.

As to Colonel Fritz, terrified at the success of his work, he with difficulty nerved himself to contemplate it.

Moreover, as he divined its cause, and partaking of the bitter hatred of Loredan, he stood in fear of the contempt that man would visit upon the contemptible being who had been his shadow for so many years.

One morning, when Loredan, shut up, according to ordinary habit, in his private chamber, as a wild beast at the bottom of his cage, was dreaming upon the perpetual subject, which, for a length of time, had nightly haunted

his days and sl epless hours, a domestic, more daring or more confident in the success of his mission, ventured to violate the sanctity of an apartment when all the world had been banished.

He bore a package tolerably volumiours and a letter.

The count was at the moment in an apathy, during which he angered at nothing. He took the package with a careless hand and opened it upon the corner of the table.

The letter would doubtlessly have followed the package had not the address caught the eye of Loredan.

He trembled and vehemently broke open the seal.

He recognised the hand writing of Nini Moustache!

The letter contained four sheets, fine and close writen upon. The count glanced over them with a rapid eye, then, turning back to the first page, he re-read the letter, line for line, word for word, so to speak, as if not to lose the savor of a drop of that perfume, enbalming his heart.

"Monsieur the Count," in this wise wrote Nina Moustache.

'I know with what a blow my evasions has fallen upon you and take no pride in the matter. If it were within my power to console you, even at the price of my life, I swear to you I would not hesitate for a moment. For several days my eyes have been thoroughly opened and I feel that there are many things against which, up to this hour, I would have jeered which have definitely become the most serious and painful of my existence. Then, determined to see you no more, I have written you to cry out from the depths of my solitude and of my tribulation:

"I have done you an immensity of injury. Loredan, yet pardon me!

"Pardon me because I have been led astray and am not wicked at heart; because, in causing you to suffer I suffer myself: because of the hell I have created around you I have drawn the inconsolable half, which come to confess its tortures to a heart alike inconsolable.

"Ah! my friend, why did we come to know each other? why has destiny made me the instrument for your disaster; why have you preferred me, unworthy being, to the holy one who had made your life happy, your spirit calm and your heart as noble as her own?

"The history of both of us is in reality very sad, although under the ban, my poor Loredan! enthusiasms without love, passions without tenderness, intoxication by long draughts, everything which should repel a delicate soul like your own, feverish excitements mentally terminating in implacable lassitude. Alas! behold us both dead to all affection and we have not even the consolation of a reminiscence of a regret. Among the many days we have sworn to love each other there is probably not one, probably not a single hour, not a minute, when we were sincerely beloved.

"There was not a pure caress which could pass between our lips; on your side was contempt, on mine, shame.

"Ah! shame and contempt! repulsion which nothing could overcome, an obstacle ever recurring which renders impossible all sincere love between an honest man and woman of our species.

"And the more vile among us experiences, doubtlessly without rendering account to herself, this sentiment, which is after all a homage to virtue, concerning which she has but a vague notion. Since, when by accident, she encounters upon her pathway an attraction, subtle and profound, she breaks it immediately, because that same affection she feels humiliating to her.

"What is wanting to us is excitement and fever. No love can exist without an absolute equality. Unable to elevate ourselves to the heart of an honest man, it behooves him who loves us and desires to be beloved, to lower himself to us.

"Thus we love him, perchance, but in time come to despise him.

"Always contempt!

"If you have loved me after the fashion of others, as we love a fine dog or a handsome horse, through caprice or vanity, perhaps I would have remained as I was when you first knew me. Then I would have ruined you, it is very possible, but we would have been tortured whether the one or the other. But, imprudent man! you have initiated me to delicacies and devotions, without partaking of as true love, and with an eye at once stupified and humiliated, I was forced to measure the insurmountable distance existing between us.

"I felt born within me a new being; proportionally as you made me learn the more certainly you would love me.

"Upon that day, in fine, when I came to love you as you wanted to be loved, then I quitted you.

"Oh, Loredan! I can say to you, now that you will see me no more, and I dread no weakness on my part neither upon yours, I can say truly that I love you!

"I love you for the sorrow you have rendered me capable of experiencing, a noble sorrow, regenerating me in my own eyes. I love because in accomplishing the sacrifice of our seperation, I feel myself better and almost worthy of you.

"And now, listen to me, my friend. You will hear no more mention of me. Consider me as a beloved one dead, oh! yes, my well-beloved! who, from the depths of a tomb, thinks of you, loves you. Look upon this letter, as I send it you in the full confidence of my heart, as a sacred testament, and swear to me to accomplish all its clauses.

"Your liberality made me rich, but that money burned my hands. Moreover the dead have no need of diamonds, is not that so? That fortune realized with this intention, I transmit to you, and beg of you upou my knees to accept it.

"Moreover, in creating you my legatee, in restoring to you that which I owe to your generosity, I ask from you, at the same time, the greatest service which man can promise to render unto me, a service which will render me doubly grateful, coming from your hands.

"I have a sister, a poor child who occupied that portion of my heart unoccupied by you. I neither desire, nor is it my duty to bequeath her a stained fortune, falling from my hands and which can be purified in passing through yours.

"Loredan, I bequeath you my dear sister.

"Render her chaste and good, and love her as she will love you, I am certain, for to you she will owe everything, and I maintain that she will honor me even to my existence.

"She is still a child; vice has in no way sullied in the least her unspotted soul, she has virtue and candor, as I once had.

"Up to this time her infancy has been entrusted to a worthy woman named Gosse, inhabiting in the rue Rambuteau.

"My sister is named Lilias.

"Oh! you will love her; is it not true, Loredan, that you will love her in memory of her, who, up to death has blessed your name?

"I have taken all from you, my kind friend, except honor, which it is not within my power to rob you of, but, to-day, I have sufficient conscience to restore your lost happiness in sending this angel to your fireside.

"You will know, perchance, some day—no! you will know no more. Oh! if you could comprehend, my friend, how happy I am at this moment, what new faith penetrates my heart and how resigned and strengthened I feel. Oh! my God, how good it is to fulfil one's duty.

"CELINE."

The letter terminated here, and for the third time the count reperused it entire. He likewise felt strengthened and resigned by the sincere expression of this honest love. No egotistical

preoccupation intermingled with this joy. He would never see Celine again, he was assured of that, still what mattered it. What need had he to see her again, when he was sure he had not deceived himself on her account, now that she had given indisputable proof of being worthy of him.

Oh! of a verity yes, he will accomplish the last wishes of Celine; yes, Lilias will find with him a shelter and a family. Dear little one! it seemed as if already he pressed her to his breast and that with her sweet infantile voice—the voice of Celine says to him: "My father!"

And transformed, radiant, rejuvenated by a half score of years, he promenaded with rapid steps across that cabinet, a moment before lonely and sad to him.

Colonel Fritz entered in the midst of this frenzy, and Loredan pressed his hand as if he would have broken it.

He was happy; he entertained no thoughts of hatred.

Then, without replying to the questions of his friend, amazed at this sudden change, he rang with a violence threatening to break the bell-pull.

"My carriage! quick! immediately!"

In the vestibule he encountered Cyprienne, incidentally informed of this quickly accomplished transformation, and bestowed upon her an embrace with a tenderness of which she had believed him to be incapable.

Then, wiping away tears from his cheeks, he murmured to her in a low tone of voice:

"Be not jealous, my Cyprienne, if I bestow on you a sister."

"A sister?" ejaculated Cpyrienne in astonishment.

"Yes," mysteriously said the Count, "but do not tell others of it. She is named Lilias, a handsome name, is it not?"

The valet arrived to announce the carriage. The count freed himself laughingly from the arm of Cyprienne who sought to retain him.

"Hold me not! I hasten to seek her out."

And, while descending the staircase to the portico he chanted between his teeth that perfumed name as the name of a flower:

"Lilias! Lilias!"

As to Cyprienne, well informed through the confession of her mother, announcement of the arrival of Lilias, and the joy of the count appeared to her semi-miraculous.

And for this she could only return thanks to those protectors, whose prodigious power seemed to overcome every obstacle.

The unknown friends.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSSE HOUSEHOLD.

The gossips were not slumbering longer.

Within the house of the rue Rambuteau had transpired incidents, fantastic and undreamed of.

In the first place the simultaneous disappearance of Ursula and Pippione, disappearances appearing to astonish none more deeply than those parties the most interested, Cinelle and the Gosse family.

Then a singular transformation within that family itself.

From the day of that morrow the "beloved wolf" was changed in a "frightful monster" and, if the "adorable Cinelle" remained as such, there was, however, in the tone of Monsieur Gosse, subsequently pronouncing these two words, a singular bitterness in accent.

The worthy man even exhibited his blind submission, but there was disguised in the manner of this submission a something giving evidence of a secret revolt. Like one of those domestic animals, for instance a pet poodle, for a long time spoiled by its mistress, seeking to induce her to pardon his fault but at the same time growling secretly at her unaccustomed severity.

Hence, formerly he went out and

came in, going and coming with the automatic regularity of the parish clock. For some time this regularity had been discarded. Sometimes he returned to the fold, two hours behind time in a condition of alarming titubation. And upon other occasions his shop as public writer remained closed all day long.

It could not be concealed, Monsieur Gosse was decidedly deranged in his ordinary habits. The honey-moon of the "adorable bebelle" was overcast in eight days, after having shone so calm and pure, for eight long years on the heaven of a conjugal canopy.

Moreover, and nothing could be more abnormal, Monsieur Gosse had been several times surprized near suspected localities, at the angle of a dark street, in the most obscure corner of a coffee house, in a cab, driving rapidly, in close confabulation with some mysterious personage.

And this personage was no other than he, whom, in their benevolence, the neighbors had bestowed as an illegitimate protector, upon the "adorable bebelle."

The man with the maroon colored overcoat.

Still, it is necessary to add that, since this unforeseen intimacy had been born between Monsieur Gosse and the man in the maroon colored overcoat, between the deceiver and deceived, the man in the maroon overcoat showed himself no longer in the rue Rambuteau.

An intimate relation between him and the adorable bebelle had been broken off.

Still, for all this Madam Gosse did not want for visitors, quite the reverse!

In the first place, there was Joseph Rozel, the handsome young working man who lodged on the fifth floor.

He had been observed to enter several times, and most mysteriously into Madam Gosse's, when Monsieur Gosse was not there. A new topic for scandal!

Hang it! Joseph was a handsome youth and not rich, while the la belle had the *wherewithall.*

Some were even jealous of Joseph's having made so good an acquaintance. The women, slighly envying the good fortune of Madam Gosse, exclaimed in marked allusions to her husband:

"So much the worse for him! its well done!"

But Joseph was not the only one coming to visit the wife of the public writer, in the absence of the "frightful monster."

Thus upon two occasions there were remarked two females, both dressed in black and scrupulously veiled.

Only the veils, most pitilessly opaque for a masculine eye, are always seen through by the glance of an inquisitive woman, and the female neighbors contrived to see those designed to be concealed by the veils.

One of the ladies, still young, might have been aged about forty years.

The other was radiantly beautiful, and in all the glow of a first youth.

The two women had come in the first instance alone, and afterwards together, and that same day the handsome Joseph had come down from his garret into Madam Gosse's.

He was expected, doubtlessly, for he had scarcely time to knock upon the door, standing ajar, which as soon as he went in was inexorably closed against everybody.

And imaginations were called into exercise in connection with this fresh incident.

Nothing could be more clear, for sooth! Joseph was beloved by some grand lady, he was handsome enough for that—and Madam Gosse loaned herself to minister to these mysterious amours.

Midwives are capable of anything.

At heart, however, despite this explanation, luminous as it was, the idea of which had been suggested by the numerous dramas at the Ambigu, wherein such things happen every day, the gossips lost their tempers, for, notwithstanding this, they could only deal with a supposition and they demanded a downright certainty.

Hence from morning until night their curious heads peered over the

bannisters of the staircase and, certes, had Madam Gosse longed for the glass house of the Greek philosopher, she would have coincided in the wishes of her entire neighborhood.

These two veiled females who so strongly exercised the speculations of the good folk of the rue Rambuteau, were no others than Madam de Puysaie and she who had been formerly known as Nini Moustache, but now rebecome Celine. The mild influence of Madam de Monte-Cristo, had equally operated upon these two spirits so differently troubled, and starting from the opposite ends of the social ladder, they had both of them arrived at the self-same round: —repentance.

From their first glance the two Magdalens had comprehended their relative situations and opened wide their embracing arms had mutually exclaimed, "sister!"

Madame de Puysaie had not, it is true, ever descended to the same level of infamy with Nini Moustache, she had committed but one fault in a lifetime; but is not the gravest fault the first one? And moreover the more profound the abyss into which one has plunged the more meritorious the effort of will by which we have extricated ourselves.

Then, had not Nini Moustache every excuse, wanting to Hortense? misery, an insufficient education, forcibly bestowed by parents laboring at daily toil, ignorance, which alas, is a fertile root of social miseries?

Beneath similar conditions not to fall becomes almost heroic. The fall is a misfortune, resistance is not only a duty, but should be regarded as a virtue.

Consequently, after learning the history of Celine, Hortense, seeing her at her feet, abashed and humiliated, had kissed her forehead, saying to her:

"You are better than me!"

No jealousy existed between the two females who had loved and probably continued to love the same man. Since the initiation of Madam de Monte-Cristo, they felt themselves in an etherial atmosphere, wherein gross human sentiments, knew not to find support for their wings. And the first act imposed upon them by that redemptress, illuminated by the genius of charity and of proselytism, had been as follows:

"All social reasons create you enemies; well! love one another and you will not devour one another."

How were they themselves known?

At this point some explanations are necessary upon the great institution of the Countess of Monte-Cristo, an institution to which we have already made numerous allusions in the course of this narrative.

The institution of the SISTERS OF REFUGE.

For, it is necessary for the reader to understand that we have selected among the conversions of Madam de Monte-Cristo none but the most salient, those appearing to us to incarnate the most forcibly one of the mother misery, whence emanate all female miseries.

The divine book in like manner is occupied only by the apostles and Jesus, the Man-God has throughout opened the eyes to millions of the accursed or of the wanderers.

We recount in these pages but the history of daughters of election of this female saviour of souls, revealing herself to them beneath the triple incarnation of Madam de Monte-Cristo, of Aurelia, of the Widow Lamouroux; still how many others have come to her and from her received consolation?

Some, like Nini Moustache, rolling in the blackest mire of vice. Others like Hortense de Puysaie, guilty almost through an involuntary fault.

Others, again, like Madam Jacquemin, victims to an exterior fatality which no weakness justifies.

How many Cypriennes, condemned to the legal prostitution of an ill assorted marriage has she not restored to love, frank, honest and unmercenary? How many Ursulas has she

not preserved from corruption, temptations and the evil counsels of misers; how many Pippiones has she not snatched from that monster who, like the Cerberus of antiquity possessed three throats: hunger, cold and precocious vice?

All those, who once saved, could again taste a drop of happiness here below, she would in this wise address:

"Remain, my daughters, within the social circle where birth has placed you; have husband, children and human interests, work for your own happiness and that of others that will be my reward, and when around you, you see others suffering pains as you have suffered, be compassionate to them and send them to me.

But to others, to spirits tested through strife, to hearts broken by effort, she said:

"Come with me, since like me you are dead to all the joys of this world, I will make known to you a celestial rule, the nly one who has given me the force of life—that of devotion. Not the almost egotistical devotion which is inspired within you by those you love, but devotion for the unknown, for whom you have met by chance and for whom evil has been done you. Come, the Refuge is open to you. You may there weep and we will console you; moreover, when you have become sufficiently strong against your own sorrows, the doors will open unto you, and as missionaries of charity you may fly away as the doves, bearing olive branches to soothe the anguish of others."

Madam de Puysaie and Nini Moustache belonged to this privileged troop of Madam de Monte-Cristo's apostles and as their first mission she had imposed upon them the task of consoling one another, they whom events had destined to remain irreconcilable adversaries.

CHAPTER LV

THE SECRET OF BEBELLE.

It was in consequence of this mission imposed by the Countess of Monte Cristo, and accepted with joy by the two women, that they found themselves at Madam Gosse's.

It concerned them to repair the evil which both had done to Loredan by restoring to him a support and affection for his poor troubled soul, crushed down by a double abandonment.

This support, this affection, Helene had the idea of causing them to find in Lilias.

In this manner this angel of mercy would heal, at the same time the wounds of Loredan and those of Hortense.

The letter of Celine to Monsieur de Puysaie, has caused us to see that she did not recoil before the generous falsehood demanded of her to admit Lilias to the fireside of the count.

But through fear that this well invented fable might appear the more plausible it became necessary to secure the co-operation of Madam Gosse.

All these falsehoods were composed of truths slightly altered.

In this fashion that of a distrust was engendered, in going to the origin a conformition of the falsehood itself would be found.

Thus Madam Gosse had veritably served as tutor to the sister of Celine, and if the count should at any day raise doubts upon this subject, proof could be easily furnished him.

It was not probable that in this case he would pursue the investigation further and occupy his time to discover the true age of this sister Nini Moustache was, however, sufficiently young to be the sister of a girl of eighteen years.

It remained to determine Madam Gosse to consent to the substitution of one of her pupils for the other.

The worthy dame, as we can already judge had no conscientious scruples and the temptation of gain would cause her to pass willingly over

many things, still her last operation with Le Gigant had laid her open to distrust.

She commenced to comprehend the danger of these manœuvers, when, however generous her intentions might have been, the law might perchance interpose to reclaim her. There is no secret, however, so well guarded, but which might some time see the light of day and the mid-wife entertained a wholesome horror for legal indiscretions.

She possessed savings adequate for her modest appetite; she feared through over ambition to jeopardize her income, her vespetio and "perfect love."

Thus, well as she recognized in Hortense the mother of Lillias, well as Nini Moustache demonstrated to her in a most incontrovertible fashion that she was the actual sister of Ursula, Madam Gosse opposed with all her ability the combination to which the other two perfectly consented.

Hortense and Celine had in turn made separate ineffectual efforts with the "adorable bebelle." To the one she responded "if the sister consents," to the other: "if the mother is of the same opinion." At the present moment the sister and the mother came to institute a combined attempt, and forced into her last intrenchment, the mid-wife still replied: "No, it is impossible."

That was the day, upon which the gossip, on the lookout had seen the two veiled ladies ascend the stairs together.

Upon the formal promise, given by Madam Gosse to each separately, they had no hesitation in proceeding according to their preconceived plan. The letter of Nini Moustache was written and sent. At any moment the count could arrive and claim Lilias, and behold, at the very end the obstinacy of this wretched mid-wife threatened to render all abortive.

Prayers, supplications, everything proved useless. It was even in vain that Nini Moustache displayed upon the table, well in sight twenty new bank bills of a thousand francs each.

These precious bits of paper fascinated Madam Gosse, who could not keep her eyes from off them, but hesitating and troubled she ever replied.

"I do not want them! I do not want them! I have already done too much; I will compromise myself."

The door opened softly and then closed noiselessly as a fine voice broke in upon them:

"Madam Gosse is right!"

And encouraged by this unexpected concurrence, "bebelle" exclaimed with a reinvigorated energy:

"I do not want them!"

Hortense and Celine turned around quickly towards the new comer, who cast upon them, furtively, a smile of intelligence, a wink of the eye, a nothing.

But the both were now initiated into the mysteries of the Countess of Monte-Cristo. They understood that all was saved.

This was the hour when the gossips saw the handsome Joseph ushered without knocking into the apartments of Madam Gosse and from that circumstances commenced the charitable reflections which we have used above.

"Madam Gosse," repeated Joseph, "is right not to desire that Justice should intermingle with her affairs."

"Precisely so," murmured Celine, who did not as yet comprehend the aim of Joseph but instinctively felt that she should endorse his sentiment.

This prompt adhesion infused Madam Gosse with distrust, and glaneing from Celine to Joseph, she bided her time.

"Madam Gosse," resumed Joseph, not without a tinge of irony, "has a perfect right to refuse to lend herself to a falsehood, which wounded her delicacy, and I do not think, ladies, that you have any designs to force her conscience. Madam Gosse is free, absolutely free, and I am certain that no one here desires to see her engage herself, against her will, in this enterprise."

"Without doubt," said Nini Moustache.

Madam de Puysaie made a gesture of assent.

"What game are they going to play on me?" thought the "bebelle."

"Only," continued Joseph.

"Ah! here it is!" said the midwife internally.

"Only, since Madam Gosse refuses to mix herself up with our little interest,—which is strictly her right—it is but just that she disengages herself wholly from them."

Celine commenced to comprehend; Madam Gosse likewise.

"There were entrusted to Madam two children: the one Lilias had been returned scrupulously to her mother upon the first requisition. The other, the sister of Madam, still a minor, remained under the guardianship of Madam Gosse, let Madam Gosse return Ursula to her sister and Madam Gosse will see that we will not persist in making her our accomplice."

The blow was hard. The midwife opened her mouth wide and could not resume the use of her tongue for several seconds.

"But you know very well," said she.

"I know nothing!" interrupted Joseph, "only that a young girl of the name Ursula, and all the section knows it as well as I do, has been confided to you; that here is her sister, her natural guardian, who desires to reclaim her, and that she should be surrendered to her."

"But you yourself have reassured me by informing me that she was not in the power of Le Gigant, but in yours!"

"That," said Joseph with a smile, "is a secret belonging to us three and there is only you to say so. The police may believe you if they will, but I am afraid that they will not. They have been for a long time upon the traces of these recruiters of vice, to whom, very innocently I believe you have been made an auxiliary. Our complaint will give to them at one stroke the entire burrow and the windfall will be too fortunate to be suffered to slip through their fingers. What they will see in all the affair — for we alone possess the power of undeceiving them, and naturally we will do so—shall I explain it to you Madam Gosse? it will be simply the abduction and concealing of two female minors, one a child—I said two, for the abductors have made double work in carrying away Pippione on the same occasion.

"The proofs? they stare them in the face!

"We have in the first place, the testimony of the worthy Louis Jacquemin, whom they entrapped in the affair and whom a scruple of honor forced to withdraw at the last moment.

"What Jacquemin is unable to reveal will be supplied by Cinelle, for he loved Pippione, he sought everywhere for traces of her, and if he has not addressed himself further to the legal authorities, it can be attributed to the good counsel I have given him in your interest, and his ignorance of judicial customs.

"Hence, you cannot deny the importance of this testimony, for Cinelle had been able to see you for over ten minutes, seated tranquilly in the carriage destined to carry off Ursula, and all the tenants of the house will certify to your absense during the entire night of the double abduction."

Madam Gosse was thunderstruck by this logic.

"What shall I do?" she murmured

"Hang me! if I know," replied Joseph, "consult your conscience."

That day should have been become decidedly a day of surprise to the inhabitants of the rue Rambuteau.

An equipage, bearing a coat of arms, stopped before the door of the mansion, and leaning upon the shoulder of a footman Count Loredan de Puysaie advanced into the obscure passage-way and enquired for Madam Gosse.

The neighbors offered at one and the same time to guide him, and the sounds of their voices conjoining in

giving a common direction bestowed upon the stairs a semblance to a hen-coop.

Joseph rushed to the window and leaning out of it perceived the carriage in the street surrounded by a crowd of delighted urchins.

Then running to the countess he forced her into the inner chamber, as quickly as possible.

"Quick! Quick?" he said, "it is your husband."

Madam Gosse, twirling her hands in agony, was repeating to herself, perpetually:

"What shall I do?"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER.

It was time!

The door of the bed chamber had scarcely closed upon Madam de Puysaie than the jabbering of the neighbors resounded more audibly, even in the passage next to the door.

'Madam Gosse! Madam Gosse! a gentleman wants you!"

Joseph went to open the door which upon opening concealed him.

Nini Moustache had retired to the most obscure corner of the chamber.

The count was so wrapt in his meditations that he saw neither one or the other.

He walked straightways to the midwife.

"Is it you who are Madam Gosse?"

The neighbors, allured by this fresh mystery, advanced their noses in curiosity to the door ajar, but Joseph most politely closed it in their faces.

"Has there not been confided to you,' continued the count engrossed with his single idea, "a child named Lilias?"

"Yes," stammered out Madam Gosse.

"Then," exclaimed the Count excitedly, "where is she? conduct me to her."

The midwife remained in silence, her mouth wide open.

Oh! of a verity, she hesitated no longer between the lie demanded of her and the sure danger with which Joseph had threatened her. But how to reply to the question of the Count?

Where was Lilias? She knew not.

Loredan distrusted her silence and smiled.

He imagined that the worthy dame distrusted him.

"Reassure yourself," he said, "you can speak to me in full confidence, and to prove to you that I know all about the child I will tell you it is the sister of a certain Celine Durand; is not that true? Well! know more, that I am connected with this Celine through a profound attachment, that she has bequeathed me her sister, and if to-day I have come to demand her it is to make her happy and rich, to adopt her as my daughter."

Not a response.

Madam Gosse threw supplicating glances in the direction of Nini Moustache and at Joseph, as if to say to them.

"For heaven's sake extricate me from this embarrasment; in all that you may say I will confirm you."

The count detected one of these glances; he turned around and perceiving Nini Moustache, gave utterance to a loud cry:

"You—you, indeed!"

He leaned upon the table with his hand, for he trembled like an aspen leaf, and Celine, as pale as himself, vainly endeavored to come to him.

But she consecrated, in a low tone, that torture she sought to avoid, at the price of a year's existence, to the Lord, whom she had learned to recognize, and drawing courage from her invincible resolution, recovered herself the first.

"Oh, Loredan! It is I, I, who have sworn never to see you again, but who feel myself both happy and troubled to be constrained to address you in loving words my final adieux."

"And why this adieu?" murmured the count.

Still, before the implacable will which he read in the eyes of Celine, he insisted no further.

"You are right," he added, "it is better as it is."

"Yes," said Celine, "it is better, my friend: we have been weak and cravenly both of us, let us repurchase in a day of courage all that we have lost through cowardice and weakness."

She approached him and gently placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"You have accepted my legacy," continued she, "and I thank you for so doing, yes, from the bottom of my soul. You have this day bestowed upon me the last joy of which I had reason to hope Lilias."

"Lilias!" exclaimed the count.

"Oh! Celine, doubt not but that I will love her as my own child, because she will be the last souvenir I will preserve from you."

"Thanks," said Nini Moustache. "And now the moment has arrived for our separation, and this time forever. Lilias is being educated at a boarding school at Passy, the address of which I will give you."

She drew a printed card from her pocket.

"Madam Gosse will conduct you thither. Lilias is ignorant concerning all of her family; say nothing to her about them; and I even should believe that a falsehood.

"I will say that I am her father," replied Loredan warmly, "and I swear to you that I will prove true in every sense of the word.

"I know it, Loredan," responded Celine, "yes, yes, I know it. But time flies, and I would know that she is within your arms. Hasten then, my friend, hasten, and—fare thee well!"

"Fare well," repeated Monsieur de Puysaie, extending his arms as if he would retain her eternally upon his breast.

"Oh! How she longed to precipitate herself upon that breast where in beat a heart which had loved her so deeply; how she wished to repose her brow upon the shoulder of her lover and there pour forth those tears, stifling her heart's utterance.

But she glanced upon the door, behind which could be found Hortense, and triumphing over her weakness:

"Fare thee well!" she repeated for the third time.

Loredan plainly perceived that all was finished, then seizing upon the hands of Madam Gosse he had led her forth just as she was, without hat or shawl:

"Come, quickly," he said, "Come with me!"

As soon as he had gone out Madam de Puysaie, pale as a spectre, appeared at the threshold of the open door of the sleeping apartment.

Vanquished by this supreme conflict, Nini Moustache wrung her hands while giving vent to a flow of tear-drops which she vainly endeavored to suppress.

Hortense approached her and bestowed a kiss upon her forehead.

"Thanks! my sister," she said.

The entire tenantry of the house were at the window, to view Madam Gosse, in all her glory, installed within the armorially emblazoned chariot of the Count de Puysaie. The dear lady had never before found herself in a similar condition of dignity, and red at the same time with pride and timidity, she with difficulty persuaded herself to sully with her august rotundity the sky-blue satin of the cushions.

She endeavored fruitlessly to assume an easy air, still what pride was there in those contemptuous glances she suffered to fall upon her female neighbors crushed out through the moral superiority, with which, within a minute she came to quell them.

"It is not such as you," these glances seemed to say, "that a count would ever come after in his family coach."

And the most jealous found themselves compelled to admit: "It is true, nevertheless, that she has bully ac-

quaintances, this very Madam Gosse."

Liveried servants upon the box, and footmen at its rear, the carriage moved majestically away, accompanied by a murmur of admiration and of envy.

The entire transit of the market was a veritable triumph.

The street urchins ran before, as skirmishers spreading abroad this wondrous bit of intelligence:

"Who wants? who wants to see the Madam Gosse in a carriage with a prince?"

And the hucksters deserted their stalls, the porters of the market presented arms as they staggered beneath their burdens, and the errand men grouped around the door-steps of the vintners' shops.

Madam Gosse was popular.

She had not been a mid-wife of twenty-five years practice for nothing.

Spontaneously, upon her passage as upon that of a crown princess on a journey, every one ejaculated—

"Hurrah for Madam Gosse!"

No person even in the house of the rue Rambtu eau condescended to pay attention to the exit of either the two veiled ladies or of Joseph.

In faith! there was no time to occupy one's self with veiled females or with Joseph, when they had gone forth to pay homage to the triumphal procession of Madam Gosse.

Now they missed something, for this second spectacle would have proven as astonishing as the first, had they only taken pains to pay attention to it.

Madam Gosse in a nobleman's carriage, was indeed a curious sight, but to observe a simple journeyman mechanic, dressed in broadcloth and giving his arm, after the manner of a cavalier, to two ladies of rank, was singular.

Only the trio took a humble cab, and people at large prefer running after chariots.

At the end of the sidewalk on the point Sainte Eustache a man stood finishing the perusal of a letter.

"Bah!" quoth he, shrugging his shoulders, "the count coming in person to hunt up Lilias for the purpose of transferring her to his own hearth-side! what folly!—This Aurelia is like the rest, promising more than she can fulfill."

At that moment the carriage made its appearance amid the acclamations of the crowd.

Le Gigant, for it was him, raised his eyes and recognized Madam Gosse seated by the side of Loredan de Puysaie.

"Already!" he exclaimed. "Decidedly, that woman is the devil, and an associate I stand in need of."

CHAPTER LVII.

MONSIEUR GOSSE'S SECRET.

Le Gigant followed for the instant with his eye the course of the carriage as it sped along in the direction of the rue of the Deux Ecus, then he took the letter again from his pocket aud reperused it with attention.

This letter contained but a few lines of a fine and very close handwriting.

"Remember our compact, do your work; I have already commenced mine which will facilitate yours. To-morrow the consent of Madame de Puysaie will arrive. To-day Monsieur de Puysaie will go to reclaim Lilias at the house of Madam Gosse to introduce her to his own fireside."

There was no signature. Only there was at the head of the sheet an escutchon, elegantly engraved bearing a legend:

Fac et Spera.

Do and Hope.

A strange thing, this device caused Le Gigant to meditate for a long time and he was assuredly the least dreaming of mortal beings. Do and hope! This constituted in one breath an order and a promise!

And, at the idea of everything, contained in this word—Hope! this man, who had preserved his passions unrestrained, and had moulded all his sentiments to the tyranny of his

ideas, felt his nerves vibrate and his blood boil.

Yes, and it must be avowed; he had been subjugated by this supreme will and this supreme beauty of her, named Aurelia.

He was in love with her!

A most fantastic love in truth, which had as many terrors as attractions. The love of a tiger for his keeper, ruling him beneath the lash, but whom he incessantly craves to crush with his heavy paws, yet whose hands he nevertheless licks.

At one instant, escaped from the fascinations of the glance and voice of this singular woman, he feels himself capable of resistance. He says to himself,

"She boasts! her power is illusionary! she seeks to trifle with me but will be trifled with in turn."

Her power was a source of fear, for over him as over others, he felt its weight.

He could not efface from his memory the horrible impression of terror, stinging him to the quick, as she arrayed herself as a phantom and walked before him with hand extended, lip contracted and eyes glaring with threats.

And in his disturbed brain he strangely mixed up the two names: Aurelia, Helene.

Yes, in loving Aurelia, Helene was still the object of his adoration, Helene, his victim, whom he was never able to forget, and his love extended the entire breadth of his remorse.

There are souls likewise, closed against all tender and generous sentiments, which, to arrive at passion, have need of the alloy of crime.

Beloved of Aurelia—what nightmare and what delirium—it seemed to him that it would be Helene whom he would embrace within his arms. This idea had caused his hair, in advance, to stand with horror, yet, henceforth, he lived no longer but for this idea:

FAC ET SPERA!

But should however,—in an interval of lucidity he had generated the supposition—Aurelia should betray him!

If she had lied to him, if her strategy had no other aim than ridding herself of a dangerous enemy; if, when the day of triumph arrived she should say to him,

"I know you not!"

At this hypothesis Le Gigant bounded with rage. But, soon dominated by his warm delirium, he treated it as a folly.

He loved after the manner of wild beasts, I would like to say, but, after all, wild beasts love, and all love, even the most vile takes its foundation in faith.

What need, in fact, had Aurelia to wish an auxiliary like Le Gigant, since she could do all and he felt himself so weak in her presence? Why did she deign to divide with him a booty which she was certain of conquering alone?

What sentiments, then, had forced her to this onerous alliance in which he had been so ready to conjoin himself—these she came to demonstrate to him:

"You are as strong as I am. It is for a long time that I have been searching after a man like you!"

"She is a lioness," then exclaimed Le Gigant, "I, myself, am likewise a lion. She has understood my strength as I have understood hers; she loves me and dreads me, I dread her and love her."

All these reflections, to which we have given space, passed through the brain of Le Gigant like a whirlwind and as were heard still the exultant cries of the urchins, hailing the triumphal passage of Madam Gosse, Le Gigant resumed his walk with an exclamation:

"What she has ordained I will do."

His compressed lips mechanically repeated the two latin words which Aurelia had assumed for a device.

Fac et Spera.

At the corner of the point Saint Eustace there could be then found, and perchance can be found to this

present hour, for we have not been there to verify the fact, a public writer's stand—a species of double sized sentry box, furnished with a door.

Plastered to the monument, as a cankerous excresence, this sordid stand, or bin, boasted this sign:

GOSSE. PUBLIC WRITER.

Within was elaborate the amorous correspondence of cooks and kitchen maids, jealous of their style, and the anonymous epistles of unfortunate lovers to deceived husbands.

From morning to night the nimble pen of Monsieur Gosse slipped over fine glazed paper.

Petitions to state officials, business letters, and billet-doux possessed no mystery for him; he had even two or three times launched boldly as a lawyer and madrigal composer.

Upon the black table, before him, was displayed piles of papers of all styles and sizes, from elephant foolscap, thick as paste board, and the double sheets of Angouleme, especially designed for commercial correspondence, down to ordinary note sheets and that most esteemed by the fair sex, which ingenious makers had adorned with perforated borders or with aquarelle designs.

Who had not seen Monsieur Gosse in his cabinet—for this he designated his shop with a peculiar emphasis, was not acquainted with Monsieur Gosse.

Great men partake of this peculiarity—they have a public physiognomy and a private physiognomy.

As much as Monsieur Gosse showed himself in his own household timid, submissive and of no account—pardon the expression—so much in the exercise of his functions he resumed a dignity, modest, yet resolute, which was particularly adapted to proud spirits.

It was not he, who so far debased himself as to inscribe upon the front of his cabinet—we will conserve this title as the worthy man always held on to it—that legendary sign,

"AT THE TOMB OF SECRETS."

Men who do this, Monsieur Gosse would affirm with indignation, dishonor the *art;* he never said trade or even profession. Then away with such popular rubbish! And find, if you please, a man, better knowing how to compose a complimentary epistle for grand-pa on his birth-day or a letter to one's protector.

He had preconcerted ideas upon this subject. A letter, according to him was valuable only for its style. The form was everything! Hence what disdain for his humble clients! He revenged himself upon them for all the affronts of his domestic life. From the first word he understood their business, so it chanced that a nurse famished with love, oftentimes emerged from his stall with a letter of reproach when she had projected to transmit a letter of reconciliation.

His vigorous style and good education—for it could not be denied but that he had made good lessons "even to the fourth class in the celebrated Lavertue institution," had transformed him into an authority in his district. They made long lines of clients from the door of his shop, for they only were admitted one at a time as they do penitents at confession.

Seated behind his narrow table, a b'ack silk cap upon his head, a pen at his ear, an eye-glass upon his nose—he wore an eye-glass, spectacles being too vulgar. Monsieur Gosse throned it neither more or less than a celebrated advocate during the hour of consultation.

Beneath his magic fingers white sheets became speedily covered with black lines, which appeared cabalistic symbols in the affrighted eyes of his customers. Markets, offered or concluded, intrigues, invented or unravelled, mysteries of business or of love, nothing could be done without the intervention of Monsieur Gosse, and he, conscious of his power, assisted unmoved at the eternal debate of passions and human interests, as calm, as dig-

nified and noble as the silk skull cap he wore.

It was towards this famous shop upon the market square that Le Gigant directed his deliberate footsteps. Perceiving the crowd encumbering approach, he, in the first place repressed a movement of disappointment; but, without doubt, having reason to husband the susceptibilities of Monsieur Gosse, he concealed his internal irritation and took his place to await his turn.

The crowd filed by little by little.

First came a gentle shell-worker, who was probably dreaming of her Francis, gone to the army; she remained but a few minutes. Then came an old lady, who desired to write to the Prefecture of Police to reclaim a lost poodle; it cost a full quarter of an hour to get the full description of that pug-nosed pet. Then—why enumerate them? valets in search of places, soldiers desirous of borrowing four francs fifty centimes of their god-fathers.

It was very long work. Monsieur Gosse kept an intelligence office at the same time as he did one for writing.

Le Gigant awaited his turn with an impatience he could not conceal; at last he presented himself before the window.

"Well! is it done?" he demanded.

Monsieur Gosse—inconceivable incident—arose and dismissed the disappointed crowd with a wave of the hand, and then came out to put up the shutters on his shop.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE GREEN POCKET BOOK.

While Monsieur Gosse was engaged in placing the wooden boards in front of his establishment, Le Gigant entered into the interior of the shop and seated himself, perfectly at home, upon the green arm-chair of the scrivener, yes upon the consecrated throne of Monsieur Gosse.

He waited.

The final shutter put into position, he designated with a gesture to the "frightful monster" to assume a seat upon the humble stool reseved for customers, saying dryly:

"Seat yourself there!"

Monsieur Gosse seated himself with the docility of a school boy, who has just received a reprimand and who is conscious of having merited it.

The stall was absolutely obscure, and a ray of light, penetrating above the crack over the door, alone lighted up the narrow chamber and this fell directly upon Le Gigant's forehead.

Monsieur Gosse appeared fascinated by this white line, beneath which he saw the terrible eyes of the man of business, glisten.

"You have done nothing yet, Monsieur Gosse," said Le Gigant in a severe tone, "and however I have warned you that you will find yourself in a singularly embarrassing position."

"Madam Gosse always carries the keys," timidly objected the public writer.

"Oh! that's not a matter that concerns me personally," observed Le Gigant with negligence, "well, I'll not deceive you that I do not find there my little interest: but that which animates me above all is the friendship I bear you and the idea of the danger you incur."

"I know it—I know it," sighed Monsieur Gosse hypocritically.

The worthy couple were deceiving each other with their best ability.

Both were aware of it and neither paid attention. The habit of business. Every well understood trade is commenced with protestations of which both parties know the value or rather the nullity.

A formula in politeness.

"You understand now, since I have revealed all," continued Le Gigant. "the origin of your fortune."

"Of my fortune! say, my wife's fortune!"

"It's all one; for you are responsible for her conduct."

"The wretch!" ejaculated Monsieur Gosse, "and ignorant of everything!

"But I have opened your eyes! You will find yourself mixed up at this very hour, without doubting you, in an affair which will inevitably come before the courts. A case of adultery perfectly proven in which you have been accomplice—"

"I!"

"Your wife, and I have already shown you—"

"Yes—yes" interposed Monsieur Gosse, "I am responsible for her acts, pardieu! I know that well enough. But after all how does this affect me?"

"Without doubt some little. In adultery they punish accomplices slightly—oftentimes they are content with a public reprimand."

Monsieur Gosse responded not, but his two fingers slipped, one over the other, with a dry sound, eloquently expressing this gesture.

"He is mocking me."

"So," continued Le Gigant, "I have not come to derange you upon that little question which, perchance, rests between you and your conscience. But at this instant the question is much more serious."

"Ah! Bah!" said Monsieur Gosse in an ironical manner.

Decidedly, sailing in smooth water the good Monsieur Gosse was undeniably strong.

"Just so," pursued Le Gigant candidly, "but to-day it is an affair no longer of adultery, but of a substitution of a child, a crime recognised by the penal code, my dear Monsieur Gosse."

"But I know nothing about that, that I don't," exclaimed the adored wolf, "I am as innocent as a child just born and so the judge will find to be the truth."

"The judges will find but one thing, my dear friend, and that is, that if you are not mixed up directly in the monœuvres, you have profited by them. Believe me, do not let them stick their noses into your little affairs, those people find everything wrong. Moreover as your interest well under stood compels you to separate your trial from that of your wife's."

"Here we are!" thought the sceptical Monsieur Gosse. "You think yourself very malignant, my good fellow, but I know that you will never denounce me. I don't know where your interest lies, but it is not there, that's evident."

At the same instant Le Gigant made this paralelled reflection:

"He is not at all frightened! Let us let loose some big arguments."

Then he added aloud:

"Do you think that two or three bank bills of a thousand francs each, gained in the way of duty as an honest man, would be worth the trouble, Monsieur Gosse?"

The public writer could with difficulty restrain an instinctive movement of joy. Three bills of a thousand francs how much malt could be quaffed in that brewery, where he knew the beer to be good!—But he repressed this first movement negligently:

"Peuh! that depends upon circumstances."

"Make it five thousand and say no more about it," responded Le Gigant drying, whom so many obstacles irritated and caused him to transcend the method of trade, which to men of business has become a second nature.

With a little patience he could have obtained from the adored wolf all he desired for a note of four hundred francs, so much could the love of beer cause a man to neglect his most sacret interests.

"Five thousand ——!" ejaculated the graduate of the institution, Laverture, so astounded by the figure as to forget all decency, even to the point of employing this ignoble term of vulgar thieves slang "and what am I to do for that?"

"Simply your duty," affirmed Le Gigant, "to defend as far as lays within the limits of your power the family and society by preventing an alien child usurping one of the most illustrious names of France, and a fortune which does not belong to her; in a word, to deliver to me the papers which your wife has preserved with

so much care, and which establish in the most unimpeachable manner the illegitimate birth of Lilias."

The sceptical Gosse laughed, ready to burst his sides.

"Are you joking about your family and society?" said he, "Oh! blessed joker, out with you! Go openly to a friend, and confess that if you offer me five thousand francs for my dear bebelle's green pocket book, it is because you are offered ten thousand for yourself."

Decidedly this Monsieur Gosse believed in nothing.

"Business is business," replied Le Gigant, with the simplicity of Plutarch's man, "you can supply me with proof for my assistance, the name of the real father of the child, while I can give you that of her putative parent, which neither you or madam Gosse is aware of."

"All in good time, unbosom yourself! I like that better, for you were a fool in attempting to frighten me with your threats of justice. Five thousand, it is little enough, quite robbing me, but never mind, we won't stand upon trifles between friends! only no more stupidities. It is with me you are doing business and bebelle will know nothing of it?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"And I shall not be compromised?"

"The papers shall be sent anonymously to their address if you desire it."

"Then, make your game!"

"You will give me the green pocket book?"

"This very day if you wish, and if you are pressing, this very instant. People are more evil disposed than you think, old fellow; despite your good nature, for two days I have watched the peg you have been driving at. The green pocket book is already in quod—come, down with the dust!—shell out the five thousand!'

Oh! professors of the institution Lavertue, what would you have said to all this?

Your graduate, discarding with such cynicism both French and honesty, opened briskly the drawer of his table and tendered the pocket book to Le Gigant.

One his side the other dealt out between his fingers five of those scraps of silken paper manufactured at the bank.

The exchange was effected with loyalty, the one not letting go the bank bills until the other seized upon the pocket book.

A light was struck and a wax taper, technically called a rat's tail, illuminated, like a star, the obscurity of the shop.

Monsieur Le Gigant desired to verify the authenticity of the bank bills, and Le Gigant the contents of pocket book.

Touching confidence!

The bills were genuine and the pocket book contained two letters from Colonel Fritz, leaving not the faintest doubt as to his intimate and illegitimate relation to Hortense.

"Now," said Le Gigant, "a last service and it is to the public writer that I address myself. Write:"

And he dictated as follows.

"COUNT—One of your most faithful friends, owes it to his honor to supply you with proofs of the infamous treason to which you have been a victim. The letters, herewith enclosed, will enlighten you, I trust, as to the esteem which you should preserve for your bosom companion and most scoundrelly of traitors."

"Of traitors," repeated Monsieur Gosse, then according to custom he was about to append a date when Le Gigant stopped his arm:

"No date!"

"Then its done!" responded Monsieur Gosse, "the adorable bebelle will be magnificently enraged in not finding her pocket book again, so much the better! It's a go!"

Institution Lavertue, what will become of your graduates?

CHAPTER LIX.

LILIAS.

While Le Gigant and the public writer were solemnizing their honest bargain over a couple of mugs in that brewery where Monsieur Gosse knew the beer to be so good, the chariot of the Count of Puysaie descended at full trot the rampart of Passy.

Only Madam Gosse no longer paraded herself upon the luxurious cushions of the noble equipage, but far very far behind it she dragged along ignobly in a dusty cab.

In her stead, the passers-by admired a charming child with long clustering locks, as delicate as a young lady of old England, a country celebrated for handsome children and uglv old women.

Lilias!

She was seated at the side of Loredan who devoured her with his gaze, and already she had learned to entwine her little arms, around his neck, addressing him in the dear infantile voice which is veritable harmony, these two divine words! "My father."

And he, charmed by this celestial music, could only respond in kissing her little hands and rosy cheeks;

"My daughter! my daughter!"

Yes! yes, Celine you were right; this sweet little one, sent to the hearthside of Loredan, was both a consolation and a sunbeam.

How could he be still sorrowful and wearied in despair now that he had perpetually beneath his eyes this loving image of youth, of joy, of hope?"

My father—my daughter!

The carriage rolled onward, onward, clouds of dust arising around it and it seemed to Loredan that amid this dust all his sorrows sped before the wind.

And he found the heavens glorious, the fleecy clouds reflected in the waters of the Seine while upon the sidewalks all the people appeared to have assumed a joyous air as to felicitate him, and he was impelled to cry out to them,

"Behold my daughter! how beautiful is she."

As to Lilias, she was delighted in her simplicity. Up to this day she had heard nothing of her, parentage and the only weeks of happiness she had enjoyed were those which she had passed near the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Her dear little heart possessed but three objects of love.

Mamma Helene, uncle Jose and Cyprienne.

Cyprienne, who had crossed as a luminous shadow over her childish dreams, but left behind her a trace of charm and of grace never to be eradicated.

Moreover had not the Countess of Monte-Cristo said to her that very morning: "You must love Cyprienne dearly."

And since that morning, Lilias had not suffered a day to pass without bestowing a thought upon that young and beautiful girl who had kissed her upon the threshold of the conservatory.

Ah poor Miss Lily! Such memories are rare to a deserted child.

When she looked back upon the past — motherless children possess precocious meditations and the sorrows of ripe years—when she thought of the little farm where she had been brought up by a mercenary nurse.

The narrow enclosure, wherein the cow pastured, the dark court wherein the rabbits played about in freedom amid the cackling broods of barn-yard fowls, the hedge of hawthorn above which, here and there, appeared the round and frosted head of an apple tree in blossom.

Up to the age of four years she had remained at the farm brought up promiscuously with her little foster brothers and sisters, but even then she knew that she was their superior.

She had little gowns of flowery stuffs, embroidered underclothing, and they invariably addressed her as Miss.

But, despite all this, she was moreover aware, and she felt it vaguely,

that she was more unfortunate than her companions in coarse raiment and unostentatious apparel, for she oftentime surprised the eyes of the farmer's wife, heavy with tears, fixed upon her and frequently heard her lips murmur with emotion:

"Poor little one!"

Once or twice a veiled lady had called to see her.

A lady, whom they received with profound respect, and who taking her in her lap, devoured her with passionate caresses.

Upon that lady's departure the nurse had said to her each time:

"Lilias that is your mother!"

But since then Lilias has vainly endeavored to fix with precision in her mind the confused features of her visitor. Closing her eyes, she only saw, in the dim mist of memory, the shadowy form, clothed in black, with long curls falling upon either side of a melancholy face.

This indistinct and veiled shadow, as a faded out pastel drawing, was the sole notion she possessed concerning her mother. Of her father she had no idea at all. Her father, in her childish imagination, was a being, half divine, mysterious and powerful, something after the manner of a guardian angel whom we never see, yet eternally watching over her.

And now upon a sudden this protecting genius, this father, was revealed to her at the moment she least expected him. He came as do princes in fairy tales in a handsome chariot, and drawn by splendid horses to lead her away to some fabulous palace, she knew not where, wherein she undoubtedly expected to refind the beings she loved so well.

The poor little heart beat with hope; she might perchance meet again with the lady with the long ringlets.

Her mother.

The carriage rolled along the entire length of the avenue of the Champs Elysees and turned upon the bridge of La Concorde.

Loredan and Lilias had merely interchanged the words, "Daughter! Father."

When the heavy gates of the hotel of the rue de Varrenes opened as upon days of grand reception, there was a sort of festivity within that bleak and desolate mansion.

The count, radiant as he had not been seen for many days, leaped from the steps of the carriage into the portico — he, who ordinarily was observed to clamber up into it feebly leaning for support upon the balustrade.

In that hour of happiness he had regained his youth.

Upon the glad apparition of Lilias, the sombre and formal vestibule lighted up and the mildewed portraits upon the wall seemed to smile upon her.

The frigid countenances of the domestics, modelling their expression upon that of their masters' gleamed with joy as Loredan, upon his entrance said to them;

"Go let my daughter know that I have brought her her sister."

There was no need of going far, Cyprienne was upon tenter hooks, awaiting the return of her parents.

She had likewise meditated all day long upon the word which Loredan had breathed into her ears upon parting:

Lilias.

And far from being jealous the generous girl thanked God, for the miracle, bringing reconciliation to the afflicted fireside.

How had this miracle been brought about? Was the Count aware of the secret of Lilias' birth? Cyprienne was ignorant upon that point and gave herself no concern about it. Her duty had been determined in advance she should love this little orphan as a sister, as a mother, she knew nothing further, and desired to know nothing.

While giving his orders Monsieur de Puysaie had ascended the steps rapidly, while the servants in astonishment followed his movements with their eyes as they whispered to each other:

"How young he is, and still this morning he appeared old."

Lilias followed him, bounding like a fawn up the stairway.

Believe it then! the fairy palace was opened to her!

"The little one, I venture to say, dreamed of pumpkins changed into carriages, of powdered footmen, created from mice, and little glass slippers.

Ophans have always turned to profit, the touching little legend of Cinderella.

But that which she discovered behind the door was worth a hundred times a glass slipper, the powdered footman and decorated carriage, summoned from pumpkins and mouse traps by a wizard's wand.

It was the radiant smile and wide extended arms of Cyprienne.

The young girl embraced her, her whom the Countess of Monte-Cristo had commanded:

"You must love her."

Alas! it is a law of nature all human joy is commingled with sorrow, without which our souls would know no rational constraint.

The lady in mourning, the lady with the long ringlets was not there.

Consequently her first movement of joy at the sight of Cyprienne having subsided, Lilias glanced around the chamber to find the absent person. Her large full eyes interrogated by turn the young lady and Loredan, then they filled with heavy tear drops as she stammered out:

"And Mother?"

Monsieur de Puysaie lowered his eyes for he knew not what response to make.

But by an impassioned movement Cyprienne seized the dear child within her arms and drawing her to her bosom, kissed her rosy cheeks and forehead over-shadowed by clusters of golden hair, while, brushing away the tears standing in her humid eyes, she uttered in a low, very low voice.

"Lilias, do you not wish that I will be your little mamma."

And beneath the attentive glances of the count, this compact was sealed by a final caress.

Cyprienne.

Yes, it was Cyprienne who was there in front of Lilias. Her entire dream had been realized. She leaned upon the neck of that charming young girl whom the Countess Helene had charged her to love with all her heart.

To love with all her heart! From the first look, the first word, that good little heart, that ingenuous heart, has flown towards her.

It was an easy task, or pleasing task, to love this dear mother, but eighteen years of age.

"You shall be my daughter," said Cyprienne to her, in a low tone of voice.

Young girls, upon the eve of discarding dolls, always desire to replace them with a child, a sweet little creacreature with red and white tinge of countenance, ever recalling memory of a loving father.

Alas! Separated for ever from Don Jose, Cyprienne had seen at its dawn, the celestial paradise of youthful maternity close against her.

But she was aware, yes she in person, of the intimate relations uniting her to Lilias, and, resolved for sacrifice, she thanked her unknown protectors for the unexpected comfort which they had sent for the affectionate needs of her heart.

"You shall be my daughter," she said, in a low tone and lower, lower still, the charming child replied that word, that endearing word, she had so often murmured out in anguish upon the monastic bed of the boarding school:

"Mother!"

Mother! daughter! Never laugh at those boarding school pastimes and those cares of idle maternity which the large children have for the small one; from the doll to the adopted child which they protect, up to those whom they nourish with the milk of their breasts, women are instinctively maternal.

Their weaknesses, their caprices, their perpetual unreasonings are matters of education: still they are ever more reliable than their masters —for they love.

The count, touched at heart, viewed this singular spectacle of a virgin mother embracing her child.

He was unaware, yes he was unaware, how heroic was Cyprienne in thus taking to her bosom the sole cause of her misfortune.

For definitely did not Cyprienne carry the weight of the illegitimate birth of Lilias?

And Lilias, smiling through her tears, threw her arms around Cyprienne's neck and almost stifling her exclaimed,

"Yes, yes, mademoiselle!"

But, without power to measure the greatness of the sacrifice, Loredan saw with a joy, intermingled with internal emotion penetrating to his heart's core, his adopted daughter so well received by her legal sister.

And, in turn, he regulated his injustice and repented of having burdened the daughter with the fault of the mother.

"Ah!" thought he, "as she loved me, if Colonel Fritz had said nothing to me I might have said with a sincere accent: "this is my daughter!"

Cyprienne turned laughingly—and how heartily we laugh when we are happy—towards the Count de Puysaie.

"Then it is agreed, father, that you give her to me to be mine and mine wholly?"

"Yes wholly yours—but you will lend her to me sometimes, will it not be so, Cyprie?"

He desired to joke then, to joke now, to joke forever.

He was ashamed of his emotions, of his sorrows and joys.

He knew, this diplomat, that he should ever disguise his feelings. He had created a mask of spiritual raillery, which he could never discard.

But the girls did not understand it in this manner.

With a bound she tore herself from the grasp of Cyprienne and threw herself upon Loredan's neck.

It was that in her solitude. at the same time that she pronounced in her dreams these two words—my mother — she prononnced two others — my father.

And I know too well that she loved them ore deeply, Cyprienne seen by her for some time past than Loredan whom she now met for the first time.

These young girls have sensitive spirits! and the *Enfans terribles* of our master Savareni have a touching counterpart.

From the first glance she understood—how was that! by instinct doubtlessly, that Loredan loved her with a passion such as is infused into a petition for pardon.

And she said to herself.

"He is doubtlessly my father."

This mysterious father, she had been told of in the days of her infancy as a supernatural being, of whom she had been deprived.

Very often she had heard her mistresses murmur:

"Poor child! who has no father!"

And even, singular ideas traverse these young heads, which know nothing of life, she had bestowed a mystical sense to the first words of the prayer she was made to repeat nightly:

"Our father who art in heaven."

Well this FATHER, this protector had suddenly appeared.

"This is your father," had said Madam Gosse.

And Loredan had repeated:

"I am your father."

"I am not egotistical," said Cyprienne with a melodious voice as that of a linnet· "she shall belong to both of us."

"Oh! yes to both of us!" exclaimed Loredan in an excess of sincere emotion,—diplomacy was forgotten about that time, "yes to both of us, and both of you shall belong to me! Oh! Cyprienne, Lilias! dear daughters, come to my arms, feel with your bosoms my rejuvenated heart palpitate! bestow upon me the first day of real happiness I have known for ten weary years!"

And he spoke in all sincerity. All his bitterness were forgotten—into a great heart had changed this poor, disgusted heart of the Count Loredan de Puysaie.

Between him and Hortense there

had been but a solitary misunderstanding, a reciprocal shame at confessing the one to the other. An hour of communion between them and all the misfortunes severing them would disappear forever.

Had Hortense related to him frankly the history of Chevalier des Alizes he would undeniably have forgiven the misty dream of the young girl, involuntary delusion which every maiden can discover within the confines of her own heart.

But no! He had straightway given confidence to the monstrosities engendered within his feverish imagination. His dubiousness had in the case of his wife awakened fear, and between the two had sprang up that bottomless abyss—silence.

They had journeyed side by side through life and without self interrogations and hence to mould their heads into one a solitary word was all sufficient.

This word had never as yet been pronounced and the more Madam de Puysaie felt herself guilty the less capable was she of giving utterance to it.

And to-day this union, this mutual pardon of reciprocal faults. Cyprienne in her innocence and candor came to discover the sacramental formula,

"She shall be my daughter!"

Behold the family reconstructed, the extinct hearthside re-illuminated, doubt changed into faith, invincible coldness into love; and what had been the treaty of union reuniting hearts thought to be severed forever? The smile of a child, two little arms, entwined around two necks, a look, a word, a kiss.

Lilias!

Oh sweet Lilias! it is instruments such as you, unconscious of their own charms ever employed by Providence, named the Countess of Monte-Cristo!

And from these double ruins, the ruins of the soul and the ruins of this house, sudden blossoms spring forth, like unto these dismantled castle walls, which in time of Spring we see covered with verdure and flowers.

In a single embrace the count reunited Cyprienne and Lilias—Lilias the loving representative of his fault inasmuch as she was the sister of Nini Moustache; Cyprienne that of the fault of Hortense, because he believed her to be the fruit of a guilty love.

And within his heart, his sad heart, he felt neither remorse nor hatred; so great is your power, eternal beauty, eternal youth, eternal love!

He was happy, profoundly happy at being able to reconcile irreconcilable matters, of being able to reunite within his soul in the same fireside of affection, under the loving form of their sister and of their daughter the two loves to which his life had been devoted—the love of his mistress, that of his wife. From the two betrayed loves a happiness could be generated. The three, arms interlaced, Loredan disputed with Cyprienne the caresses of Lilias, formed a charming group. But suddenly the arms fell listless to their sides and their lips quivered no longer with spontaneous embraces.

A common enemy entered.

Colonel Fritz.

As she had presentiment of danger Lilias took refuge behind the robes of Cyprienne.

This man, whose coming had already brought into the house so much sorrow and grief, was destined even to dissipate this supreme joy.

Loredan received him coldly. He had desired to use him as an accomplice in his amours; an instinct of secret repugnance impelled him not to suffer the colonel to intermingle with his confidence as to his chaste ebullitions.

However vile he might regard himself, it struck him that the witness of his orgies could not at the same time be that of his newly acquired paternity.

However, Fritz was a daily visitor to the mansion. It was necessary that he should become acquainted with Lilias and the position she was designed to occupy in the count's hotel.

Loredan took her by the hand and presented her:

"My daughter Lilias."

At the name the colonel turned pale, but recovered himself quickly, and going to the child desired to embrace her.

Lored unconscious as to what was transpiring within the mind of his companion, smiled delightfully in all the freedom of his frank happiness.

Lilias rushed into the protective arms of Cyprienne and in a half voice, loud enough for Fritz to overhear her, she murmured:

"Little mamma, don't let him kiss me. I am afraid of him!"

CHAPTER LX.

HOW LE GIGANT HOLDS HIS OWN.

At those words—I am afraid of him—Fritz turned livid. To be a machiavellian scoundrel one must at least be a man. Lilias was his daughter, after all, and to hear that daughter say—"I am afraid of him"—overturned even a reprobate.

Upon his entrance hearing Loredan present the child with this formula:

"Lilias, my daughter."

He thought the count to have discovered everything and prepared himself for the struggle. But Loredan knew nothing: his open smile and extended hand indicated his ignorance and the colonel was unprepared for the mournful shock coming upon him when Lilias said:

"I am afraid of him!"

He bowed his head gravely with a sufficiently awkward action, as in truth it was.

"I see," he said, "my presence incommodes you."

He made a gesture towards leaving but Loredan did not interfere to restrain him.

After crossing the threshold of the hotel de Puysaie, finding himself upon the sidewalk, he gave vent to a violent ebullition of anger.

These souls of clay, have like ours the scale of human sentiments, but by a phenomena inherent to their nature, they sully all, even the most generous.

These accursed, like all other men, are lovers, friends, and fathers; still they distrust your friendship.

And their love you distrust.

Better have their hatred.

He had loved Hortense passionately, as strong as he was capable of loving. That heart, to which the sweets of devotion and of sacrifice remained ever unknown, was capable only of passion.

And that woman, whom he had loved, whom he loved still, he had sacrificed nevertheless to his vile interests. Still, while sacrificing her, he regretted her, and with his sadness embittered into hatred, he reported everything entire to Loredan.

Hence, behold this rival, for to the colonel the count was a veritable rival, after interposing between him and his wife, took from him his daughter.

Lilias called him: "father;" Lilias said to the colonel: "you make me afraid!"

"It is necessary that I kill him."

Fritz walked about aimlessly, traversing such streets as came first to hand, seeking, through the rapidity and disorder of his march, to re-establish the disorder of his thoughts.

He found himself, without being conscious of the time he had spent or of the road he had taken, in the rue Faubourg Montmartre, before the house of Le Gigant. Then he stopped, and with a calm tread remounted towards the boulevard.

His outburst of anger had passed, he reflected.

The introduction of Lilias to the Hotel de Puysaie could not certainly result from accident but from some design upon the part of Le Gigant.

What other than Le Gigant had interest in occupying himself with the Hotel de Puysaie?

The colonel detected treason at once, and as he was aware that in the front

of an adversary, as at the moment of a duel, calmness always triumphed, he set about recovering his calmness.

He seated himself upon a bench of a coffee house upon the boulevard, drank at small sips a glass of iced lemonade, and then redescended the rue of the Faubourg Montmartre.

He was ready.

He leisurely mounted the staircase, enquired in his ordinary voice whether Le Gigant was within, and upon the affirmative response of the little clerk, who recognized him as of old, he penetrated within the sanctum sanctorum.

Le Gigant was cyphering at his bureau, and scarcely turned his head.

"Ah it is you, Colonel!"

"Yes," replied Fritz dryly.

And he seated himself.

Le Gigant smiled behind his horn eye-glass. Those, who knew this smile, trembled at it.

"Well," said Le Gigant listlessly, as he continued with his papers, "any news?"

"Curious news," responded Fritz, with a tone of voice keen as a razor.

"Ah!" ejaculated Le Gigant.

And the noise of his scratching figures upon the paper continued as usual.

Despite his stern resolution to remain unmoved the colonel felt his blood boil and his nerves shake.

A short silence ensued, broken by Le Gigant.

"I am listening to you."

"Lilias," said Fritz pronouncing each word after a pause, "Lilias is at the hotel de Puysaie."

The man of business turned around in his arm chair and regarded the colonel, face to face, eye to eye, so that their glances seemed to strike fire as when two sword blades crossed each other.

"I know it," he said.

The duel commenced.

Fritz clenched his hands upon the leather cushion of his seat as if to force himself to keep still.

"Then it was you?"

"It was me."

These two replies exploded like an exchange of shots.

Decidedly these two friends loved each other.

"You are aware, if it was you," said Fritz bitterly "I should have been forwarned the first."

Le Gigant simply replied:

"It was impossible."

He was a student of men, this Le Gigant. He knew that with men of the colonel's stamp one must never show weakness, even for a second's duration, through fear of defeat.

Aurelia had overridden him because she was firm and diabolically beautiful, but to suffer himself to be overridden by a mere rude man, by a Colonel Fritz—the thing was impossible.

With this declaration: "it was impossible" he was silent and did not deign another explanation.

In mortal combats, the reverse of physical ones, one must always await an attack and never venture the first assault.

Le Gigant awaited the question, the question came.

"And for what purpose?"

"Because the installation of Lilias into the hotel de Puysaie was absolutely necessary to the success of our common plan and you would oppose it—"

"And so I should."

"I knew you would."

This was the second thrust of the sword, and as in the first, Le Gigant came out victor.

They rested on their swords; otherwise they were silent. The man of business seemed ever and completely absorbed on the arrangement of his papers, but beneath them, he never quitted his glance upon the colonel's face, in which he appeared to read his thoughts the very instant they were born.

He felt himself strong and was therefore content. He was taking revenge for his defeat at the hand of Aurelia, and with a pleasant satisfaction he was complimenting himself,

"Come! come! we are not yet idiots."

The colonel was conscious of his impotence, and despite his determina-

tion to remain unmoved, his anger exhibited itself.

Anger is ever an avowal of weakness; Le Gigant smiled paternally behind his spectacles as he moved his papers about.

All great comedians are not behind the foot-lights, and all, comedians of the theatre and comedians in real life know the influence of by-play.

These papers constituted the by-play of Le Gigant. He was aware that their continued rustle would excite the nerves of the colonel and ruffle his temper beyond power of restraint, and then he would break out spontaneously into an outburst. Anger is invariably followed by a reaction, during duration of which he could persuade his irascible associate as to anything he thought proper.

Popular language contains many expressions singularly remarkable in their commonplace adaptation. They say of an angry man; "he simmers like a stew-pan."

When the water in a stew-pan simmers it remain for a long time without boiling over, but then an accident, a shock, a what not may interpose and the contents are over into the fire.

This accident, this shock, this what not were Le Gigant's scraps of paper.

The colonel arose.

"Leave those papers alone," he exclaimed vehemently, "and listen to me."

Le Gigant gazed at him in stupid amazement, a marvellously fine bit of acting.

With the flat of his hand Fritz struck the table with force enough to break it.

"It concerns my daughter, do you understand? my daughter!"

Le Gigant arose in his turn.

"Come," said he, moving his spectacles to his forehead, "no stupidities! no mock heroics!"

This was the third point in the engagement—the attack.

Despite the diapason of anger to which he had ascended, Colonel Fritz was instantaneously disconcerted by the cold glance of Le Gigant and the disdainful tone of his voice.

But, as a natural consequence of his previous astonishment, he only irritated himself the more.

"She is my daughter!" he repeated in that special emphasis belonging to the leading melodramatic actors.

Theatrical emphasis is like musk, the odor of which we can never drive away. Once the gesture, voice, or manners of a man is impregnated with it, it lasts him for an entire life time.

Colonel Fritz could have become a man of fashion, a peerless leader of ton and an arbitrator for men and manners. But, beneath all this varnish, the strolling actor of Brussels was ever to be found.

Never could he say: "she is my daughter!" without rolling his large eyes or sounding a deep toned voice.

The ridiculousness of the actor's professional speech did not escape Le Gigant who smiled as he shrugged his shoulders.

"If it suits your fancy," said he 'go on with your rant." He emphasised these last words.

"You may mock me as much as you like," grumbled out the colonel, "that will not hinder me from exacting the explanation to which I am entitled, very well, this has gone on long enough, and I warn you, Monsieur Le Gigant, that I am acting no longer—"nor will I be acted upon."

"Eh! who thinks to act upon you? hold! I am sorry for you—you are really silly!"

"In a word, why make use of my daughter without my permission?"

"Because your daughter is at the same time our common instrument—the head upon which we intend to unite the fortunes of de Puysaie and of Matifay. Because, moreover, we are at a grave point, and as prudent gamesters we are compelled to take every advantage in the game so as not to lose the stakes like simpletons.

"How, my poor colonel, have you not thought over all this, smart fellow as you are?

"Did you not say that, upon the day when the lawsuit is commenced to establish the identity of Lilias as the count's daughter, every proof will be good, moral proof as well as physical?

"Have you not sufficient foresight to know that from this day, the installation of Lilias by Loredan at his own hearthside will become, in the opinion of the judges, the most strong presumption, a tacit avowal of her paternity?

"Hence it enters, as you are aware, into our plan that Loredan shall not have it on his power to do us harm, should he wish to contradict our declaration?"

Fritz, with downcast eyes, reflected and was constrained to admit, if not the sincerity, at least the speciousness of Le Gigant's reasoning.

"Yes," he responded, raising his head, "all this may perchance be true and the plot seems skillfully managed, but, still, in the matter of Lilias, the concern of my daughter interests me too deeply that I should have no voice in the chapter.

"For, in truth, I want my daughter to love me, that I do—and it tortures my heart to see her on the arms of that man who robs me of her caresses.

"Oh! I hate him from the bottom of my heart, I hate him for all the happiness of which he has robbed me and for all the injury I have done him, still, this day he has taken Lilias from me and I hate him more deeply than ever."

Le Gigant smiled:

"It matters nothing to my plan whether you hate him or not—so I repeat no more sentiment—business is business. Now let us talk rationally."

"You reproach me with having occupied myself with Lilias, your daughter. It had to be done, you could not do it yourself, and, were it so, this part of our plan would have been specially entrusted to you.

"That which I have told you is not for the purpose at some latter time of affording a pretext for lessening your share of the spoils, but, you have behaved like a simpleton, my poor friend.

"Toinon would have done better.

"With the exception of the affair of Nini Moustache which had been pretty well down—and I had a finger too in the pie—you have only blown soap bubbles my boy!—How, you in the centre of the place and you let things slip through your fingers!

"Madam de Puysaie would not have escaped upon the verge eve of the explosion without your being warned of it, or having some trace of her. Lilias, whom you adore so devotedly, and of whom you show yourself so jealous, without me would have gone to some place where you would never have placed hands on her!

"In fact, colonel if I mix up in your affairs it is because they are so entangled as to render my interference an indispensible matter."

"So be it," responded Fritz dryly, "you are my master and I confess it; yes, you have succeeded in finding Lilias after I have vainly hunted in every nook and corner of the town. Still I repeat to you that at this moment there is a vital question for me above all of the other; the question of sentiment as you say.

"I do not wish, on the day when my daughter has been made by me rich, she shall say to me.

"I do not know you.'

"I do not wish on that day that she will be touched by pity over the fate of victims I have sacrificed for her.

"You know I am ambitious for I have become your ally, but I must remind you of one thing you appear to have forgotten, I am her father."

"Oh! permit me to speak in my turn, Le Gigant, since I have known you I have oftentimes left to you both word and leadership, to declare to you, in fine, once and for all, what I think, what I desire.

"Up to this day I have always obeyed you. Your superiority I recognize; it originates from your total want of scruples. I know in you not a single passion, that is to say, a sin-

gle weakness; and you will remain invincible as long as that force which you ignore—passion—does not cause you to explode like an overcharged locomotive.

"That day will however come."

And he, himself, thinking of Aurelia, Le Gigant murmured to himself,

"Yes the day may perchance come!"

"The day will come," continued the colonel, "and if it does not come for your own self, it will certainly come for one of your faithful allies, for myself, perhaps. Do not push me to extremities for inevitably the explosion will follow, and if I do not possess within myself the force necessary to circumvent you, my good fellow, rest assured I shall take care that you go up with me.

"Listen. When I fell in with you for the first time I was not then worth much, and, sincerely, I admired you. If I went to you it was willingly.

"I felt in your brain a power of perseverance, which I wanted and always will want. But I was young and ardent, you had need of me and I of you.

"Reciprocal needs make solid alliance; I became your friend and associate.

"I became more: your tool.

"One day you said to me: 'it is necessary that Madame de Puysaie becomes your mistress.' She has been thus.

"That flattered me, that intrigue with a lady of the high world, and yet—and yet I feel that I have done wrong.

"As soon as passion intermingled with it, all was spoiled. I am not a calculator, and a woman, in tears, sufferings and prayers, moved my heart.

"You are of bronze, you ignore such things.

"Is this a real sentiment or simply a remembrance of outline, which from the brain, descends to the head. I know not. These thoughts and these sensations are they of my creation or are they simply old dramatic phrases recalled to mind? What is the difference!

"I only know one thing and that is, be the suffering real or imaginary, I have suffered.

"I have suffered through the confidence of this poor woman whom I have betrayed. I am not in the habit of playing third rate parts. I have suffered through the lying denunciation you forced me to carry to the count. I have sufiered through this friendship imposed upon me in face of the man whom I have dishonored and of whom I am at the same time as jealous as a wild beast.

"And of all these sufferings I have never told you anything.

"Listen, you permitted me a little while ago to indulge in ranting. I abuse your permission. This is the first and the last time in my life in which I shall play before you in honest comedy.

"As an actor or not, in reality or in fiction, I may play the part of a dupe, but I comprehend that you do not wish to see me as I think I am.

"Hold the bridle firm, Le Gigant; the day you loosen the bit I will break the reins."

Was Colonel Fritz sincere or not? It matters little!

As he said he was really handsome and Le Gigant felt, despite his calmness, ill at ease before that power, of which he had been ignorant up to this day.

That power which Aurelia had reawakened within him:

Passion.

The colonel resumed after a short silence, calculated upon, perchance, for effect.

I say to you actors will ever be actors, and even at the coffin of an only child they will strain after effect.

"You have compelled me to all these infamies and I have not revolted. You have caused me to throw into the arms of another Nini Moustache, whom I loved and I uttered no complaint. You have caused me to torture Hortense, whose sorrows

touched me to the heart's core, and I said not a word.

"At this moment there is within my very soul but a single corner to which you have not penetrated—Lilias! and I advise you never to touch there.

"For the rest, I admit myself impotent as against you.

"Do as you like. I have only one expedient against you, that of the locomotive to which I alluded but a moment ago—to go up and to carry you with me."

Definitely, this avowal of weakness was a triumph for Le Gigant.

However this triumph left him pensive. He could with difficulty restrain muttering to himself:

"If, perchance, Aurelia has betrayed me! There is something most clear in this installation, of Lilias into the household of the count, an installation for which I am not accountable. It is direct hostility to the colonel.

"I have, this day, lost my most unscrupulous tool!"

The triumph was in fact one for Aurelia.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE FIELD OF ROSES.

The spot was charming, I know not the name it bore upon the map of Paris, but Clement found one embalmed within the spot itself. He had christened it: The Field of Roses.

The house was small, all covered with foliage and flowers, in a thicket of shrubbery. The inhabitants were gentle, happy, and gay as meadow larks.

In this shady retreat, away from visitors and intruders, dwelt Madam Rozel and Ursula.

Never, since she emerged from the convent, had the girl found herself more happy. Nothing was wanting her in her chosen asylum, not even news from the beloved Cyprienne.

The sorcery, which, heretofore, had been so strongly employed by La Bleue, recommenced again in favor of La Blanche who, each morning, without knowing whence it came, found upon the table a letter from Cyprienne.

Another laconic note—of an unknown hand writing—had apprized upon the first day, that she had only to deposit her answers upon the same place and they would be transmitted directly to Cyprienne by the same mysterious post.

Ursula was brave and this fairy work caused her less fear as she doubted not the fairy with whom she had business.

Hence, with what a heart the dear little one prayed every night, for Madam Lamoroux.

How, in truth, did she not see in all this the hand of the good lady in the quilted silk gown?

It was not Madam Rozel herself, Madam Rozel, the right arm of all this charitable widow, had been given to her as a guardian and as a companion in exile.

The guardian gave her no uneasiness, but the companion pleased her thoroughly. Madam Rozel was still young, cheerful, happy and volatile, more volatile in fact than Ursula, who was never given to seriousness, and hence it is easy to account for these outbursts of gaiety ringing all day long in the pleasant house amid the Field of Roses.

And, nevertheless, it is always necessary for the human soul to crave for something, so aptly has it been said that desire is the source of happiness. Consequently in this house, wherein each day was a holiday, there was one whose advent was expected with singular impatience.

That day was Sunday.

In the morning the house preserved its ordinary closed appearance, but I will willingly wager that behind the Venetian blinds, they slept to a less late hour, and that matinal eyes watched, from the stroke of eight, the

gravel walk by which the garden gate was approached.

At nine o'clock, no one as yet appeared upon the road-way, but through the branches of the thicket, the accommodating breezes wafted the refrain of a joyous song, of a graceful effusion, in honor of the bright spring-time.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Madam Rozel gaily, as she opened the window shutters upon catching sound of the melody, "behold the Marseillaise of the true lovers."

Nothing still upon the roadway.

Madam Rozel listened as the harmony progressed.

At length the voise raised itself to its most sonorous pitch, scarcely twenty paces off, the melody accompanied by the cadence of footsteps on the gravel pathway.

Then the gate opened wide and Madam Rozel welcomed Clement with a most respectful and at the same time most graceful of salutations.

But Clement came not alone; behind him timidly advanced Louis Jacquemin.

This Sunday promenade to the Field of the Roses was his reward for his week at labor; hence came it he was among the first to be found at work, and the last to leave the work-shop. No longer indulged he in prolonged visits to the wine-shop, in debauches or in follies! For the future his existence had an aim; at the end of his six days of assiduous labor, austere privations, he knew that there lay before him a seventh illuminated by a clear sky, radiant with promised joy. Long, long to him these six days, and oftentimes leaning over his work-bench, file in hand, he had stopped in his labor ready to throw away tools and seek the enervating excitement of his former pleasures. In those hours of temptation the spectre of Celine passed before his eyes! Vain phantom which he could now chase away in conjuring up the image of Ursula.

Then, little by little, he came to appreciate the healthy joys of toil. That attention, which in the beginning had cost him so many efforts, gradually appeared to him a matter of ease, in the end one of pleasure. He finally came to recognize the pure enjoyment a well occupied day bestows upon the soul, an enjoyment the most complete which can be earned by mortal men, the enjoyment of self-satisfaction.

In truth, you would not have recognized him as the former vagrant idler, beneath his well-brushed cap of velvet, his black hair flowing behind his ears, and his honest glance, which now turned not aside from the eyes of any man. His own eyes, formerly bloodshot through constant drinking, glowed with rejuvenated brilliancy; his feeble limbs had refound their pristine vigor; his mouth, cramped by regret or perpetual remorse, now arched with a placid smile—all this was more than a reformation—it was almost a resurrection.

And who, if you please, had accomplished this miracle?

The sweet smiling Ursula.

He loved her with the same ardor with which he had previously loved Celine but with a deal less frivolity. He had understood—with the aid perhaps of Clement—that love is not always a pleasure, and for it to be truly great, avowable and generous, it carries with it a degree of duty. What pleasure to say, thinking of a loved one: she owes me all this! I will be her sole support, her sole family! It is through leaning upon my arm she will traverse the proofs of a life smoothened by my cares. Should we encounter a rock in our pathway, it is my foot which will strike against it and I will dash it aside. Oh! holy love, transforming into joys even our miseries and sorrows, it is thou, thou alone who hast made us brave and valiant; it is as such that Louis Jacquemin has come to know thee!

And all astonished at feeling his heart beat as it never beat before, to find within his heart a thousand grave reflections of which he had never dreamed. He bestowed in plentitude of thanksgiving all merit of his redemption upon Ursula, saying to him-

self: "It is she, yes, indeed, it is she who has wrought my salvation."

Did she love him? He was ignorant of the fact; he never dreamed of that. It was sufficient for her to allow him to love her. Sincere love is not proud and the prize it aspires after is always so elevated that it is an honor to obtain it. Only feeling that each day made him a better man, he said to himself: "I shall show myself worthy of her," and this conviction strengthened his worth and his courage.

Clement had recounted to him the story of Ursula always concealing her relationship to Celine, through fear of intimidating him or of rekindling his ancient affection, which would have been entirely at variance with the object of Louis' protectors.

He knew that Ursula was poor like himself, who, like him only lived from day to day by her labor and that the time would come when she, would desire her share in the world's joys and that then she would require a hearthside, some one to love and a heart to sympathize with her lot. If, suffice upon the day, when these necessities dawned upon her, and which nature had implanted in the heart of every woman, he trusted that her choice would fall upon him to minister to her wants and happiness.

Oftentimes, this hope traversed, like a dream, the soul of Louis; then, working rapidly with his file, chanting one of Clement's refrains, smiling within his interior soul, he felt the stifled waters of twenty years arise to the surface of life's stream to wash away the sorrows of the past and the ignominies of a wasted existence.

And why should it not be so?

When Sunday arrived, as he turned the angle of the pathway leading to the Field of Roses, and perceived the walls of the house wreathed in flowering vines, then his hopes appeared to him extravagant. With a single glance he measured the interval seperating him from the young girl, him, the degraded being, degraded through debauchery and vice, then, exaggerating his own loss of dignity, he would murmur to himself:

"Never!"

Never!—Ever!—Perhaps! These are the three words of lovers; indefinite as is love itself.

Afar, too, from Ursula, Jacquemin thought:

"Perhaps!"

In her presence, he exclaimed within himself, somewhat bitterly:

"Never!"

The day will come at last when he will perchance murmur:

"Ever!"

Ursula no longer regarded Louis Jacquemin with indifference.

She was a brave and generous girl, having within her little of a sister of charity.

She knew concerning Jacquemin all that Clement could narrate to her; his deceived love and his bitter sorrows, and, involuntarily, the desire to nurse this wounded heart, to dry his tears, to restore his shaken courage, grew upon her.

Although Ursula had already loved Louis, he had never declared his own love for her; affection is not born rapidly within such matured and tested souls as his. Still, independent of love compassion had shown its head, and oftentimes compassion is the mother of love.

The reserved air of Louis, his sadness even, had served him to gain the affections of the young woman.

He would have been the most skilful of seducers had he not acted otherwise.

Moreover Ursula was prudent and rational; she had never indulged in those golden dreams haunting the pillows of boarding school girls. She was aware that the time had passed when princes married sheperdesses; it was not a hero, concerning whom she dreamed to wed, only an honest man who would love her good and trusty.

She recoiled neither from stubborn labor nor from a dearly bought piece of bread. Nor feared she the austere duties of a wife or of a mother of a family and, truly, had she been offered

a choice between the two she would have unhesitatingly preferred the little black shawl of a working man's wife to the rich cashmere of the mistress of a millionaire.

One Sunday morning Madam Rozel and Ursula, awaiting the habitual visit of Louis and of Clement, were promenading, arm in arm, as two friends, within the little garden teeming with rose buds,

That day Madam Rozel, ordinarily the personification of mirth and candor —had indulged in truly mysterious movements.

Twice or thrice she had seized Ursula's arm with an unaccustomed vivacity, as if she had something to confide to her, then, with no less quickness she had relinquished it, doubtlessly hesitating as to the manner in which she should broach the subject.

At last, she took her resolution and proceeded, to speak in common parlance, to take the bull by the horns.

"How do you find, my little dear, our friend Jacquemin?"

Ursula blushed to the white of her eyes.

"Very well, is he not? Although a little sad! He's had so much trouble! Oh! he is not like monsieur Clement, such a joyous, gay and amiable fellow."

When it concerned Clement Ursula no longer felt ashamed. She soon endorsed all the eulogies of Madam Rozel so that that good little woman approved by clapping together her two hands in delight.

'Then you find that I have not made a bad choice?"

"How, Madam—?"

"Ah! my dear little friend, I have determined upon marrying and it is Monsieur Clement upon whom I have bestowed my choice. To remain an old maid, don't you see would be terrible! Besides he is so gay, always with a song upon his lips, and such a a heart! a heart of gold! Hence, the affair is resolved upon and within a month or so Madam Rozel will be transformed into Madam Clement. My resolution is taken and I am going to announce it to him right away."

"He will be indeed happy, Madam."

"I am quite certain he will be," respoded Madam Rozel, as her hearty laugh exposed her white shining teeth. "But, as for you, my dear little one; here you are well grown up, and it is time to think about being established for life."

"Me!" ejaculated Ursula with a sigh.

"What a pity?" sighed Madam Rozel in a hypocritical manner, "that Monsieur Jacquemin loves another

He is so good and kind!"

She felt Ursula's arm tremble beneath her own.

"What is the matter with you, little dear?"

"Me! nothing, Madam, I assure you."

"It struck me that you trembled, but these mornings are very chilly."

A silence ensued.

Ursula walked with downcast eyes and Madam Rozel cast furtive glances at her, biting her lips.

That morning there had been a conspiracy at the Field of Roses.

Ursula appeared anxious to speak —to ask questions—but she dared not.

The waggish Madam Rozel amused herself at her perplexities.

It was necessary for Ursula to surrender for the other would not have enclosed her teeth for an empire.

Such was the order of the day.

"Then Monsieur Jaquemine?"

"Alas yes!" sighed Madam Rozel reluctantly. "When I say that he loves, you understand that I do not know it of my own knowledge. He has perhaps consoled himself. I hope for his own sake that he is consoled. But that which I know for certain is that he has loved, loved dearly a woman who has not repaid him well, and that he has suffered much and most cruelly. A past like that for a suitor is always a source of inquietude for a young girl he would like to marry."

Ursula felt her heart throb within her.

"On the contrary," she exclaimed suddenly.

She stopped short and turned red.

Good Rozel! with what enthusiasm she took Ursula in her arms and kissed her forehead.

"You are an angel. Conceal nothing from me. Am I not your friend?"

"Oh! certainly, madam!"

"Then you will consent, my darling to soothe this poor, afflicted heart! Listen? I was joking a moment since, I deceived you! Will Jacquemin love you sincerely.—Would I speak to you of it if I were not sure of it?

"Yes! he has suffered deeply; and for a disordered person, as doubtlessly he is at present, he will become dear as you grow to know him. It is almost a duty in you to staunch that wound.

"I would not have spoken thus at first as I desire in no wise to influence your conscience, but I can now avow it to you as I see that you love our poor Louis. For you love him, do you not?"

And, more and more confused, in a half audible voice, as the rustling of the breeze through leaves, Ursula murmured:

"I believe so, Madam."

Then, ashamed of her previous shame, for honest confessions of an honest heart are such as should be declared with an open brow, the courageous girl reassumed her upright position and glancing upon Madam Rozel with her full, black eyes, frank as her soul, said composedly:

"I do love him'"

"This morning I was ignorant of him still and it has been you who revealed him to me. May God pardon me but I was almost jealous, when a moment ago you said he loved another. But it is not wicked to have been jealous, and I am so no longer. Alone I may perchance hesitate but if you and Monsieur Clement tell me that I must love him—well! I must follow your advice."

Then she added in a low tone of voice,

"I will follow it with joy."

Oh! how joyous it appeared, as the light of the day grew clearer within that pretty garden of the Field of Roses, as Clement had so characteristically styled the place, blessed enclosure as it was. The sun shone through the vines enclustering the arbor and sent upon the ground circlets of light wherein danced the dust in his golden rays. Huge butterflies with their myriad-colored wings, tawny and dust covered, hovered around in joyous flutterings, while from the branches of neighboring trees came the wild notes of singing birds!

In all this, in the mortals and in the inanimate reigned an intimate and serious joy; the lively Rozel herself laughs no more. Amid this serenity laughter was a breach of harmony

At the bottom of the arbor, upon the beaten track of the road, could be heard the rolling of a carriage. Rozel arose.

She was by this time absolutely serious and grave; not even a smile!

"My child," she said to Ursula, with an accent going to her heart, the destiny of two beings, which ought to concern you the most, if the anticipations of those loving you are realized, is at stake this morning:

"Those of your sister and of your husband.

"You will see to-day, for the first time a great criminal whom you alone have no right to pass judgment upon even if this ordeal terminates otherwise than as we expect.

"Ursula, this day should bring great joy, but God alone is infallible; therefore, perhaps, a severe misfortune may be in store for you.

"You are courageous as I am aware and it is on that account that some one who is stronger and better than I have adjudged you worthy of submitting yourself to this unmerited ordeal but which can save two poor beings lost without your intercession.

"You have still the right to repel

it for we do not think it proper to be imposed upon you unwillingly."

Ursula turned pale. This mysterious language filled her heart with a singular anguish.

But she was courageous, as Rozel observed, and she responded:

"It concerns him. It is you, who have done naught to me save what is good, who advises me. Behind your influence I feel that of Madam Lamouroux—let the will of God be done!"

"Then," said Madam Rozel, kissing her forehead, "wait here."

With a light step as the flight of a bird she descended the steps leading from the arbor.

As she passed along the voice of Clement was heard chaunting one of his rollicking songs.

Veiling her eyes behind her hands Ursula murmured to herself:

"Lord God! how I love him!"

CHAPTER LXII.

THE ELDER SISTER.

The sound of a footstep reverberated upon the stairs of the terrace. Ursula raised her head, in front of her stood Louis Jacquemin.

Louis was pale and as agitated as she herself was.

He made two steps towards her and stopped timidly.

Then, with a voice trembling with emotion:

"I love you, Ursula," he said, "will you try to love me?"

Then it was she who advanced two steps and who, with equal frankness, simplicity and courage, took his hand, extended towards her, and replied to him:

"I believe you to be an honest man, Monsieur Louis, and I love you!"

Oh! how beautiful was that morning in that garden of the Field of Roses.

Everything seemed to breathe enchantment.

Intoxicated, insane with happiness and gratitude Jacquemin imagined himself wafted upon wings, the wings of victory, from his slough and transported triumphantly, by a solitary flight, to the pinnacle of ideal joys.

And dazzled by the light, gleaming from this plane, he saw shining scintilations floating before his eyes as those do gazing upon the sun's disc for a length of time. All his strength, all his courage, suddenly forsook him. The effort once made, he felt himself grow feeble and then fell as a helpless mass upon a bench of worm-eaten wood.

As to Ursula she remained resolute and calm. Louis had said to her: "I love you;" she had replied: "I love you." From that time forth she considered herself as the friend, the sister, the wife of Louis.

They are thus these proud girls, unstained by any degrading influence, who have been brought up in the rude school of healthy misery, courageously sustained.

She seated herself by the side of Jacquemin as if to say to him:

"I know that you have suffered. Your sufferings are not yours alone. I must have my share."

During these sacred moments when souls cast aside burdens of their terrestial condition we can say that a more intimate communication is established between them as if a friendly fairy murmured in confidential tones their most secret thoughts.

Were it otherwise, why did Louis seize the hand of Ursula and whisper a response to her mute questions:

"Oh! yes, I have suffered grievously."

"I know it well," she said.

"You know it and still you love me?"

"I have loved you since I have known it."

These last words, so simple yet so noble, caused him to shed tears.

It had been a long time since Jacquemin had wept. He thought the sacred fountain of tears to have been dried up.

He wept now tears of delight.

He wept upon the shoulder of Ursula, where in modest chastity she suffered his forehead to rest.

"Pardon me! pardon me!" he cried, "it is not my fault. It is not regret which causes me to cry; it is remorse—I am weak and faint—pardon me!"

And she replied to him:

"I do not pardon you, Louis, for I have nothing to pardon you for, and on account of these tears, I love you so much the more."

Oh! how beautiful was that morning in the garden of the Field of Roses!

Below, amid the flower-strewn avenues, walked, arm and arm, shoulder to shoulder, Rozel and Clement.

They wept not, not they; for in his throat the joyous jeweler felt ready to warble melodies of which nightingales might be proud.

"Come, it is decided!" said his pretty companion, "we are to be a bridal-couple."

"The torch of Hymen only needs lighting up."

"Then I owe you a revelation," said Rozel with downcast eyes.

"Reveal then;" responded Clement, comically yet not without some uneasiness.

"I have loved some one," said Rozel with a sigh.

"Truly!"

"Yes!" affirmed Rozel anew—"yet I love him no more—at least not in the same fashion."

Another sigh.

Those who play with fire always burn their fingers.

Clement comprehended that some pleasantry was intended, still he entertained misgivings.

'His name?" he enquired.

"Joseph!" said Rozel and she cast her eyes down upon the sand as she turned it up with the point of her little shoe.

Clement burst out into laughter.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "here I am! you are a malicious little devil in rose colored varnish and for the past ten minutes you have been only mocking me! You wish to play here the counter part of the scene above. That will not take. I warn you of it. Love Joseph as much as you like, but love no one except him and I'll warant I'll never be jealous."

Rozel now laughed heartily. It was all right, her conscience was lighter since she delivered her revelation.

This huge revelation, this grand secret of her own keeping which she felt it her duty to confide to Clement before accepting him as her husband.

Beneath a frivolous exterior this Rozel possessed an exquisite delicateness; to her husband she desired to be as chaste in mind as in body.

She had loved Joseph here to fore, the love of a hoyden for a stripling, before circumstances had placed between them an impassible barrier. At this moment she, without a thought of regret for the past, placed her loyal hand within the equally loyal one of Clement; still she thought herself obligated to say to him:

"I have loved Joseph."

He accepted the avowal in good humor, so much the better! There, was doubtlessly, a little female cunning in this; Rozel might moreover have insisted that her confession contained something of value.

But what wish you? woman must always be woman.

After all, I wish all husbands never to be worst deceived than this Clement.

Oh! How beautiful, how soothing was that morning in the garden of the Field of Roses!

Beneath the arbor the scene had continued; they were still at confessions.

Louis Jacquemin did not dissimulate in nothing for he had no wish to deceive.

He told the story of the clockmaker and his daughter Celine, of the arrival of the tempter and of the fall of the poor girl he already loved.

Hence, without doubting it, from the lips of her brother, Ursula listened to the history of her own family.

Then he narrated the tale of his first

sorrows, which carried Jacquemin and her into their first frailties, he misrepresented nothing and nothing extenuated.

From time to time he interrupted himself and murmured discouragingly:

"Ah! you will love me not when you hear all, but I am an honest man and must unbosom myself."

Then she replied.

"You have suffered too much not to be good. I love you!"

In this way he went on until he reached the period of his infamous complicity, that which directly preceeded the drama of his regeneration.

He related this event, that abduction and travel at daybreak, of which she had preserved but an indistinct recollection. She shuddered at learning for the first time the danger she had run and by what a slender thread she had been seperated from irreparable perdition.

But she looked upon Louis and read in his eyes a repentance so profoundly sincere that she said again:

"I love you."

He had even a smile upon his lips.

The souls of these young girls, even the most candid, have singular depths.

She thought.

"He would never have known me, never have loved me had it not been for this abduction."

Oh! how beautiful and pleasant was that morning in the garden of the Field of Roses and beneath that thrice happy arbor.

For an instant, half concealed in the rear of a mass of lilacs, a woman clothed in black and veiled, contemplated the pleasing spectacle of these two lovers with their arms chastely interlaced.

Deep sighs heaved within her bosom and she was almost tempted to give vent to them but was restrained only through fear of annoying this charming duo.

And in a low voice she murmured, addressing herself to an invisible being as one would address the Deity:

"All thy promises thou hast kept! Thanks, holy dear one! thanks, Helene!"

Louis raised his eyes and perceived this sombre form.

Then turning alarmingly pale, he drew himself up to his full height and exclaimed:

"She! she again! ever she!"

Nini Moustache advanced as far as the centre of the terrace, then stopped, shivering and with downcast eyes.

Oh! truly the effort she then made was the most terrible which the Countess of Monte-Cristo could have exacted fram her.

But the welfare of Ursula was involved and that of Louis Jacquemin, both and for all time, secured, should she emerge triumphant from this final ordeal, and she hesitated not to undertake it.

She held her peace, awaiting in anxiety, the first words, pronounced by the young man and praying God with the entire strength of her will that those first words might be cruel as regards her, that is to say, that they would be pleasant to Ursula.

For, if his former passion had not been wholly extinct!—If Louis might once again reclaim an impossible passion! It would be a declaration of his eternal separation from Ursula.

Because Celine was aware of it, Madam Rozel had informed her, and Clement had sworn to the fact that Ursula loved Jacquemin.

Louis had, as we have said, stood erect, with his brow contracted and his face terribly pale before this unexpected apparition of his first, his degrading love.

He waved her away, in the first instance by a violent gesture, but almost instantly a smile of bitter disdain played upon his lips.

"You, again!" he said sternly, "why seek you me in this place?"

Nini Moustache did not respond.

"Is this the degraded and infamous wretch, whom I once loved?" continued Jacquemin, "but I must tell you that that is past and gone. The contempt your acts generated has killed all thought of you.

"You will here find but a heart repentant and resolved upon every expiation in order to redeem myself from errors of the past."

Ursula, with the same simplicity and calmness she had heretofore exhibited during this entire day, the most momentous in her existence, approached Louis and with a tender familiarity leaned upon his shoulder.

It was not to brave her rival that she acted in this manner. Oh! no! Neither to restrain Jacquemin had he shown an intention of following her.

Her sense of shame and indignant pride forbade her indulging in such a strife.

She, likewise, upon perceiving Nini Moustache enter, had shivered. The vague confessions of Madam Rozel caused her a mysterious presentiment of danger and when Celine appeared upon the terrace, she said to herself: "here is the danger!'

With an anxiety similar to that exhibited by the repentant sinner, she had awaited the words of Jacquemin, words fraught with a triple judgment.

Perchance those words might be violent; she feared they might be, for she thought: 'his anger may partake still of love.'

But the frozen calmness of her betrothed, for as such in her innermost heart she regarded him as yet, thoroughly reassured her, and if at that moment she leaned upon him with a position of chaste resignation, it was to reward him, so to speak, his merited reward, so as to cheapen the price of the effort or of his courage.

"Henceforth," she seemed to say to herself, as she pressed softly upon Louis' shoulder, his arm responding to her action, "henceforth, my friend, we shall have hands in common, and in the same manner as shortly will I demand a share in all your sorrows so do I demand participation in your struggle.

With an eye beclouded with tears, tears of consolation, Celine looked upon the loving couple: upon Jacquemin, whose melancholy brow still bore traces of his past sufferings; upon Ursula, whose forehead gleamed with the warm foreshadowing of future happiness.

Ah! dear friends, dear children, as she would wish to unite them in a common bond and confound with it their joy, which penetrated even to her soul—still she dared not. She could not however prevent herself from extending to them her arm as an evidence of a despairing appeal.

It seemed to her that they could have divined her intention.

Louis distrusted this empassioned movement and he knitted his forehead —contracting his black eyebrows.

"What come you to seek hither?" he ejaculated, "Do you wish by your contact to defile purity?"

Ursula stopped him.

"Not a word more, Louis!" and she added in a lower tone: "Why insult her? She should have suffered had she loved you."

These words were uttered as a murmur, a breath of air, softer still than the rustle of a withered leaf as it falls to the ground, still Celine heard them and she responded:

"Thanks!"

Then, weak at every point, she tottered towards the staircase leading from the terrace.

She then resolved to accomplish the entire sacrifice.

The Countess of Monte-Cristo had doubtlessly judged it inexpedient to make known to Ursula her relationship to Celine. Celine obeyed to the strict letter the instructions of Madam de Monte-Cristo.

She would emerge from the house as she had entered it, despised by the husband, unknown to the wife. Never again would her name be pronounced and the little children who would be born, would never learn that they had afar, in some obscure nook of the land, a second mother praying for them. Be it so! She resigned herself to this eternal solitude of the heart. And, moreover, had she not merited it? It is the inexorable, still just, *lex talionis;* "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

Against whom had she been culpable? against her father, against her brother Louis—she then styled Louis her brother—and she deserved to be punished by her brother and sister!

Tottering at each step, sustaining herself by one hand upon the bulstrade of the terrace, feeling her way with the other, for she was as one blind and could only perceive objects through a mist of falling tears. Celine slowly wended her way, while Ursula following her with her eyes, could scarcely restrain an expression of sympathy at witnessing her profound grief.

She looked upon Louis to read in his countenance some trace of his internal sentiments. He was stern and grave as would be a man discharging a duty without feebleness or regret.

"She is suffering deeply," said Ursula to him.

But he replied by shrugging his shoulders.

"Comedy!" he said in response.

This word inflicted the final wound, striking Celine to the depth of her heart; still the unfortunate woman winced not, stumbled not, nor even turned her head, but commenced descending the stairs of the terrace.

At the same instant a joyous group were ascending them, that of Rozel and Clement.

"Well?" asked both sumultaneously of Celine.

"Well!" responded the latter in a husky tone of voice, seeming to emerge from the grave, "all is finished!"

"Oh! I knew it well," exclaimed Clement gaily.

"Louis has done his duty."

"Then," interrupted Rozel, "it is our turn to do ours!"

Despite her inclinations, they both took hold of an arm of Celine, and, constraining her to retrace her steps, as they led her back to the terrace.

"What wish you, what wish you further of me?" she stammered out, overwhelmed with trouble.

"That which we wish," replied the handsome jeweler, "is that justice shall be rendered to you and that those who have so long accused you shall learn to love you anew—but in another fashion, for example!" he added, with a smile:

"That what we still wish," interposed Rozel in her soft tones, "is that the happiness of our dear Ursula be complete, and that she should know and with her own voice thank that mysterious cousin, whom she has so often blessed in the solitude of her heart.

"What Madam Morel!" exclaimed Ursula.

"Here she is!" responded Rozel, thrusting her into the arms of Celine.

However Clement had taken Louis Jacquemin aside and was conversing with him seriously.

"It is not necessary, Louis," he said, "to be more severe than God. The trials we have imposed upon you, you have courageously sustained, and you see we do not haggle about the reward, well, know then that Celine has suffered more poignantly than you have, for she was the most guilty, know likewise, to-day, we regarded her as being worthy of the esteem and friendship of an honest man.

"Your reward, promised by me in behalf of those for whom I acted, in love and happiness.

"That which we have promised to her, laboring in common with us, was, in the first instance, your reformation and pardon, and in the next your affection for her sister, of whose presance she has for a long time deprived herself voluntarily."

"What! Ursula!"

"She is the sister of Celine. Well, Louis, will you leave our work half finished? And will you, for whom we have done so much, not help us to the end?"

Jacquemin, lost in thought, listened to this revelation which he was far from expecting, Then, without responding, he went towards Ursula and Celine, who, with downcast eyes, dared not look upon her sister.

The latter, all intimidated at discovering her earliest protectress in the woman who but five minutes before she considered as a rival, stammered:

"Oh! madam—my cousin!—how can I prove to you my gratitude?"

Louis took the hand of Celine within one of his, and that of Ursula in another.

"Ursula, my beloved wife," he said in a tone of deep pathos, "embrace Celine—our sister!"

Oh! how beautiful, how pleasant was that morning in the beautiful garden of the Field of Roses."

CHAPTER LXIII.

EPISTLES FROM THE REFUGE.

Since the adoption of Lilias by the Count de Puysaie incidents, the most detached one from the other, appear to group themselves in a fashion so as to appease all his griefs and to calm all his troubles.

We might say that an invisible and providential hand guided them, that mysterious hand which according to popular adage never allows blessings to come single.

In the first instance he found that the black body of debts, upon which in the earlier moments of his difficulties he could not dare to venture his eyes, had reduced itself to a single entry.

The greater proportion of his indebtedness had in fact been contracted for Nini Moustache, that is to say that Le Gigant, as manager of the formidable association to which we have already alluded, had charged himself with their collection.

Heretofore, when he struggled to accomplish the ruin of the Count he acquitted himself of his charge with a pitiless bitterness of spirit.

But now, when the man of business saw drawing near the instant, when this fortune, united to that of Matifay's would fall into the hands of Aurelia—that is to say his own—he had an interest in husbanding it, so that it might not fall entirely into the clutches of conspiring sharpers.

The less expense the greater the gain, and acting upon this maxim Le Gigant secured the count, to his great astonishment a little tranquility from that quarter.

His other debts were, it is true, considerable. Still the sale of the hotel sufficed in a measure to extinguish them, upon condition that Madam de Puysaie on her side, would relinquish in part, her right of dower, and that it could be disposed of to some amicable purchaser without having recourse to a peremptory sale at auction under order of the courts.

This amicable purchaser presented herself, represented by the person of maitre Durantin, notary, the same who but a few months belore, had acquired in the name of Madam Lamouroux, proprietress, the little hotel of Nini Moustache.

This Madam Lamouroux would appear to be a pretty strong proprietress with a real estate fever.

The difficulty remained in the way of Madam de Puysaie's right to dower and this difficulty was no small one inasmuch as the count, despite all of his researches was absolutely unable to discover what had become of his wife.

One morning, when upon the point of going, according to his daily habit, into the chamber of his beloved Lilias to embrace her, Loredan found evidence of her being in the land of the living in a sealed envelope upon the marble top of his toilet table.

How came that letter here? the count was unable to give any explanation.

No person entered his private apartment except his valet de chambre and his two daughters.

Cyprienne and Lilias, interrogated, did not appear to comprehend the question and Florent declared positively that he had no knowledge on the subject.

Florent had been brought up in the household and his fidelity being unimpeachable the count was obliged to believe in his assertion.

Moreover, good news is ever welcome and this letter, coming in so eccentric a fashion, contained the best

news Monsieur de Puysaie could hope for.

In the first place it contained two business documents, drawn up in strictly legal form: a consent to the marriage of Cyprienne with the baron Matifay and a relinquishment to right of dower upon the hotel property.

Then came a letter signed Hortense.

"Loredan," said this letter, you have done me a deal of injury, but I forgive you as I desire that you will forgive me for what I have done you. The greatest culprit is neither you nor I, my friend, in this whole matter, and if I have flown from you, it is that, through force of grief, I fear that I may betray myself and I desire, for your sake, for mine, for everybody's, that you will never learn his name.

"I forgive you because you have suffered much and I trust for your forgiveness because I swear to you I, likewise, have suffered profoundly.

"I know that you have need of the two papers herein enclosed and I send them to you. In deserting my conjugal relation I have abdicated all right over Cyprienne. Decide then upon her destiny; but know you, and voices from the tomb never speak falsely:

"Cyprienne is your daughter.

"All attempts you may institute to refind me will prove fruitless; you have already experience in that respect and I am aware of all the vain efforts you have made to discover me. Cease then through love of me and strive to forget me. The idea that you still regret me and that I remain a source of sorrow tortures me.

"As for me, from the depth of my tomb, where I am as happy, perhaps, as any woman can be, separated from all of those she loves by an unsurmountable obstacle, I lose you not from my sight and my heart, my sad heart partakes of all your anguish, your desires and your joys.

"Adieu, and conserve for me the tender recollection, we always treasure concerning those dear creatures who have passed into the valley of the dead years gone by. "HORTENSE."

No one, as we have said, could elucidate to Loredan as to the manner in which this letter had been introduced to his mansion and deposited upon a table in his most private apartment. Cyprienne alone could have thrown some light upon the subject.

But a light very pale and vague. She could have told him that upon arising from her couch, she likewise had found a letter in the ordinary spot where hitherto she had found communications from "unknown friends," —that is in her jewel casket.

But he might have compelled her to expose the contents of her letter—that was impossible.

The epistle received by Cyprienne was in the same manner signed "Hortense," but unlike that of the count, it was dated from a mysterious place— "The Refuge."

Like the count's communication, it embraced but a few lines, replete with maternal effusions, anxieties and tear drops, compressed upon a short page which Cyprienne covered with kisses and with tears.

"Oh! my daughter," said this letter, "neither adjudge nor condemn me; wait and hope!

"We are, I know, in hands more powerful than our own yet divinely good.

"They have promised to save you and I have as strong faith in this promise as if it came from God himself; you will be saved.

"Think not that I this day betray you. Your father will again speak to you concerning that odious marriage with the Baron Matifay. The sacrifice is most cruel, yet it must be submitted to.

"This will assuredly appear very strange to you, as it does to me. This marriage, which to our idea personally seems to bring despair, is the only road remaining to you, whereby you can attain deliverance and happiness.

"Why, and in what manner? I am ignorant. Still I must believe it as *they* have told me so, they, who are so good, they, who are all knowing, they, who are omnipotent!"

That evening, at the family dinner, Loredan appeared more absorbed in thought than he had been for many days previously, and it was with difficulty that he paid heed to Lilias' cheerful attractions.

From time to time he looked furtively at Cyprienne, and she, well conceiving wherefore he directed his glances upon her, and upon what subject he desired to speak turned away her eyes.

The count hesitated. That triple and solemn declaration: Cyprienne is your daughter! shook his former conviction.

Hence he had resolved that in case she exhibited the remotest repugnance to renew the marriage with Matifay to impose no constraint upon her.

He had it is true passed his word, yet the sudden departure of Madam de Puysaie was an obstacle independent of his will, and it sufficed for him not to inform the baron that he had that morning, received the authorization so ardently desired.

Things would in that wise remain unaltered until the baron at his own option might renounce the engagement and relieve him from his word.

At last Loredan broke silence.

"I have received news from your mother, Cyprienne."

Cyprienne blushed and dropped her eyelashes. It behooved either to appear to know nothing or to lie.

"And will we see her home soon, sir?"

"Alas! my dear child, I have no such hope. In her letter she speaks of your marriage and no longer opposes it."

Loredan, more and more embarrassed, had cogitated upon the composition of this phrase which he pronounced in disjointed words as if to invite an interruption, which, however, came not.

Cyprienne comprehended that the moment had arrived, and invoking in a low tone those "unknown friends" whom she obeyed so religiously:

"I have promised to obey, sir," she said, "and I will obey—"

"Without any more reluctance?" enquired the count.

She hesitated again, then replied in a firm voice:

"Without reluctance."

Loredan arose from the table so briskly that he overturned a pile of dishes.

"Hold, Cypry, you are an angel and you merit not a father like me. Thanks to this little demon," and he took up Lilias in his arms to implant a kiss upon her lips, "thanks to your devotion on this day, all my troubles are forgotten all my faults repaired. Yes, my children, it is to you I owe everything and think not that I will ever forget you. Hence, with the blessing of God, I will work for you and yours; I will again become rich, powerful and happy! Apropos, Cyprey, you know that your eldest son will be heir to my title and rank, and I swear to you that that youngster has the trouble only of being born, for at this moment, beween you two, I feel myself stronger than ever, and, of a truth, I will remember, henceforth, always to bear true allegiance to the device on our escutheon:

Conquiers puis aie.

CHAPTER LXIV.

PREPARATIONS.

For over two months the hotel of Monte-Cristo had been deserted.

No more carriages in its vast court yards; no more lights at the huge windows of saloons blazing all night long like furnaces.

No more joyous melodies, carried by the wind through the shade trees of the park as far as the public road, where, allured by the music, the passers-by listened its strains, clambering upon the massive gate ways.

The hotel Monte-Cristo was closed, sombre and dismal, and belated travellors shunned its long walls as a place absolutely deserted and propitious only for highway robberies.

Houses like men have their destiny; this one, which in its luxurious halls had seen all Paris happy, all Paris laughing, all Paris in love, presented at this moment the dismal aspect of a tomb.

Life within had departed with the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

That mysterious beauty had disappeared as she had come, like a fairy queen so to speak and had left no tra ces behind her.

Her intimate friends Monsieur de la Cruz among the number, pretended that she had gone to travel *incog.* in Germany, so *incog.* in fact that the special newspapers of high society, the Gazette at the watering places and the Magazines, which for the year past had been filled with notices of her, enregistered not the slightest mention of her movements.

At Paris impressions are readily born and as readily die away. In the provinces it takes centuries to create a ruin; in the capital, where we travel fast, a month is all sufficient.

Perceiving this sumptuous palace perpetually gloomy and closed many persons did not know that it was that very Hotel de Monte-Cristo of which they themselves had been so often covetous.

Thence a legend was invented.

It was pretended that during the night within this deserted habitation a lamp lighted itself and burned, ever in the same spot like an eye of flames.

This eternal light appeared the soul of the dead house.

Never the less, one day, the doors of the hotel were opened wide to admit an invasion of workmen and of upholsterers.

The baron Matify was in love, he could find nothing more beautiful for his adored Cyprienne. The luxuriousness of the Hotel de Monte Cristo by no means sufficed his vanity.

The plan of Aurelia had succeeded.

Obedient to the suggestions of Colonel Fritz the baron had renounced completion of the work, commenced in the chaussed' Antin as being too slow to suit his impatience.

To regulate completely the question of rent he found himself in treaty with Don Jose, who in turn advised him to give to Clement supervision of all improvements to be wrought in the mansion.

Clement, it is true, was but a jeweller, still nothing, touching the art of decoration was foreign to him. He comprehended marvellously the harmony of colors and the unity of ornamental designs. His inexhaustible talents were best displayed to give orders to the thousand artistic ideas to dazzle the eyes of the most fastidious critics.

There was no greater poet than this ex-wood chopper.

And a poet in the largest acceptation of the word, a poet by instinct. The sound of the wind whistling through the foliage of trees had taught him melody, the strong contrasts of the green, blue and other tones of the forest and of the sky had taught the art of colors.

Poet, musician, painter, he was apt at everything. Certainly, he could never become very great either as a poet, painter, or musician. He lacked a primary education; beside, intellectual force is like light it must be concentrated upon a single point to become really powerful.

But, such as he was, Clement was admirably gifted to understand and to translate the thousand almost unconscious impressions which form that sort of instinct, without which we can never be an artist.

Hence, Baron Matifay had selected Clement to direct the ornamental works to be bestowed upon his hotel.

Little by little, in details one after another, all was changed within that palace, already as rich as a queen's.

One part alone was respected by orders from Cyprienne—the conservatory and the pavilion adjacent to it, which the countess had especially reserved in the lease.

From morning until night Clement could be found at the mansion, ascending and descending the stairs with a feverish activity. He had pledged

his word of honor that everything should be marvelous, delicate and perfectly exquisite.

Not a nail was driven unless he indicated its place; not a piece of upholstery was hung, until he had scrupulously studied and selected its tint

He was particularly charged with everything relative to the decoration of the private apartments of the baron and his intended bride.

He invented for Cyprienne a veritable linnet's nest, lined with velvet and satin, diminutive as a casket, a real fairy palace, such as we dream of.

As to the baron's chamber, separated from that of his bride by a long, sombre corridor, its serene furniture of old oak and tapestry from the looms of the Gobelins seemed to have cost Clement a heavy strain upon his imagination.

It was like those everywhere to be seen; a bed with wreathed columns surmounted by a canopy, a large oaken table, hangings in tapestry and arm chairs of the style of Louis XIII, garnished with the same; in fine, in front of the chimney piece supported by decorations of a rich bronze, yet sober-hued, a large glass surmounting a console.

However this apartment, furnished after a style so luxuriously manorial was the one which appeared to occupy Clement's attention the most.

He desired to bestow upon this chamber his own handiwork and would accept the aid of but one workman, our friend Louis Jacquemin.

And during their hours of toil, they closed themselves in, suffering no person to penetrate there.

One question above all appeared to engross their ingenuity—that of the glass. During many evenings they held long consultations on the subject.

At last, one morning Clement arrived all radiant, and said to Louis:

"I have discovered the *hang* of the glass!"

Upon that day they were seen no more; there was heard until an advanced hour of the night, the sound of their hammers and chisels. On the morrow, the glass was placed in position and the doors of the baron's chamber were accessible to all the workmen employed throughout the hotel.

In truth, this glass appeared nothing surprising and nothing seemed to justify the necessities for these long and mysterious endeavors. Very large, very vast, very clear, and enclosed with a frame of black wood marvellously carved, by day, it was hung up against the wall above the brackets like any other—and the most common of glasses.

Hence the upholsterers, slightly jealous of the predominance accorded Clement over them, could not be prevented from shrugging their shoulders at remarking that it had cost him three days to terminate a work they would have done in as many hours.

Clement let them comment and feigned not to have heard their raileries.

Fifteen days had scarcely elapsed before the hotel, renovated throughout, decorated and brilliant, awaited only its new mistress.

Already, chosen lacqueys in livery occupied the antechamber, and through the halls heretofore deserted everything reassumed an air of activity.

In the court-yard, grooms washed their horses, in the oaken stalls gallant steeds neighed, while gardeners, spades in hand, turned up the sod of the lawn.

The hotel de Puysaie having been sold and turned over to its new proprietors during a prompt interval of time, it had been decided that the count would occupy the right wing of the hotel Monte-Cristo. Naturally Lilias accompanied him. What means were there for causing her to return to the convent or for separating her from her father Loredan, or from Cyprienne, her little mother?

The count built castles in the air, and the baron laid down plans for domestic happiness. The heart of the stag-wolf was decidedly moved and he spoke of his love in a tone which

would have been affecting, did we not remember the fable of Mr. Fox retired to a hermitage there to live upon milk and herbs.

In a word every body appeared prefectly happy.

Everybody, alas? except Cyprienne, who despite her absolute confidence in her "unknown friends," saw not the fatal day approach without a shudder.

Except Colonel Fritz, who each week, each day, each hour, so to speak. grew more moody and taciturn.

The instinctive repulsion by Lilias of his handsome, yet sinister, countenance had augmented his ill nature. Vainly he sought to gain the good graces of the little one? all his endeavors with that aim seemed to turn in a contrary direction.

More and more he terrified her, and it was under his appearance that she represented to herself those mysterious terrible creations of nursery tales, the Ogre, Blue Beard and the Old Man of the Sea.

It is this kind of people, who, when misfortune purifies others, are changed by it into bitter haters.

The colonel hated with full power of his soul, all those surrounding him, and the spectacle of their joy excited him to more determined animosity.

He hated Loredan: he hated Cyprienne; he hated Matifay; he hated everybody to such a pitch that, may heaven forgive him, he was commencing to hate Lilias, his own child!

CHAPTER LXV.

A LIGHT, A RAY, A SHADOW.

We deceive ourselves in saying that two of our characters only threw forth a shadow of sadness amid the rays of happiness, of hope, or of love, illuminating for the past fifteen days the hotel de Puysaie.

There was a third and certainly one of the most sympathetic personages in our history, who suffered most cruelly.

The reader has doubtlessly discovered that we refer to the Viconte don Jose de la Cruz.

The sale of the Hotel de Puysaie to Madam Lamouroux and the leasing of that of Monte Cristo to the baron Matifay had placed him in constant communication with Loredan.

He had henceforth public and private admissions at the rue des Varennes.

The count was favorable impressed at first sight by his dignified and manly countenance. He esteemed don Jose after he had known him twenty days as if he had been an acquaintance of many years.

Colonel Fritz had, in the beginning, entertained some jealous suspicions with regard to the new comer. He scented a secret hostility beneath the mask of dignity, polite yet cold, with which the stranger never ceased to treat him. He even communicated his suspicious to Le Gigant.

But the latter, aware of the part destined to don Jose in the plans of Aurelia had stopped the Colonel at his first breath.

"Still another, Colonel, whom you must not interfere with. He serves us."

Le Gigant having reconquered all his past influence over Fritz, did not deign to give further explanation, and the Colonel without exacting them tacitly obeyed.

He obeyed because all contest appeared to him impossible, but it was with a firm resolution of exploding everything in a common catastrophe, should he find that they were cajoling him.

This resolution he had, as we have seen, formally declared to the man of business and he thought that the latter knew him well enough not to despise such a warning.

Hence, against bad fortune he opposed a good heart and exhibited himself in regard to Don Jose as amiable and attentive as the other remained disdainful and reserved.

Don Jose scarce passed an evening without paying a visit at the hotel de Puysaie.

It was a means of seeing Cyprienne alas! and this mute interview of some few minutes' duration was the sole joy remaining to him.

The Countess of Monte-Cristo had solemnly promised to protect and save Cyprienne, but by what means? On this point he was in ignorance.

Oh! of a verity he had deep faith, absolute faith in the promises of this beloved and valiant Helene; he had already seen her accomplish many miracles, but as to that one, relating to his dearest interests; he entertained passing fears and he often said to himself:

"It is too difficult, she will not be able to do it!"

But he was aware, likewise, that one of the indispensable conditions attached to the success of the secret plan of the countess was the confidence and complete obedience of Cyprienne with respect to her "unknown protectors." Hence in her presence he dissimmulated his doubts, and each of his glances seemed to exclaim to her:

"All is saved! Courage!"

Alas! at the same instant he said to himself:

"All is lost!"

Weeks and days flew by and the fatal term glided apace; within fifteen days, ten, eight, four days, on the morrow this radiant Cyprienne will assume the crown of orange blossoms and bestow her hand upon a man other than Don Jose.

And she will venture to love that man, to obey him, and to recognize him as her master and husband.

At this idea the heart of Don Jose leapt, as if it would burst asunder his breast, but he was compelled to smile and he did smile, and, at the sight of this encouraging and generous smile, Cyprienne hoped against hope.

The restoration of the Hotel Monte Cristo was wholly perfected and one evening, upon the close of the Stock Exchange, the baron came to announce this welcome information to Cyprienne.

His little grey eyes sparkled with joy; that hotel upon which he had expended some hundreds of thousands of francs with a semi-regal prodigality —that was a declaration for her hand.

These men of business are ever the same; it is through paying very dearly that they think they demonstrate the extent of their affection.

That evening Matifay undertook to prove that he loved to the value of a millionaire.

A fashion of seducing Juliet not invented by Romeo.

However the baron appeared so delighted in having an opportunity to demonstrate the affectionate qualities of his money chest that it would have been discourteous to have spoiled his happiness.

Cyprienne, accompanied by her father, consented to go visit, in the carriage even of her betrothed of sixty, the fairy like dwelling, soon to become her own.

She ran over the entire hotel, assuming the air of taking the greatest interest in the explanation of the baron who, with an honest satisfaction, did not attempt to exaggerate the cost of his amorous devices.

Voluntarily, after the manner of one of the heroes of our dear master and friend, Champfleury, he struck with his hand upon the bosom of his Venuses in order to cause it to be remarked that they were of bronze "and solid."

Then they descended into the garden.

Night had fallen.

Cyprienne, overcome by a sudden sadness, left her father to talk over with the baron certain modifications in domestic arrangement, and directed her steps towards the conservatory.

There at least nothing had been changed.

Exotic flowers, as of old, were hanging from lattice frames, wrought in embellished iron, in odoriferous gar-

lands; as of yore, the crystal water with its melancholic ripple, flowed into the marble basin.

Cyprienne seated herself upon a bench, that self-same bench, whereupon—time ago—what hours, alas! had sped by since that day—whereupon she had, for the first time in her life, conversed with Don Jose.

What had they said?—Her memory could not recall the words any longer, but within her heart she heard their echo as a knell.

It was the day, upon which she received from his own lips the revelation of danger menacing her, alas! and likewise the more saddening one as to the mysterious and insurmountable obstacle ever to separate her from Don Jose.

Ah! they were but too true, those apprehensions, which she at first affected to despise with that obstinacy, to which youthful souls cling in hope of happiness!

No! nothing had been changed within that conservatory, wherein she, for the first time, entered with so violent a palpitation of the heart, and whence she emerged in trouble and disappointment.

This would be her privileged nook, her asylum, the place wherein, henceforth she would come, during hours of solitude and sadness, to dream of happiness, foreseen for an instant and then lost to view.

The darkness of the night increased and the first oblique rays of the moon, streaming through the glass roof, thence upon the sand of the conservatory, in a black shadow, the indented outlines of the foliage fancifully trimmed.

The effect could almost be compared to a huge lace shawl thrown upon the ground after the fashion of a carpet.

Suddenly, from behind a thick mass of nopals, a light gleamed, vague, flickering, indefinite, like unto that from a lamp burning afar off and in some other apartment.

Who could come at a like hour into the hotel as yet uninhabited?

Robbers, perchance allured by the rich booty they trusted to secure.

This idea, in truth, was the most simple and the most natural; however it came not to Cyprienne.

For, in her mind, the apparition of this light connected itself immediately with the idea of "unknown friends."

Whence came this light? Had she spirited the mass of nopals, she would learn forthwith; however, she remained seated upon the bench motionless.

When one suffers, the heart grows willingly superstitious; it seemed to Cyprienne that her curiosity might provoke the anger of her "unknown friends."

It was the fable of Psyche revived. The prudent wife extinguished the lamp not to disobey her mysterious husband.

However, the light gradually grew more vivid as it concentrated its rays; shortly it changed into a star and advanced towards Cyprienne.

As it grew nearer, shedding its rays through the shrubbery, Cyprienne could distinguish two dark figures, one of whom carrying a lantern in its hand.

One figure was that of a womans cautiously enveloped in a large black capuchin, the other was that of a man.

The man was Don Jose.

The woman in passing Cyprienne, almost near enough to brush against her suffered her veil to drop.

It was the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Both spoke in a low voice. Don Jose said.

"Thanks, Helene! oh! now that I know your plan, I am certain that she will be saved!"

And with a blind faith and indescribable joy Cyprienne repeated:

"I will be saved!"

The light was extinguished; the shadow disappeared and in the garden the voice of the count was heard:

"Cyprienne! Cyprienne, where are you, Cyprienne?"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE NUPTIALS.

THAT night the slumbers of Cyprienne was filled with soothing dreams, and around her congregated the images of those she loved, while the swarm of winged hopes warbled most melodiously.

She saw afar off, very far, the light of the conservatory glimmering as a star and she heard beloved voices murmur:

"She is saved!"

The morrow and the succeeding days Don Jose did not appear at the Hotel de Puysaie.

This circumstance which at any other time would have been a source of sadness and of uneasiness to Cyprienne appeared at present on the contrary a favorable omen, so much has the human soul the propensity to transform into reality the illusions of desire, as those of fear.

This absence of Don Jose, which would have driven her to distraction a few days before, became, quite the reverse, a principal cause for her present hope.

"He is toiling in my behalf," she thought.

She knew already from experience the method in which the "unknown friends" acted and she awaited each instant some unforseen event to overthrow everything, such, as before, the unexpected departure of her mother.

When some one entered the house or went out, was a walk proposed, was the brow of her father obscured, or Matifay behind time in his daily visit—all these trifles caused her heart to palpitate as she said to herself:

"At last, it is here!"

Alas! it came not and every night, upon retiring to her bed, murmured to herself:

"Come! it will for to-morrow!"

Flattering hope, vain expectance! The to-morrow rolled away as the yesterday and clinging to a faith, gradually growing more hopeless and uncertain, she repeated:

"To-morrow! Tomorrow!"

And the last week rolled away, then the last day and finally the last night.

That night Cyprienne slept but little and wept a great deal, she wished it to last forever and it was with that melancholy with which we ordinarily perceive twilight fall upon us that she observed the dawn of day; the twilight of morning.

But she rebelled against this saddening sentiment.

"It will be in the morning," she thought.

Once in the carriage conducting her to the sacrifice again she thought.

"It will be at the mayor's office."

Oh! the charming story, telling the tale of Blue Beard, and how familiar the cry of agonized hearts, this stubborn question ever the same.

"Sister Anne, sister Anne, see you nothing?"

In the story Sister Anne finally saw horsemen coming to the rescue covered with dust, but less fortunate than her Cyprienne saw nothing.

She saw but the mayor with his huge tricolored scarf, then the church festooned in white with its tall candles lighted up in the obscurity of the aisle.

The organs gave forth their thunders of music. Artists from the Opera sang. Everybody insisted that they had never been present at a more beautiful marriage.

Sister Anne! Sister Anne, see you nothing?

Alas! what good would it have been at that hour! The horsemen could have arrived with the steeds covered with foam, and their bright sabres could have sprung from their scabbards, but it would have been all too late. The sister of poor sister Anne would have been dead.

Yes dead! Dead to all joy, dead to all hope, dead to all love!

At last Don Jose had deceived her. It was for him to extort his final consent that the "unknown friends" had allured her by the idea of an impossi-

ble deliverance; to effect this deliverance what had they done. Nothing.

Oh! truly, if Don Jose had attempted the slightest movement, however fruitless, Cyprienne would have blessed him.

But nothing, nothing, nothing! at the moment of the contest he was not even seen!

Possibly on that day the poor girl was too troubled to see anything.

Had she not been so she would have doubtlessly perceived, concealed behind the shadow of a pillar a handsome young man as handsome and in as much despair as she was herself.

No! Don Jose had not fled before trouble and affliction; he was there, looking the enemy in the face, and offering his heart to sorrow, as the soldier presents his breast to bullets.

The marriage was necessary, indispensible and fatal, and he suffered it to be accomplished and bravely, although anxious, he awaited the result of the terrible game in which the Countess of Monte Cristo was his partner.

Who would win that game? He hoped he would. But should he lose it, he would lose Cyprienne now and forever.

Cyprienne doubtlessly despises him for his deceitful promises, and accuses him of treason.

They were a valiant spirit and a heart of steel, those of Don Jose; but he suffered deeply. Heavy drops of sweat stood upon his temples, and after the manner of tears streamed down his cheeks.

Of a verity, to this anguish, racking his soul, he would have preferred a thousand times the agony which he had submitted to in the inexorable tomb among the caverns of Rancogne.

When the last notes of the choir died melancholically away amid the dome of the church and the organ thundered forth the departure march for the procession, the crowd rushed precipitately to the door-way to see the bride on her way out.

He budged not a step, but remained behind the pillar.

As Cyprienne said, so said he:

"All is finished!"

Thus he remained isolated and well in view, and if Cyprienne did not perceive him, another did; Colonel Fritz.

Pale, dispirited, his lips white as if they had tasted vinegar from the sponge steeped in gall, the Viscount Don Jose de la Cruz was so different from his prior self, that the colonel, in astonishment paused to contemplate him.

He was moved at first to accost him, when, changing his mind, he hid himself among a group of gossips without losing sight of Don Jose.

When Cyprienne, with downcast eyes, white as a sheet, passed her arm to Matifay, radiant with gladness and pride, a flame, a lightning flash illuminated the glance of the viscount, and in the luminous jet with which he compassed the nuptial group, the colonel read at once the love he bore Cyprienne and the hatred he entertained for Matifay.

"Oh! oh!" thought he, "Le Gigant was right in forbidding me to harm this youngster. He's a precious youth. If I do not deceive, that hand holds the knife to finish off Monsieur Matifay."

However, the cortege had passed out upon the portico of the church and the emblazoned chariots stood in readiness to bear away the bridal party and their invited guests to the hotel.

At the moment when he extended his hand to Cyprienne to assist her into the carriage, Matifay exclaimed:

"Where is your missal?"

Cyprienne gazed upon her empty hands.

"I must have left it in the sacristy," she replied.

A book of masses which had cost five hundred francs!

Truly, millionaires have but little regard for money, still they do not like to have it thrown away.

"It must be found!" rejoined Matifay.

Just then a man, in the garb of a

well to do mechanic, pushed his way through the crowd, holding the missing volume in his hand.

"Here it is. I noticed where Madam placed it before signing her name to the register."

Matifay nobly drew forth a hundred sous piece.

But the mechanic, who was no other than our friend Louis Jacquemin, repelled at the same time the proffered coin and the hand tendering it.

"Thank you!" he said. "But the book belongs to Madam and I only desire the pleasure of returning it to her in person."

"I have an idea I will bring me good luck in love."

This was, perchance, pretty bold, yet the physiognomy of Jacquemin was so frank and prepossessing that Cyprienne smiled and took her book.

And as a reward Jacquemin saluted her politely.

The volume was enclosed in a rich casket, and, upon opening it mechanically, Cyprienne felt, with a nervous quiver, the corner of a note slipped in between the binding of the book and the velvet of the casket.

This note undoubtedly contained some allusion to the singular abstinence of the unknown friends."

But, Monsieur Matifay sat opposite to her, watching her with his eyes, hence she could not open the note and peruse its contents until after reaching the hotel.

As soon as she had alighted from the carriage and could escape from congratulations, with which her guest conceived it their duty to overwhelm her, she hurriedly ascended up stairs to her boudoir.

The note embraced a single line, a line which corresponded exactly to her anguish, to her sadness, to her anger even, as she, who had written it, possessed the faculty of reading her innermost thoughts.

This line read as follows:

"Accuse no one. Be courageous. You are saved.

C. of Monte-Cristo."

The first sensation of Cyprienne, after reading this laconic epistle, prompted her to give way to a delirium of joy, not so much on account of the declaration it contained: "you are saved," as from its having proved the unjust fallacy of her suspicions.

It is a cause of much regret this being compelled to accuse those you love!

She passed the remainder of the day in a species of intoxication, the same as she had experienced for many days before, which we may call the intoxication of expectancy.

Still this time again and nothing came!

Cyprienne with difficulty maintained her position, for it seemed to her that if her anguish were not speedily relieved, she would die outright.

In truth, she had been more composed hours before, when she believed her misfortune absolutely consummated.

It is thus, when a workman, buried amid the ruins of a mine, feeling light excluded from his sight, air from his nostrils and his limbs overburdened says to himself:

"I am lost!"

Knowing every outcry, every effort to be useless, he in muteness of agony prepares himself to die.

But, if he hears, upon a sudden, the dull sound of liberating pickaxes, striking upon the intervening soil, then a frenzied desire for life seizes upon him, and racked by impatience, he who was so calm, when he believed all hope lost, now exclaims:

"How slow they come!"

It was no longer by weeks or days that Cyprienne counted time; it was by hours. At the conclusion of the dinner, served in sumptuous luxury, it was by minutes.

Nothing, always nothing.

Then, Cyprienne thought that she should comprehend that the "unknown friends," enjoined her to defend herself, and, blushing all over, she seized upon the sense of this second recommendation:

"Be courageous!"

It was in this manner that she med-

itated at the very moment the ball was opened, leaning upon a console, and as indifferent to all surrounding her as if she had not been the heroine of the festival.

She trembled and became purple. A burning hand was placed upon her shoulder. Its contact produced the effect of grossness, vulgarity, and insult.

She turned around suddenly and encountered the constrained smile of the Baron Matifay.

The orchestra was already installed upon the platform, and the baron came to claim his right, that of leading off in the first dance.

"Be courageous!" repeated Cyprienne to herself to raise her spirits and she abandoned her delicate aristocratic hand to the huge freckled paw of the plebeian baron.

During continuance of the quadrille she recovered little by little and meditated with comparative calmness upon the line of conduct she would adopt.

The gravest desperation is oftentimes hidden beneath deceitful placidity and those calms, which we regard with indifference, are tranquilities from which we die sometimes.

Her determination was taken. Matifay had promised her I know not what sort of paternity. She would reclaim from him observance of his promise. She would throw herself at his knees and swear to him to love him in some other manner—at some future time. She would beg from him grace and pardon.

She would be eloquent, she felt it, and if that man possessed bowels of compassion he would yield to her prayers.

With a timid eye she glanced upon the face of the man, and then she comprehended that on his side all her hope of clemency was false.

The baron glanced upon her beneath his languid eye lashes, with the selfsame leer with which he had greeted her first appearance within this saloon then reigned over by the Countess of Monte Cristo.

She then saw that, with him, she would never be his daughter as he had hypocritically promised, not even a respected wife, but a slavish victim.

And that ardor, which had rendered, during their mutual love, so tender, even religious, the respect he had paid to her, now appeared to her written upon every gesture of her new master, sensual, gross, brutal.

"Ah!" thought she this time, "I am lost!"

And this frightful calm of assumed resolution to which we have first alluded, thickened, like a frozen wish around her heart, and she said to herself:

"I will kill myself!"

During all this while the musicians gave forth melodious strains and the streams from the lights flooded with brilliancy the flowers, the satins, and the alabaster shoulders of the ladies, blooming in beauty, the animated flowers of the land.

Cyprienne was not in the ball room; Matifay had moreover disappeared.

The festivities could not continue in the acknowledged absence of the host and hostess—

Suddenly, in the interval between a quadrille and a schottische, a cry, a terrible cry, traversed the apartments, the dancing room, the window seats, the curtains and hangings, so piercing and horrible, that instantly each one stopped in the place they occupied, mute and immovable, the better to catch the appalling sound.

We might have imagined ourselves for the moment in the "Sleeping Beauty," at that precise moment when all within it were stricken by the fairy's magic wand.

To this silence which in reality reigned but a second but which seemed to last much longer, there succeeded a confused buzz of conversation, carried on in a whisper by all present.

Then a brisk movement of curiosity urged the crowd towards the saloon doors; curiosity and terror broke

down rules of etiquette. Every one was desirous of learning the cause for commotion.

A few dared utter the thought which had suggested itself to the entire assembly.

"Ah! has somebody been assassinated!"

The cry appeared to come either from the apartment of Cyprienne, as some urged, or from that of Matifay.

Investigation was commenced, in this last, but therein nothing was found extraordinary.

Only one more bold than the rest, candle in hand, penetrated into the gallery, leading from that chamber to Cyprienne's apartments and returned quickly thence, pale and thoroughly disconcerted.

"The baron?" he stammered out.

"Well?" questioned simultaneously fifty voices.

"The baron is there!"

With his finger he pointed to the gallery into which the crowd poured in an impetuous torrent.

Those in the rear of the inquisitive stream, unable to find place in the corridor, piled themselves within the sleeping chamber. The crowd filled up the entire stairway and the ball room was thoroughly deserted by its animated contents.

Upon search, above, Matifay was discovered, stretched at full length, his face against the floor in the middle of the corridor, his candle stick broken by his side, the wax spread over his face and his clothing.

Down stairs it was merely rumored that the baron had been assassinated, yet some persons of strong imagination ventured to assert that he had come to his end through a love intrigue.

These people divided themselves into two classes, both better informed than the other.

The first said that the baron had been murdered by his young wife; the others maintained that the deed had been done by a lover of his wife.

Nevertheless the baron had not been assassinated at all.

He had simply fallen down insensible, suddenly stricken by congestion of the brain, or some other accident of a similar nature had occurred.

Doctor Ozam, who was discovered among the guests, caused the corridor to be cleared; then he closed the doors and set about instituting enquiries into his condition.

He quickly ascertained that Matifay was not dead, but had fainted, and then extending him upon the divan, running along the entire length of the gallery and bestowed upon him medical care.

The physician preserved around this extemporized bed those only absolutely indispensable to assist him, and as he evicted the rest, the discontented excluded set him down as a mere mountebank.

Cyprienne, a thousand time more beautiful in her paleness and with disheveled hair, placed herself by the pillow of her husband.

The facts of the case, which every body else, the doctor included, attributed to an accident, quite natural, was convinced to have been the work of her "unknown friends," and, with a feeling of terror, as she contemplated its effect. she said to herself:

"Are they so potent that they command apoplexy or death?"

Matifay at a time opened his feeble eyes, and raising himself up, his hair standing on end, with a haggard look, designated a point upon the wall.

"There! there!" he cried out.

A curious bystander went to the wall, struck upon it with his knuckles; the solid wall gave back in sound testimony of its compactness.

"It was a vision!" sighed Matifay, reassured by this experiment.

"What vision?" enquired Dr Ozam kindly.

But Matifay would give no further response, and so the curious spectators were forced to content themselves with this insufficient explanation:

It was a vision!

The sufferer was transported into his chamber, but, although his condi-

tion was in no wise alarming, he would not consent to remain alone.

In his sleep, which was at times good, he, watching over him, remarked that he moved his lips as a man who prayed, and that this prayer comprised but a single name, repeated over and over and incessantly :

"Helene! Helene!"

THE EPILOGUE.

I.

THE END OF COLONEL FRITZ.

From Monsieur Gosse Le Gigant obtained the papers held in his wife's possession and duly transmitted them to the Count de Puysaie, who now became convinced of the perfidy of that man, who had poisoned his mind against Cyprienne and her mother.

Nothing was left Loredan but an appeal to the code of honor, and consequently a challenge was borne by Don Jose to Colonel Fritz, which that man of fashion could not avoid accepting.

At early dawn in the forest of Meudon four men descended from a carriage. They were Loredan and Don Jose de la Cruz on the one side, and Colonel Fritz and Doctor Toinon on the other.

Although reported a dead shot Fritz exhausted every endeavor to avert the combat. But the wronged husband and father was implacable.

A single report from a pistol followed the word of command given by the young De la Cruz.

Loredan had fired; his ball grazed the cheek of Fritz. A few inches intervened between him and death.

The Colonel raised his pistol and fired in the air.

The Count de Puysaie knitted his brows.

"You are generous," he said ironically, "reload the arms."

Despite Dr. Toinon's objections the combat was renewed.

This time two explosions shock the forest air. The ball of the count had struck first, and as Fritz fell his pistol discharged without aim. Loredan looked upon his fallen foe with a bitter contempt, but the wounded man tendered him a paper. It was his confession.

"He was a scoundrel," said the count, "yet it would be wrong to deny him the last embraces of his child."

Fritz was conveyed to his garret in the rue des Macons-Sorbonne.

In a miserable garret, without furniture, fire-place, or other convenience, dwelt this man of fashion amid the surroundings of commingled riches and poverty. His exterior life was a comedy.

He had lived alone, he would die alone!

The rolling of a carriage was heard in this narrow street, very little accustomed to such sounds.

The entrance door of the house slammed violently in the corridor; the shaky stairs creaked beneath the tread.

A light glimmered through the half opened door

"It is here, madam," said the voice of the porteress.

And a lady, clad in black with the veil drawn down over her countenance walked into that wretched garret.

A child accompanied her, likewise in mourning.

The Colonel's sleep resembled a trance.

He did not percieve the arrival of these strange visitors.

"Leave us," said the lady in black to the porteress, astounded at this unexpected visit.

Then both lady and child kneeled silently by the side of this death bed.

The dawn broke and still Hortense and Lilias had maintained the same attitude.

The expiring candle gave but a feeble light soon replaced by that of the newborn day.

Kneeling upon the hearthstone Hortense read in a low tone the sublime prayers for the dying.

"From the depths, I have cried forth to thee, oh Lord! that you may sustain me."

"Thou art the judge, and confiding in thy law, oh Lord, I have invoked thee."

"For in the Lord is all mercy and from him springs redemption."

"It is he who hast redeemed Israel from iniquities."

At the sound of this voice the colonel opened his eyes.

He thought that his dream continued in thus hearing victims pray for their executioner.

"Lord! Lord! listen to my prayer, lend thine ears, and temper my heart with penitence."

Fritz made a violent effort to raise himself up. He held forth his hand to assure himself that his vision was not one of imagination, and in a voice commingled with joy, anxiety, and fear, he murmured,

"Hortense!"

The Countess de Puysaie slowly raised her eyes from the book.

"You!" continued the colonel, "you here! ah! you have forgiven me for everything!"

With her right hand uplifted heavenward, she replied to him in a grave tone:

"Judge not, saith the Lord, if you would not be judged!"

"And my daughter?"

Hortense arose and this movement unmasked Lilias, towards whom the wounded man stretched forth his arms with a passionate gesture.

Madam de Puysaie pushed the child towards him.

"Lilias, embrace your father, who is on the point of death."

"Yes," exclaimed Fritz, "I am to die, but to die happy! very happy, thanks to you, ministering angels!"

Lilias seated herself upon the bed, and the colonel seemed to recover his former force and energy while pressing her fondly to his breast.

His eye was brilliant and his hand firm as he appeared never to tire in looking upon her face in admiration.

"And it is to you, madam,—and it is to him, that I am indebted for this crowning joy, this sublime happiness, this final consolation! There then are hearts capable of such generosity! oh, if I could live again, all my blood, all my soul would be divided between you two.

"But no! it is better as it is. It is better that I die. What more can I do here below? Strive to forget me and perchance you may be happy.

"If I can carry such a hope to my grave, it seems to me that I shall not be an outlaw in hereafter."

"Have faith in eternal clemency," softly whispered Madam de Puysaie, "that God will pardon you as we have pardoned you."

"What—Loredan?"

"My presence here should prove to you that if he has forgotten nothing, at least he has banished all malice from his heart."

"And my letters?"

"He remitted them faithfully to Lilias and to me, and Lilias—it is I who will guarantee that she will act thus—will religiously obey the last wishes of her guilty yet unfortunate father.

"Now silence—the moment is grave—let us pray."

Anew she knelt at the side of the bed and opened her book. Lilias took position beside her.

"Have pity upon me, Lord, in thy profound mercy. According to the infinity of thy commiserations efface my iniquities.

"Wash me more and more of my iniquity and purify me from sin.

"For I know my transgressions and my sins are ever present before me."

"Behold in fact; in iniquity have I been conceived as my mother was conceived in sin.

"But thou wilt wash me, Lord, with hyssop and I shall be purified; thou wilt lave me and I shall become white even as the driven snow."

The colonel, raised up upon pillows, with hands joined and eyes half closed,

repeated the last words of these supplicating verses.

And as if these prayers, intermingled and fused into one, from three so different persons, from the oppressor and the oppressed, from innocence and crime, reached the foot of the celestial throne, suddenly into this chamber came a flood of light.

A joyous ray of sunbeam pierced the double obstacle of clouds and of glass, rendered opaque through accumulatiou of dust, and it came to dance, bright and sportive upon the blonde tresses of Hortense, and bestowed upon her head a sort of halo.

The two angels of prayer agitated gently their white wings in this abode of desolation.

That of Mercy collected as a perfume of myrrh and of cinnamon the precious words falling from the lips of Hortense and Lilias.

That of Repentance gathered the bitter tears of this dying man, who in a single hour of sincere grief repaired a whole life time of iniquity.

Doctor Toinon arrived and remained stupified at the tranquility of his patient. He had no hope for him, the colonel was condemned, but the physician had not expected so quiet a resignation to fate.

However, to the mute question manifested to him by the glances of Hortense and Lilias, the doctor could only reply, while shaking his head:

"I can do nothing more here."

These words were pronounced in a low tone of voice. Fritz, however, overheard them.

"Yes," he said with a feeble smile, "it is not the physician of the body I want it is that of the soul."

Upon a gesture from Hortense the doctor retired, but returned a few minutes after in company with a priest.

It was the young vicar of the Church St. Stephen-upon-the-Mount—almost a mere youth—with his long blonde hair in curls, his bright blue eyes, brilliant with a faith untroubled by any doubts or hesitations, this youthful apostle appeared a missionary of clemency and of forgiveness.

He listened, oftentimes with a shudder to the confession of this wicked man, and pronounced these sacred words unlosening him upon earth and in heaven.

During the remainder of the day neither Lilias nor Hortense quitted the pillow of this guilty being.

In proportion as the hours flew by the assumed force communicated to Fritz through the great movements of his soul grew gradually more and more feeble.

But to the last moment his resignation remained the same.

However, from the moment the obscurity of falling night came upon the chamber, it fell likewise upon the brain and the person of Colonel Fritz.

First his sight perished, and then by feeling about he sought the hand of Lilias, and would not release it.

Shortly after the prayers which Madam de Puysaie continued to read, only reached his ears as an indistinct and confused murmur which in time became extinguished by a complete silence.

Commencement and solemn image of the profound silence of eternity.

At last the impress which Lilias felt upon her hand slackened, the nerves of the dying man relaxed, his lips moved as if he desired to give some parting words or to indulge in a final prayer.

The shades of night fell, the darkness of the hour came and with it the Angel of Death stalked into that desolate chamber.

II.

THE RICHEST AND HONESTEST MAN IN FRANCE.

From the hour of his marriage Baron Matifay had grown into an altered man physically and intellectually.

All Paris wondered at this sudden termination of so brilliant a nuptials while the groom himself, prostrated

by the supernatural events of the wedding night was confined to his chamber a prey to illusions and spectral apparitions, so much so that Dr. Ozam soon pronounced him incurable so weakened was he by nocturnal vistations,

Aurelia reappeared at her apartment in the Rue Vivienne.

In that character the Countess of Monte-Cristo had dispatched a note to Le Gigant appointing a meeting at ten o'clock at night at the garden gate of the hotel Matifay.

Enraptured with the expectation of re-meeting the beauty with whom he was enraptured the wily man of business, believing possession of the banker's wealth likewise within his grasp, hurried to fulfil his appointment.

Two o'clock sounded. Le Gigant entered the garden, as the gate swung open noiselessy. A woman stood by his side.

"Aurelia!" exclaimed Le Gigant, extending his hand to grasp that of his suspected colleague.

"Silence! and follow me," said Helene, and she led the way down a narrow stair-case winding in absolute obscurity.

As at each step Le Gigant stumbled against the steps she extended him her hand to guide him.

That hand was cold as marble.

After descending about twenty steps Le Gigant perceived a pale light gleaming through a door, which turned without noise upon its hinges. Then he remained stupified with the singular spectacle presented to his sight.

He was upon the threshold of the oratory.

Helene turned towards him:

"Enter," she said, "if you wish to know who I am."

She threw back her long veil and Le Gigant recognized that pale visage he had seen in the boudoir of Aurelia.

He felt that he was lost and vainly attempted to cry out. The door of the oratory was instantly closed upon him and the moment he attempted to escape in what direction he knew that a heavy hand was placed on his shoulder.

Yielding to this weight, he fell into an arm-chair, when the hand passed rapidly over his face and tied something behind his back. Le Gigant was gagged!

"You wished to know who I am," resumed the countess in her low solemn voice, "you will soon be satisfied.

"I am the avenging phantom, the terrifying image of your crime, remorse whom none can slay.

"I am the condemned of the Court of Assizes of Limoges, the sacrificed innocent, the inconsolable widow from whom you took the husband, the mother whose child, Pippione, is now dead.

"This man," and here she designated Don Jose who was standing before her, calm and upright near the arm-chair in which Le Gigant remained gagged and bound, "this man is the weak child, disconcerting your infernal plan, the faithful accompl ce of my devotion and of my vengeance, the assistant who has ever accompanied me, and served me, who love him dearly."

Le Gigant replied not, but his looks expressed an anguish and terror impossible to describe.

"God is just," continued the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "We were weak. A woman without name or country, a poor peasant boy—

"You were strong! you had position and wealth! To-day, however, it is this woman and boy who are to pronounce unalterably upon your distiny."

She raised her hand and gradually became obscure; the burning lamp extinguished itself with a final flicker, and the actors in this strange scene remained an instant after plunged into impenetrable darkness.

Then suddenly, directly in front of him, Le Gigant saw arise a light, as if the partition wall had become transparent, growing by degrees brighter and brighter, and through that wall he perceived a saddening picture.

He saw a vast chamber richly furnished. In that chamber, in front of Le Gigant an invalid was reclining within a darkened alcove.

Upon the chimney-piece rested three or four medical potions and a lamp, covered with a shade.

A clock upon the mantel-piece showed the midnight hour. And, as if the invalid had assisted on his own part in a phantasmagoria, analagous to the one terrifying Le Gigant, he raised himself up painfully upon his elbows, then raised his hand aloft as if to drive away some horrible image appearing before his sight.

His lips curled with a cry of anguish, if his internal thoughts could be described by that word, or rather a sigh of maddening horror, to which he gave a forced vent.

"Mercy!" he moaned.

Le Gigant in him recognized Matifay.

Helene had placed herself at the end in the full play of the light within the illuminated space. She appeared in the frame of a large looking-glass of Matifay's chamber, and this glass was converted into a picture.

She extended her arms towards the banker with a gesture of solemn authority, and responded to his sigh:

"There is no mercy!"

The baron writhed his arms in augmented anguish.

It was the first time that the spectre, which had visited him faithfully at the midnight hour since the night of his nuptials, and whose features he had recognized, had spoken to him in a voice equally as familiar!

"What must I do?" he enquired.

"Confess your crimes," responded the apparition.

"I confess! I confess!" exclaimed Matifay.

"Forthwith!" said the voice.

And the hand of the spectre designated his writing-table to the terror-stricken banker, as the voice continued:

"Seat yourself and write!"

Matifay made a superhuman effort to arise but he fell prostrate at his full length upon the coverlids.

"I cannot," he murmured.

"It must be so," insisted the voice, "as long as you will not I will be with you."

Again the baron endeavored to arise, and after many efforts he placed his feet upon the carpet. Then by clutching hold of the furniture he contrived to lay hand upon a dressing gown and after drawing it on, crept to the table.

"What must I write?" he enquired for a last time.

The inexorable voice replied:

"Everything! all you have done and your accomplices!"

Le Gigant at length comprehended the danger of his position. Bound in the armchair, mute, reduced to absolute impotence, he was to be present at the framing of a criminal indictment against him by his own associate.

He made strenuous efforts to disengage himself from the gag for he would have cried out to Matifay:

"You are deceived! you believe yourself in the power of a ghost, a spectre risen from the grave! This woman playing this terrible drama is no phantom but a living being. Drive away these vain terrors and write not, for now that we have stripped the mask off from her our triumph is no longer doubtful."

He tossed about wildly in his armchair, but the hands of Don Jose were again pressed heavily on his shoulders. Into his ear the young man whispered in solemn tones:

"Hercules Champion, it is for you to listen!"

"You must reveal everything, write down everything and subscribe everything.

"Your punishment, Matifay, is complete; it has reached its full measure. God has willed this miracle. Still know now, that I cannot rest quietly beneath the tomb until my memory be purged from all stain and my good renown be firmly re-established.

"It is decreed that the other guilty

parties be stricken as you have been. Therefore write."

Matifay wiped with the sleeve of his gown the huge drops of sweat rolling in showers from his forehead.

Not that he hesitated; he experienced no desire to resist an order coming from so far and from on high, but then at the moment his intelligence revolted against the vision.

He said to himself:

"Hallucination continues. This form has no existence, this speaking voice is but that of my conscience, a little more courage and the climax will be passed."

This man was accustomed to hearing himself styled the richest and most honest man in France.

How! in one day, in one hour, was he going to write with his own hand his own condemnation and blot out with a stroke of the pen the work of perseverance and of dissimulation to which he had consecrated his life?

He heard the whispers of the morrow.

"Do you then know that this millionaire was a thief? His probity was that of hypocrisy; this venerable patriarch, whose name, so to speak, was a synonym for honor, is nothing but a treacherous assassin.

"And the proof of all these assertions he has supplied with his own hand, in writing above his own signature upon the order of a vain phantom which doubtlessly existed in the imagination of an invalid."

Matifay experienced a moment of courage and during its continuance he revolted against the dictation.

"No!" he cried as he threw down his pen "I will not write that."

Le Gigant drew a long sigh of relief.

The courage, animating Matifay, was that of a coward in revolt, like that of a wild boar turning when pressed.

He called to mind the advice of his physician:

"Have strength to walk upon the apparition, to convince yourself of its existence and you may be saved—"

He rose with decision, determined to follow this advice of Doctor Ozam cost him what it may.

It was with difficulty that his trembling limbs could sustain his weight, and to preserve his equilibriumn he held his hands extended like a man intoxicated. Unsupported by moral resolution, he sought to accomplish a feat which was far beyond his physical strength.

At each step he found his limbs give way and was constrained to stop to wipe away his sweating brow.

Then he rested himself for several seconds, half extended beneath an arm-chair should he find one in the way, or upon the carpet, were no other seat convenient to his hand.

At length, having during these intervals resumed a portion of his failing strength, he arose and persisted in his painful journey towards the spectre.

The apparition ever remained in the same position, silent and unmoved and—oh happiness!—proportionately as Matifay approached it, it became more pale and indistinct.

The doctor was then right! This vision of a feverish brain could not stand examination of a resolute will.

When Matifay was near it, it disappeared.

Then it seemed to the baron that the base of the frame upon which Helene stood shone upon a mysterious obscurity became lighted up, little by little, by a vague flame.

That flame which we can only compare to the sparkling of a pond, detaching its surface from the horizon, arose, mounting gradually, concealing first the hem of Helen's garment, then her knees, then her waist, rising higher and higher as if she was submerged beneath a wave.

Already Matifay saw but the figure of Helene to the shoulders; another step and the bright level left but a head floating above and ready in its time to disappear.

A last step! all had passed from view!

The baron stretched forth his hand; it touched upon the cold and polished

surface of the glass in which he saw his own image reflected in the very place where but a moment before stood the avenging spectre.

He drew a long sigh of encouragement.

"The doctor was right," he murmured, "I was crazy."

But a voice, deep near at hand, but so vague and feeble, however, as if it came from the other world, spoke close to the baron's ear:

"Write!"

Matifay leaned upon the table and wrote.

He was writing a length of time.

When Matifay finished, his pen fell from his wearied hand and the voice of the apparition spoke anew:

"It is well! you have atoned for your crimes as far as lays within your power. May God pardon you as I pardon you."

The climax had passed.

A new sentiment, heretofore unheard of, entered into the soul of the banker.

"She has pardoned me," he said to himself, "and she will return no more—but should she return again!"

Far from destroying the fatal paper, he folded it carefully, enclosed it in an envelope and placed it upon the most conspicuous part of the table.

Then he arose thinking to regain his bed, but he was almost instantly compelled to lean for support with his hands upon his writing table.

His legs tottered beneath him; lights sparkled before his eyes; his head went giddy.

At last, drawing himself up to his full height, he stretched out his arms as if to stem this irresistible torrent, and, giving utterance to a harsh moan, he whirled about and fell headlong upon the table.

He was dead.

Within the oratory Madam de Monte-Cristo was ever at the side of Jose and Jacquemin.

"Our work is now complete; Matifay is beyond our justice; he has been summoned to eternal judgment!"

III.

LE GIGANT COMES TO GRIEF.

At an hour agreed upon with Le Gigant the Count de Puysaie was awaiting his coming in his cabinet.

Before him, upon the table, was disposed, wide open, the voluminous register of the fortune of Matifay.

By his right side the title deeds to his real estate and his rent rolls formed a respectable pile of papers. On his left thick bundles of bank-bills and bills receivable formed a much more respectable heap.

Loredan was ready to render up his account.

Instantly all became still.

Monsieur Laroze knocked.

Three gentlemen entered.

Marie Joseph formed a striking contrast to his two companions. He alone, the least culpable of the trio, the instant the struggle commenced appeared decided to sustain cost what it might.

Toinon took refuge timidly behind Le Gigant, who had upon this occasion adjudged proper to mask his eyes behind thick green spectacles.

The count arose without however quitting his arm-chair and pointed with a gesture full of gracious condescension to the colossal fortune which he was on the point of surrendering without the slightest regret.

"You see, gentleman," he said, I am expecting you."

Le Gigant could not repress a movement of joy.

Toinon indulged in a characteristic motion by extending his hands, his fingers closing like locks.

As to Marie Joseph he felt a burning blush upon his cheeks, but by a supreme effort of his will he repressed the beating of his heart and preserved his calmness.

"There remains, sir," said Loredan turning with perfect courtesy to Hercules, "a simple formality to observe.'

"Your recital so lucid, perspicuous, and positive, and I may add, so thoroughly disinterested has completely convinced me. Only, if I am to

credit the recital, Monsieur Joseph de Rancogne recognizes but imperfectly and only for a few days past, the document which forms the ground plan for your claims."

Here are are the contents of that paper, which was nothing but

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF BEASSON:

"Joseph, my son, the work which I have bequeathed to you is finished, the malefactions are finished, Rancogne is saved, since you this day read lines which I have written and which I bequeath to you as the most precious of rewards and to serve in my own rehabilitation.

"The paternal malediction is at length dissipated, all that I cost in sorrow to Count John, my father and your grandfather, you have repaid him, my dear son, in devotion and in riches.

"You can resume to-day at our family hearthside that place my exile rendered vacant, for it is you who have reconstructed that family.

"I am born a gentleman. The will of my father made me a peasant. You were born a peasant, your devotion has re-created you into gentility.

"And you, child, born in adversity and sorrow, you for whom a crowd of traps were laid, even before your birth, open the arms wide to the heir of the disinherited race, efface by a look, by a word, by a pressure of the hands, by filial embrace, the brand of reprobation inflicted by me, and recognize in the humble serving man you have sustained and saved the last of the ancient counts.

"WILLIAM DE RANCONGE."

But when he had finished he fixed his investigating glance upon the unmoved countenance of Marie Joseph Tarantas, and added:

"You have here, my dear count, a precious title of nobility, and I know not a single armorial which might not feel proud in containing one like unto it.

"During our period of discussion, of trade, of calculation, you solitary and alone have reconstructed the work of our noble ancestors. They have created our nobility, you have resusticated your own, and it is with pleasure that I remit into your hand, purified by the tenacious energy of labor, this fortune to which you alone have a right."

Singular thing! it was Le Gigant and Toinon, who arose by a simultaneous movement to go to the table, while Marie Joseph, to whom this discourse had been addressed, did not budge from his arm-chair.

The count placed his hands upon the heaps of valuables.

"A word more," he said with a gracious smile.

And addressing anew Marie Joseph he said:

"What I admire in you the most, is your modesty."

"Hence, these brave friends," and he saluted profoundly the two acolytes, "these two friends, who have shared in all your trials, aided in your works, are ignorant of a part of your work, a part, in truth the most valiant and, if I must say so without giving offence to you chivalric modesty, the most heroic.

"They know not, these kind friends, that in coming hither to-day to claim this fortune, to which I am frank to say you have the sole right, you have accomplished in fact but a measure of common justice, in which your particular interest has not been wholly brought into play.

"They know that your personal fortune, although you are henceforth the only and legitimate heir of Rancogne, mounts up to such a figure that these rags are for you but trifles; they ignore your prodigious enterprise, that subterranean march among the dismal caverns of Rancogne, the discovery of treasure conquered despite the obstacle of obscurity, solitude and hunger."

Toinon and Le Gigant comprehended no more.

They bestowed upon each other terrible glances.

As for Tarantas, overpowed by the deluge of eulogies, to which he was aware he was not entitled, confusion seized upon him and he dropped his previously daring looks.

"But I know myself," continued Loredan with enthusiasm, "I know these labors which would have daunted a modern Jason, and the disinterested aim with which they were undertaken.

"I have done more, I have found the obscure witness of your gigantic enterprize, who aided you as assistant; a being as heroic as you are, as simple as you are, who for a long time has lost sight of you and seeks for you, a friend like Pylades, more than all that, a brother.

This Clement in fact entered.

"Joseph, my brave Joseph, at last have I found you!"

The ex-student, whom this unexpected recognition completely floored stammered out some incoherent words.

"It is emotion," explained Loredan to the baffled accomplices.

"My faith, gentlemen, a spectacle so touching is such a delicate affair, still we must not be egotish and we will leave them, if you please, alone to their congratulation."

With his exquisite politeness, and the manner of a great lord Loredon conducted them into the adjoining apartment. Still he remained but little time to hold them company there for almost instantly he returned by another door to his cabinet.

"Now let us talk," said the Count, coolly.

"The two scoundrels who are with you, sir, I know who you are, merit no pity. And you yourself, I must avow, but very little. However you are young, every good sentiment may not be dead in you.

"It was still for her," he stammered "If you only knew."

"I know," replied Madam de Monte Cristo, "we know everything; is it not so, Joseph?

"It behooves you from this day forth to undertake a difficult task, to re-create your probity: we cannot aid, for aid on our part will diminish the merit of yours at one moment. But know however that your mother shall be happily provided for, that which should be the price for crime shall be the price for repentance."

Huge tear-drops stood in Marie Joseph's eyes, he wept, this man who for so long a time had known not a tear. He seized the hands of the countess and with painful emotion stammered out:

"Oh, madam, be the most blessed among women!"

"Go," she said, raising him kindly, and designating to him the door, with a gesture of sublime impressiveness, "go, and sin no more!"

As soon as he had quitted the chamber, Monsieur de Puysaie opened the large door of the lateral apartment in which were enclosed the two accomplices.

"Come, sir," he said with a smile so amiable that the man of business fancied all his cares dissipated, "come sir, we are waiting for you."

Then going to his writing-table, he addressed Don Jose, whose countenance was turned from the light:

"We have made it, Count, five millions in divers values, bills, papers, or coin, and then, the hotel estimated at fifteen thousand francs. Is that all?"

"Absolutely all," responded Joseph.

The sound of this voice caused Le Gigant to tremble, for he had never seen Don Jose's face, concealed as it had been from him in the oratory within Matifay's hotel.

The suspicions of the man of business came to him more strongly than ever. However, he put a good face on the matter and did not budge a bit.

"Then," said the Count, "it only remains for you to receipt."

"In my own name," replied Jose,

"or in that of the dowager countess of Rancogne."

A clear voice, coming from the other side of the door, caused Le Gigant to shudder.

"In thy name, my dear child," said the voice, "there is nothing more left me in this world."

And as Don Jose hesitated a second time the Countess Helene de Ranconge entered the cabinet, walked to the table and extended to him the pen.

All this transpired with as much indifference as if Le Gigant and Toinon had not been there.

They appeared to be unconscious of their presence.

"She!" exclaimed internally Le Gigant in perceiving before him in living flesh the pale figure of her he had thought had disappeared from the living world.

This time, the man of business comprehended every thing to be lost, and when they deigned to address him he merely replied with a gesture of discouragement or of incompetency.

However, the first sentiment passed, this man raised his head and addressed them with savage pride.

"It is all very well, you play trumps; my game's up, bring me to sentence, put me in the galleys, its all the same. To do this you will dishonor the memory of Matifay, and two criminal trials in one family is enough."

Then, taking Toinon's arm he addressed him:

"We have fallen into a rat trap, old fellow; so much the worse for us. Come, come, there are policemen waiting for us at the door, and they don't like to be kept in suspense."

And in this encouraging manner he dragged his companion with him into the meshes of the law.

As to Joseph and the Countess of Monte-Cristo, they had not spoken a word, but on the contrary by a gesture stopped Loredan and Clement, who were anxious to pursue and prosecute the conspirators.

This mission was not to punish but to save.

As soon as this domestic tragedy terminated the Count of Puysaie who had conducted himself with marvelous nerve, sank overpowered into an arm chair.

Cyprienne threw herself upon him, kneeled at his side and warmed his hands upon her lips, but as soon as she loosened her hold the hand fell helpless.

In a few minutes, this man whom at the beginning of this interview we had seen so young, skilful and dexterous, became, with the exception of his hair remaining black, almost an old man, in fact, a mere premature wreck, a saddening ruin.

His eyes however remained vivid and eloquent, so eloquent that their glances seemed words, and these energetic looks passed from Jose to Cyprienne.

They did not cease until this fair girl, obeying the mute expression of his will, drew her arm through that of Jose de la Cruz, now the Count of Rancogne.

"Poor father!" she sobbed while clinging to her new husband, "must he then remain alone?"

The Countess of Monte-Cristo returned after a moment's disappearance and led Lilias to the arm-chair wherein lay the Count like an inert mass!

"Not alone!" said she, "for here is one who must expiate the faults of her guilty father!"

IV.

THE SISTERS OF REFUGE.

THERE is no final catastrophe in life. Events affecting or rendering happy the existence of the child are an immediate or fatal consequence of those afflicting or rendering happy those of the parent. At each generation human life recommences, repassing through the same periods and the same alternatives, the same passions are in play: the same feeblenesses fall as we advance, the same as those fainting soldiers an army sows, step by step, along its route.

The man of genius who could create in its intense reality the history of his own age would have written the history of the entire human race.

Thus, we, humble author, who have sought to tear for your inspection a leaf from the great book of life, feel embarrassed when we come to write out the word END, so long desired by the author and perchance by the reader.

This word END! alas! is it not the first word of another book, a thousand times more interesting because it is that of which one dreams?

Upon the same day and in the same church, were celebrated three marriages at different altars.

That of the Count Joseph de Rancogne with Mademoiselle Cyprienne de Puysaie, widow Matifay.

That of Clement with Madam Rozel.

That of Louis Jacquemin with Ursula.

Each of these three brides had that morning received a letter signed with a different signature.

That of Cyprienne had been signed Countess of Monte-Cristo.

That of Madam Rozel: the widow Lamouroux.

That of Ursula: Aurelia.

But all three contained the same text; it enjoined them to present themselves upon conclusion of the ceremony to a common point therein indicated.

Three carriages awaited the newly married couple upon termination of the mass and the three, which took the same road, directed their way to the heights at Passy.

They stopped before the green gate of a vast park planted with great trees, beneath the dense shades of which were to be seen amid the foliage cottages and isolated pavilions.

The gate opened silently and the carriages rolling without noise over the fine sand of the avenue of the lawn, and stopped by a common consent before the porch of a cottage a little larger than the rest.

A woman, as mistress of the lodge, stood at the top of the flight of steps. It was Madam Jacquemin.

Cyprienne inquired for the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Ursula for Aurelia.

Madam Rozel for the widow Lamouroux.

At this triple demand Madam Jacquemin replied by an inclination of the head and by a gesture invited the three young women to follow her.

The apartments into which they were introduced was of austere simplicity. No furniture; a mosaic pavement like that of a chapel, stained glass windows transfusing the light in a singular manner; and at the rear was a tomb of white marble, a *chef d' œuvre* of some great, yet unknown sculptor.

The monument was in the form of a couch and upon the stone cushions, so skillfully wrought that one would almost tempted to place the hand upon them to test their elasticity, was the figure of a young child stretched out in a recumbent position.

It was that of Pipionne.

In the chapel upon the same pavement a female enveloped in long garments was kneeling and in prayer.

She raised her head at the sound of the tread of the new comers and Ursula recognized Nini Moustache her elder sister.

Nini arose and opened wide her arms into which the young woman precipitated herself; but this embrace was of short duration.

A new personage entered the hall.

Madam de Monte-Cristo, Madam Lamouroux, Aurelia, these three personalities incarnated in a single, who bore but one name—Helene!

But how distinct did she then appear — then as we have seen her in these three different incarnations.

An ineffable calmness pervaded her transformed countenance as if, disengaged from all the cares, the desires, the agonies of human life, she appeared all ready to belong to another world, where cares, desires, and agonies have no existence.

"You are," she said with a tone of voice wherein vibrated all the harmo-

nies of her celestial soul, "you are, my dearly beloved children, the spirits of election in which I feel myself revive, those whom I have chosen from among all to spread abroad my words and to continue my work of mercy, and hence I have said to you: come unto me.

"The spirit has flown from me. My task is finished. In taking away from me this angel—" and with her extended hand she pointed to the tomb—"our Father in Heaven has taken away my courage; yet, with a failing heart the work of good should never perish, I have therefore this day consecrated you, my daughters, to the task and upon you I charge its continuance.

"Go forth then; traverse the fields of life, spreading on every side the light of Faith, the benedictions of Charity, the treasures of Hope. Go forth, and that which I have done for you, in memory of me do unto others, unto our poor disinherited sisters, unto those whom misery has oppressed or vice sullied. Out of every courtezan create a magdalen, and of every virgin make an apostle.

"Social life has made us weak in appearance; still woman is all powerfull, if she go forth as daughter, wife or mother. Our strength is within us; it is love. To love, to adore, is, at a first step, abnegation; in reality it is the most omnipotent force conceived by human imagination; with love and devotion we can reform the entire world.

"For is it not written that the foot of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpant?

"The task which I alone have accomplished in obscurity and silence, patiently and laboriously, during many years, I now transmit, divided among you.

"Cyprienne, Countess of Rancogne, it is for you to succeed to the Countess of Monte-Cristo. To you the miseries of the happy of the world, tears, dropping silently upon the pillows of lace, sighs, hidden behind a smile.

"To you Ursula, to you Rozel, are committed those sorrows, more often but no less poignant, which were wont to be perceived by Madam Lamouroux, proprietress.

"The poor have lost their mysterious benefactress, but I know that your heart and those of the poor have not lost memory of her.

Helene turned to Nini Moustache.

"In your turn, Celine, you the most guilty yet not the less dear. And it is you, who will replace in her coquetish apartment of the Chaussee d'Antin, her who was the beautiful, brilliant, the wild Aurelia."

"Oh! pardon! pardon!" sobbed the repentant courtezan. "do not impose such a sacrifice upon me; preserve me near you!"

"It must be so!" replied Helene with severity, 'you played at comedy with that which was your infamy. Now that you are chaste, you will resign yourself to appear impure, and traverse again that desolation which you will convert into a paradise. I have done it all, I who now speak to you, and I had nothing to atone.

"Yes, I am well aware, my daughter," she added with a burst of infinite tenderness, after a moment of silence, "that the task I impose upon you is a melancholly one, however is it not the more meritorious on that account?

"Those, compelled to struggle against pride, vanity, and sorrow, I commit to you, so that you will teach them to combat against the most deadly of enemies—Vice.

"Chasten them through repentance, these poor, down-stricken souls, sacrificed, immolated by that which should have been their power—martyrs to love."

Then addressing herself, at one time, to all these missionaries of charity, she sent them forth into the world:

"If," said she, "among those you will have sustained and saved, there be those inconsolable, send them to the Refuge, which will never be closed against them; but if there be others, valiant and strong, instruct them in the world, as I have this day instructed you.

"Conceive none to be unworthy; every woman is proper for this labor of Love, and perchance you will find the Pharisee, repelling you with a disdainful gesture, the one who will ultimately do the most good.

"And now, my children, go pray for me as I have prayed for you."

The lay order, created by the Countess of Monte-Cristo, the Order of Sisters of Refuge, exists to the present hour.

Like every generous idea, the idea inspiring its creation has progressed silently and effectively.

"Conceive none to be unworthy!" were the words of Helene.

And, in truth no woman is excluded from this mysterious affiliation. Every parlor has its Madam de Miramon, every hovel its Magdalen.

And all, united by the same Truth, travel towards the same destination, inspired by the same spirit, accomplishing in a modest manner the same sublime work—Redemption through Love.

"It is the woman who shall bruise the head of the serpent."

L'ENVOY.

A few words more and our lengthy narrative is terminated.

Upon a beautiful summer evening a happy couple, while making a tour of the South during their honeymoon, were sailing upon the waters of the harbor of Toulon.

The vessels was propelled, according to custom, by condemned felons, tugging at the oars and bending their backs beneath the lash of galley slave drivers.

The bridal couple—both beautiful and young—appeared absorbed in a delirium of mutual adoration.

Seated at the stern, with intefolded hands, they revelled in the charms of that lovely summer's night.

Suddenly the casual glance of the young husband fell upon the countenance of two convicts of the chain gang, chancing to be nearest to him. One was strong as Hercules of old, broad shouldered, thick lipped, and red faced; the other on the contrary, was small, round shouldered, bilious looking, obsequious in demeanour—still sporting his felon cap and jacket with a dandy air.

The young wife could with difficulty restain an expression of disgust, when upon order of her husband the prow of the boat was turned to the shore. Nevertheless, upon reaching the wharf, Cyprienne de Roncogne failed not to drop a purse into the hand of Hercules Champion while bestowing a sigh of pity upon the altered condition of his companion in penal servitude the fashionable physician, Doctor Toinon.

About the same period in time the usual promenaders of the garden of the Tuilleries marked the arrival at a regular hour upon each evening of a notable couple.

An old man, broken down, stooping, with wandering gaze and a countenance gifted with evident traces of youth, and a young girl, a mere child, of a radiant almost celestial beauty.

They walked slow, this resplendent girl and prematurely old man, she sustaining him with a filial care, slackening her pace to his unsteady tread, caressing him by voice and smile, constituting herself, as it were, young as she was, the mother to this venerable charge.

She was not the Antigone of pagan heroism, who so tenderly guided the trembling footsteps of a blind father: she was a christian Antigone, in whose blue eyes, in whose bright and smiling countenance, was read a reflection of those of the divine shepherd of men, of him, who first pronounced these words, designed to change the face of the world:

"Love one another!"

The old man was Loredan de Puysaie.

The young girl was Lilias.

THE END.

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