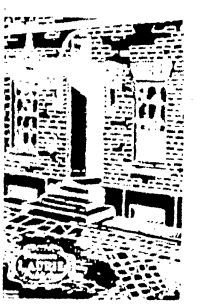
MADAME PRUNE



By PIERRE LOTI

UNIFORM VOLUMES

CONSTANTINOPLE
(Aziyadé)

THE MARRIAGE OF LOTI
(Rarahu)

THE SAHARA
(Le Roman d'un Spahi)

INDIA
(L'Inde, sans les Anglais)

MOROCCO
(Au Maroc)

JAPAN
(Madame Chrysanthème)

JERUSALEM
(Jérusalem)

MADAME PRUNE
(La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune)

SIAM
(Un Pèlerin d'Angkor)

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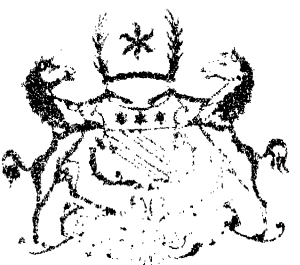

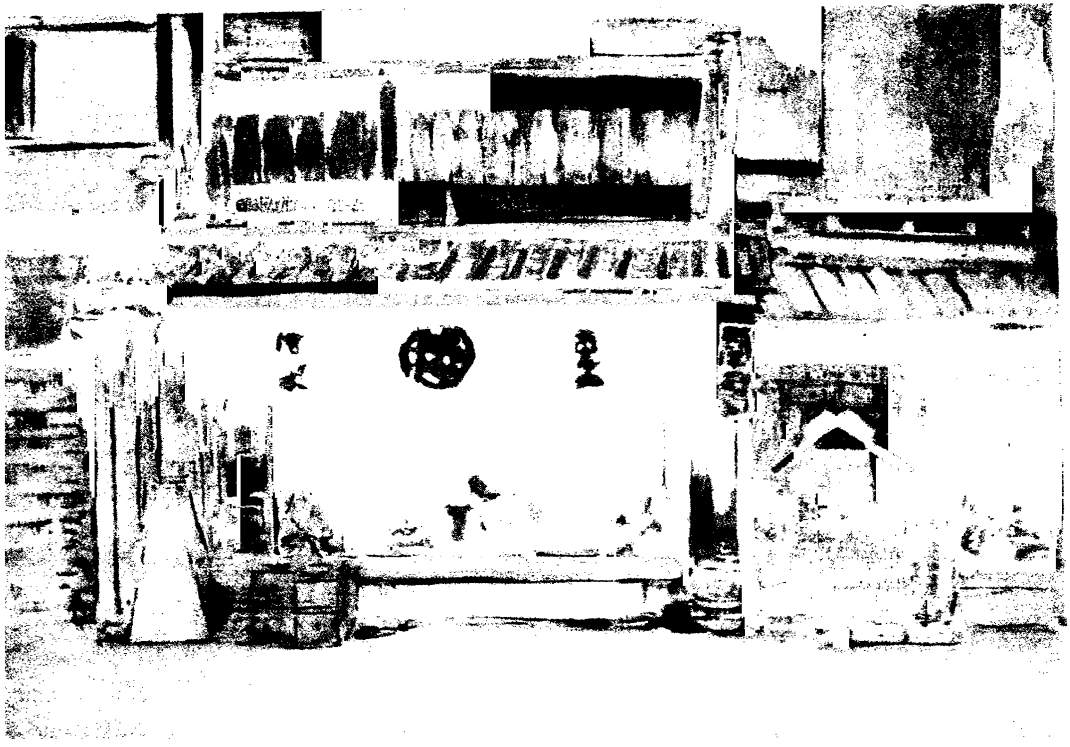

MADAME PRUNE

(LA TROISIÈME JEUNESSE DE MADAME PRUNE)

By

PIERRE LOTI

TRANLASTED FROM THE FRENCH BY

S. R. C. PLIMSOLL

LONDON

T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.

COBHAM HOUSE

24 AND 26 WATER LANE :: :: E.C.4

First Published in . . 1919
Reprinted 1926
Reprinted 1928
Fourth and Popular Edition . 1929

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
NORTHUMBERLAND PRESS LIMITED, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

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FOREWORD

To my good companions of the "Redoutable," in memory of their true comradeship during our twenty-two months' voyage, I dedicate this book, in which I have aimed at recording only some few of the things which amused us, without laying stress upon our fatigues and our labours.

Throughout it is but surface-skimming, written from day to day, nearly three years ago, before the Japanese had yet begun to sprinkle with their blood the plains of Manchuria. To-day, despite the brutality of their initial attack, their courage beyond question deserves one's homage, and I wish to salute here, deeply and seriously, the heroic little yellow soldiers fallen before Port Arthur or on the way to Moukden. But it does not appear to me that the respect due to so many dead obliges me to alter the picture which remains with me of their country.

P. LOTI.

January, 1905

MADAME PRUNE

CHAPTER I

Saturday, December 8th, 1900.

THE horror of a winter's night, through the blast of the wind and the storm of snow, in the open, shelterless, on the wild sea, full in the black commotion. A battle, a revolt of the cold and heavy seas against the great breath of the world which lashes them as it howls; a cataclysm of liquid mountains, upheaved, driven and beaten, that take to flight in utter darkness, crash together, foam with rage. A blind fury of things—as before the creation of beings, in the primal shadows—an icy chaos surging as if it would boil over.

And there we were, in the midst of it, tossed about in the clamorous rout of these masses terrifyingly moving and engulfing, flung back from one to another with an all-shattering violence; we were there, in the heart of it, beyond all possible recall, delivered to it all, every minute plunging into gulfs darker than the night, themselves in motion like the mountains, which in their maddened flight each time threatened to overwhelm us.

We had ventured out into that, some hundreds

of men together on an iron machine, an armoured monster, which seemed so enormous and so strong that, in calmer weather, one almost had the illusion of stability; one had even settled in confidently, with rooms, saloons, furniture, forgetting that the whole of it rested only upon that which evades and betrays, swift to snap you up and swallow you. . . . But that night, how thoroughly one learned the instinctive disquiet and dizziness of being in a house that holds not fast, that has no foundation. . . . In the immensity surrounding us there is nothing safe, nothing firm, whereto to escape, to cling; all is fluid, treacherous and moving. . . . And down below, oh, below, lie in wait for one the bottomless abysses, where already one feels oneself plunging half-way between each wave-crest, where the grand determining plunge would be so terribly easy and swift! . . .

In the shut and inhabited part of the vessel—where, as you can easily understand, casual objects, in lamentable disorder, are roughly flung one on the other, stupidly jolting to and fro—we were, so far, almost protected from the drenching of the waves, and the grand roar of the outer world, attenuated by the bulk of the iron walls, boomed but dully with a sinister monotony. But now here, in the very heart of the poor refuge, enisled thus by tumult and fury, a sudden noise, very different from the terrible encompassing symphony,

a noise which bursts like a cannon-clap, accompanied by the rush of a cataract. . . .

A gun-port has been battered in by the sea, and the water, black and cold, pours in a torrent into our quarters.

Of little importance for ourselves: but right at the ironclad's stern is our poor admiral, lying this night between life and death. After long hardships endured in the Gulf of Petchili, during the disembarkation of the expeditionary force, we were carrying him to Japan for a short rest in a milder climate; and that black cold sea invaded the cabin where he was almost in his last struggle.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, far, far down appears a little light, stable—one, it seemed, which did not dance that death dance of all surrounding things; it is still far off; across the blinding gusts and snow one can scarcely pick it up, but it stands witness that in its direction there does exist the *solid*, the earth, the rock, a scrap of the framework of the world. And we know that it is the jutting point of the Japanese island Kiu-Siu, where soon we shall find a refuge.

With the absolute confidence that we now have in these little lights, unchangeable and almost eternal, like the stars, which the men of our day keep up on the edge of all landfalls, we set our course by this lighthouse. It alone is visible in this tempest; on its directions alone we round

menacing capes, which are there though nothing reveals them, so black it is, and islets, and lurking rocks that would shatter us like glass.

Almost suddenly we are here, sheltered from the fury of the waves, peace weighs upon the waters, and, though we have seen nothing, we have entered the great Bay of Nagasaki.

Things at once recover their immobility, with the idea of the vertical which they had so completely lost; one holds oneself upright, one steps squarely upon planks which no longer evade one; the exhausting dance has come to an end—one forgets those obscure abysses, of which one had so keen a realisation a moment ago.

Groping, the great battleship advances steadily through the darkness, through the whistling winter wind, through the flurries of snow; numbed with cold and wet, we must be now half-way through that immense mountain gully which leads to the town of Madame Chrysanthème.

And now other lights in myriads begin to scintillate, to right and left on the two shores, and it is Nagasaki, in tiers there like an amphitheatre—Nagasaki, strangely grown, so it seems to me, in the fifteen years since I visited it.

The noise and the jarring of the anchor which falls to the bottom, and the flight of the enormous iron chain destined to hold us; it is over, we have arrived; let us sleep in peace until the morning.

To-morrow then, on awaking, when day has dawned, Japan after fifteen years shall reappear for me, there all about me and quite close to me. But my most positive knowledge of it is useless to me, I cannot conjure it up before me, under this snow, in this cold and darkness of December—my coming of yesterday, to this same place, having left me but souvenirs of voluptuous summer, of warm languor; cicalas for ever distractingly noisy, exquisite shade, a green night riddled by rays of sunlight, wonderful green growth hanging everywhere and falling from the high rock right down on to the sea.

CHAPTER II

Sunday, December 9th, 1900.

AWAKENING late, after such a night of rough handling, I opened my port-hole to salute Japan.

And there it is indeed, the same as ever, at the first glance at any rate, but uniformly clad in snow, under a pale sun which bewilders me, which I cannot recognise at all. The green trees, which still cover the mountains as in other days—cedars, camellias and bamboos, are powdered white, and the roofs of the little suburban houses, climbing towards the peaks, resemble in the distance myriads of little white tables.

I find no trace of melancholy in my recollections, on seeing all that again, which still remains pretty under the winter's winding-sheet; no trace of emotion; the lands where one has neither loved nor suffered leave one nothing. But, at the very look of that bay, it is strange what a number of forgotten things and people take form again in my mind; certain corners of the town, certain dwellings, and the figures of men and women of Nippon, expressions of eyes, or of a smile. And at the same time words of that tongue, which seemed to have gone from me for ever, come back one after another. I really believe that once I

have landed I shall know how to speak Japanese again.

In the sunshine of two o'clock, the snow has everywhere melted. And one sees better thus all the changes which were hidden this morning under a white canopy.

Here and there factory chimneys have pushed impudently up, and blacken their surroundings with their breath. Away down there at the foot of the bay, the old Nagasaki of temples and tombs seems still to have remained immutable—as does that suburb, Diou-djen-dji, where I used to dwell, half-way up the mountain; but in the European concession and everywhere on the new quays, how many new buildings, and what a formless style! What smoky factories, what shops and cabarets!

And then, where now are those beautiful great junks, bird-winged, that had the grace of swans? The bay of Nagasaki was once peopled with them: majestic, with their trireme poops, supple, light, one saw them come and go on every breeze; little yellow athletes, naked like antiques, used leisurely to manœuvre their thousand-pleated sails, as they glided in silence amid the green of the banks. Some few yet remain, but decrepit, dejected; lost to-day, astray in the crowd of hideous iron craft, tugs, lighters, patrol boats, like those of Havre or of Portsmouth. And here are heavy warships, uncouth "destroyers," painted that dirty grey

dear to modern squadrons, over which floats the Japanese flag—white adorned with a red sun.

All along the sea, what a massacre! That mantle of green growth, which of old hung down right into the water, which covered even the most abrupt crags, and gave to that bay the charm of Eden, men have torn up by the root; their labour, as of evil-working ants, is found all along the banks; they have hewed down, cut up, scratched out, to establish a sort of girdle road, which to-day the factories and black coal depots border.

And very far off, very high up on the mountain, what is that white which persistently lingers, after the snow has melted? Ah! letters—Japanese, it is true—white letters, ten yards long at least, making words legible at a league; an American poster system; an advertisement for food stuffs!

CHAPTER III

Tuesday, December 11th.

A SUN of late autumn, warm without excess of heat, shining as if it were homesick, as, at this season, is the sun in the south of Spain; an ideal sun, lingering to gild the old pagodas, to ripen the oranges and the tangerines in the tiny gardens. . . .

For fear of too much disillusionment, I have preferred to wait until this lovely weather before leaving the ship and making my first call upon Japan.

So, only to-day, two days after my arrival, do I find myself wandering among the little houses of wood and paper, rather out of my bearings at first through so many alterations in the quarters neighbouring the sea, and then discovering myself again on the boundaries of the great temples at the very heart of the old Nagasaki which is wholly Japanese.

In spite of all that may have been said, it is certainly ever there, this aloof Japan, despite the wind of folly that drives it to transform and destroy itself. As for the Mousmé, her I find still the same, with her lovely head-dress of polished ebony, her sash with its broad bows, her

air of reverence and her little eyes bridled until they can scarcely open; her umbrella alone has changed: instead of being of a thousand pleats and of painted paper, here it is, alas! of silk, sombre in colour, and ballooning in the western way. But the Mousmé is still there, bedizened, sweetly comic, and innumerable besides, filling the streets with her quaint grace and her smile. As for the men, the bowler hats and the little Western suits are not noticeably more numerous than of old; one could even say that their vogue has passed.

How odd it is! I was once a citizen of Nagasaki, long, long ago, many years ago! . . . I had almost forgotten, but I remember it more and more, the more I shut myself into this strange city. And a thousand things throw me as I pass a melancholy greeting, with a little sheaf of memories—a thousand things; the cedars, hundreds of years old, stooping about the pagodas, the granite monsters which keep watch across the ages on the thresholds, and the old bent bridges of stones ravaged by moss.

Melancholy greetings, said I—melancholy of fifteen years slipped away since we lost sight of each other, that is all. But, otherwise, no more emotion than on the day of arrival; clearly, then, it was without suffering and without affection that my time was spent in this land.

These fifteen years, however, weigh not at all upon my shoulders. I am come back to the land of the Mousmé with the illusion of being as young as the first time, and, as I could not have foreseen, far less obsessed by the anguish of the flight of the days; so much have I gained, doubtless, in detachment that, though nearer the great departure, I look forward as if there were on the contrary many more to-morrows left to me. In truth I feel inclined to accept gaily our unforeseen stay in this bay, which is still, so it appears, one of the most amusing corners of the world.

On the evening of this day, almost involuntarily, I am borne towards Diou-djen-dji, the suburb where I used to live; habit, perhaps, or may be some unacknowledged attraction in the smiles of Madame Prune. . . . I climb, climb, thinking to myself that I shall go straight there. But—who would have believed it?—in those little streets, of old so familiar, I lose myself as in a labyrinth, and here I am turning and returning, unable to recognise my dwelling-place.

So much the worse! it shall be for another day, perhaps. And then, it matters so little to me!

CHAPTER IV

Thursday, December 13th.

WHEN I was out walking this morning, I had the pleasure of meeting Madame Renoncule, my mother-in-law, scarcely changed; these fifteen years have not, so to speak, altered those traces of beauty which I knew in her, and we greeted each other without the least hesitation.

She could not have been more amiable, and invited me to a dinner-party, where I should see a number of sisters-in-law, nieces and cousins. Further, she has informed me that her daughter, Madame Chrysanthème, was very satisfactorily settled in a neighbouring town, married in the legitimate manner to a M. Pinson, wholesale manufacturer of lanterns; Heaven the while refuses, alas, to bless this union, which obstinately remains sterile, the only shadow upon their happiness.

The family dinner, in which I have not thought it necessary to refuse to share, promises to be well attended and friendly. My faithful attendant, Osman, whom I have introduced as a young cousin, is to be present also. But my mother-in-law, who, in the most delicate situations, never loses sight of the finer shades of tact, has thought it more becoming that Monsieur and Madame Pinson should not be invited.

CHAPTER V

Saturday, December 15th.

I WAS bored to-day in Motokagomachi, which is the smart and rather modernised street of the town, the street in which some shops venture upon glass windows, and more stories than one, in the European style; I was bored, and the idea came to me to distract myself, to have recourse to the geishas, as one used to do once. . . .

Geishas, surely there would be some left, though, in Japan, everything is going. And I unbosomed myself to the runner who for the last few moments had been bearing me along with all the speed of his muscular stunted legs.

"Sir," he answered me, "I will take you to one of the most elegant of our tea-houses, called the 'Maison de la Grue,' and there they will hasten to gratify your caprice."

(I trust that no one will be misled; in this title the word "Grue" (o tsuru) only means a "bird.")

It is quite close to Motokagomachi, in a side street; one enters by a little door of unassuming appearance; one crosses a jewel of a tiny garden where there are dwarf mountains, dolls' grottos, old trees in miniature, and the Maison de la Grue is at the bottom, very inviting and very discreet.

As the Europeans never go there, it has retained its meticulous Japanese daintiness; I slip my shoes off as I enter, and two servants, as I appear, fall upon all fours, noses to the floor, following the pure etiquette of other days, which I had thought lost. On the first floor, in a large white room, which is empty and resonous, they settle me on the floor, upon cushions of black velvet, and prostrate themselves anew to take my orders.

Here they are, then. I desire to hire for one hour a Geisha, that is, a girl musician, and a Maiko, that is, a dancing girl. Very well: they will have two of these ladies, who live in this quarter and usually work for this house, warned.

As I wait for their coming, the doll's feast of convention is brought to me with a thousand graces, on little loves of plates. . . . Of a surety, it still exists, my Japan of old days, of the days of Chrysanthème and of the days of my youth; I recognise all this, the minute cups, the little sticks that serve for fork, the heating dish of bronze whose handles show heads of monsters—and above all the reverences, the little engaging laugh, the endless pretty trickeries of the servants.

But I had known these things in the splendour of the summer; now I find them again in December; and the winter of the year—perhaps, too, the winter of my life—make their elfishness too sad, intolerably sad.

Let them make haste to bring these ladies to me. I freeze, and I am bored, all alone there, my feet bare on that white matting. A little wind, freshened from the snow, passes sighing between the paper panels which serve for walls; except for my tiny feast, there on the ground, and my cushions of black velvet, there is nothing in all that vast room, nothing but a fragile bouquet over there, in a vase, on a lacquer tripod—a bouquet in exquisite taste, I agree; but it makes no difference to me, and the absolute nakedness of the room only chills me still more. I am cold, cold to the very soul; I am become to myself ridiculous and pitiful, crouched in the midst of the solitude which that room is. Quick, let them bring these ladies to me, or I go!

"Patience, sir," mincingly they answer; "patience, their hair is being plaited; they are getting ready."

To break the monotony during the length of this toilet, they bring in for me, one by one, various accessories: first, the guitar with its long neck, enveloped in a housing of red crape, and the ivory spatula to twang its strings; then a light coffer—of lacquer, it goes without saying—holding the dancing girl's various masks, her rice-paper flowers, her silken streamers; all the little luggage of a mountebank, who yet is subtle, exotic, from the back of beyond.

At last, rustling on the staircase, children's laughter, light steps which mount: "Here they are, monsieur, here they are!"

It was time; I was getting up to go.

Enters first a frail creature, a diminutive girl-child, in long robe of crepe, mouse grey, with a rose sash, rose of the peach blossom, knotted behind, and of which the bows are like the wings of a quaint butterfly which had settled there. It is Mademoiselle Matsuko, the musician, who now prostrates herself; chance has served me well, for she is dainty and pretty.

Then appears the most strange little being that I have ever seen in my wanderings through the world, half doll and half cat, one of those that at first sight impress by the very excess of their *bizarrerie*, which you never forget again. She advances, smiling from the corners of her bridled eyes; her head, the size of your fist, is poised, and seems unreal, on a child's neck, a neck too long and too thin; and her tiny nothingness of a body is lost in the folds of an extravagant dress, hugely flowered with great gilded chrysanthemums. It is Mademoiselle April-Shower, the dancing girl, who also prostrates herself.

She admits to thirteen, but, so small is she, so tiny, so slender, that I should allow her scarcely eight, were it not for the expression of her cajoling, quizzical eyes where, between too very childish

smiles, there flits, furtively, a little precocious femininity, a little bitterness. However, the little thing is delicious to look at in its draperies of farthest Asia, amazing, unlike anything else, indefinable, and sexless.

I am no longer bored or lonely; I have met the plaything which I have, vaguely perhaps, desired all my life: a little talking cat.

Before their performance begins, I must do the honours of my miniature banquet for my two inimitable little guests; so knowing from of old what are good manners in Japan, I myself wash, in a bowl of hot water, brought for the purpose, the miniature cup out of which I have drunk, pour into it a few drops of sake, and offer it in turn to the two mousmés; they pretend to drink, I pretend to empty the bowl after them, and we exchange ceremonious reverences: etiquette is preserved.

And now the guitar preludes. The little cat rises, in the folds of its marvellous robe; from the depths of the lacquer box it draws out masks; it chooses itself a face which it carefully conceals, fastens it over its own comic mask with its back turned to me, and then abruptly shows itself again! . . . Oh, but the surprise! . . . where is it, my tiny cat? It has become a fat common creature, with an air of such astonishment, so ingenuous and so silly, that I cannot restrain

myself from bursting into laughter. And it dances, with a calculated clumsiness that is really great art.

A fresh transformation, another dive into the mischief-box, choice of a new mask rapidly attached, and a new apparition to make one shudder. . . . Now it is an old, old hag, the colour of a corpse, with eyes at once greedy and dead whose expression is beyond bearing. It dances, bent double, crouching; the thing still has the arms of a child, and all the time winnows the air, the great sleeves waving like bat's wings. And the guitar sobs on deep notes a sinister tremolo. . . . When the mousmé then, her dance ended, lets fall her hideous mask to make her bow one finds her delicious little face, by contrast, the more exquisite.

This is the first time that in Japan I have come under a spell. . . . I shall often return to the "Maison de la Grue."

CHAPTER VI

December 18th.

I SAW again to-day Madame Renoncule's little garden, whose appearance alone in the old days was sufficient to induce a melancholy.

And I saw it was still the same, as sickly, in its twilight, between its old walls. Its dwarf trees, which even then seemed hundreds of years old, have neither changed nor grown by so much as a line. The same bunch of little abortive cedars which I remember so well, the little cedars not two feet high, admire themselves for ever in the miniature lake, whose surface is tarnished with dust. The same hue, greenish, as of mouldiness, has remained on the sickly grottos, in the sunless corners. . . .

One is always astonished at finding again, in countries very far away, and after long years which have been filled for one with excitement and journeys through the world, poor little inanimate things still the same, minutest little plants still vegetating in the same places.

CHAPTER VII

December 20th.

DURING my former stay, fifteen years ago, one saw no drunkards in Japan except the sailors from Europe. Now the Japanese sailors have joined them over their alcohol. They look very much like our own men, save for their flat yellow faces; they wear the same blue collar and the same cap, and go about arm-in-arm, singing and reeling through the streets. Many other folk, too, in Japanese costume, get tipsy on Sunday and fight in the cabarets.

And as for the tea-houses, only those which are very smart and rigidly exclusive, which admit only pure Japanese and some few foreigners of note, these alone have kept up the tradition: meticulous white cleanliness, great rooms with not a thing in them, extreme refinement in their absolute simplicity.

But all the others, open to anyone who wishes to enter, have become foul and reek of absinthe. You are admitted without taking off your boots, in your great dirty shoes: there are no more immaculate mattings on the floors, no more cushions on which to sit; chairs and tables such as you see in public-houses; on the landings,

instead of dainty porcelain for the doll-banquets, there are, to-day, rows of bottles, whisky, brandy, pale ale—all the poisons of England and America, dumped daily by the shipload upon the old empire of the Rising Sun.

And yet Japan still exists. At certain hours, in certain places, one finds it so intact and so Japanese, that it seems never to have suffered more than a superficial taint. That strange great bay where we are, between its high mountains with their exaggerated fangs, has never ceased to be a receptacle of strange and inexpressible things. Nagasaki, in spite of its electric lamps and the smoke of its factories, is still, in spirit, a city far removed, separated from us by thousands of leagues, by civilisations, by ages.

If her port is open to all the ships and to all the importations of the West, on the mountain side she has kept her little streets of past centuries, her belt of old temples and of old tombs. The green slopes which surround her are haunted by those thousands of ancestral spirits, to which each day so much incense is burned; they have not ceased to exercise the tranquil royalty of the dead; the mysterious symbols, the granite pedestals, the praying Buddhas crowd there from top to bottom, among the cedars and bamboos. And all this immense place of reunion and adoration, as though hung above the town, casts its shadow

upon the fantastic little creatures that pass below. In Nagasaki, no matter where you stroll or where you find amusement, always overhead you feel that mass of pagodas and of cemeteries, in tiers among the greenery; each road that leads from the border of the bay, each street running upward, ends always by touching upon it; and often you meet extraordinary processions which are making for it, accompanying some dead son of Nippon, whom they are carrying there, up and up, in a pretty little coffer borne by porters. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

December 23rd.

I HAVE found Madame Prune again, and I have found her free and a widow! . . . There's a real lively emotion for me. . . .

I had climbed by chance towards Diou-djen-dji, thinking no ill, when of a sudden the turning of a lane, an old tree, a rock, recognised me possessively as I passed; these things had once been daily written upon my eyes; I was but two steps from my old habitation. . . .

I went straight there, and found it the same as ever, despite an air of decay which it had never had in the days when I dwelt there. Hesitating not at all, slipping my hand between the slats of the door, I opened the secret catch to let myself into the garden. . . . Madame Prune was there, in a négligé distressing to her, poor dear little soul: I ought not to have taken her by surprise, with her head-dress unadorned, yawning over small household duties. And such was her distress on seeing me, that I could doubt no more the persistence of her feelings for me.

Three years now, it appeared, since M. Sucre had paid his debt to nature; a few hundreds of yards above his house he rests in one of the mountain

cemeteries. The widow jealously preserves her relics of the spouse who was able to introduce into his art so much detachment and philosophy; the jade inkstand, which I recognised immediately, with the mother toad and her little toadlets; the round spectacles; and finally the last study which sprang, half finished, from that clever brush, a group of swans, as one might have expected.

As for Mademoiselle Oyouki, she was married ten years ago, established in the country, and mother of a charming family.

And Madame Prune, dropping her eyes, laid stress on the freedom and the loneliness of heart with which her new position has left her. . . .

CHAPTER IX

December 26th.

ONLY those who have that "weakness for cats" will be able to follow and understand me in the development of my passion for little Mademoiselle April-Shower, professional exponent of Japanese dance.

One has a weakness for cats or has it not; there is no argument possible on the matter. I have seen people, who in other respects showed no sign whatever of any aberration, cuddle cats irresistibly, in a frenzy, though no question of affection, and, still less, of love, entered in. And such folk were not always subtle, neurotic, but quite often wholesome and primitive beings; thus I remember that a certain little grey cat, six months old, on board one of my last ships, caused a good number of sailors genuine transports; they gave her the wildest names, paralysed her with caresses, rubbed, for minutes together, their moustaches in her smooth, clean fur, cuddled her as though they would eat her—just as I myself was quite capable of doing if by chance I caught the little marmoset, in a happy place where there were no indiscreet witnesses.

It is absurd to state solemnly that I did not go so

far with Mademoiselle April-Shower in her finery —who doubtless would have been most shocked at the proceeding; but young cats and she cause me sensations of the same type, beyond a doubt, and there are moments when will-o'-the-wisp fancies seize and paralyse me—all of which I could experience with no greater intimate thrill if she were Miss Marmoset in grey fur.

So I often come to sit on the spotless matting, in the great empty resounding rooms of the "Maison de la Grue." There I freeze, in the December winds, never very severe in Japan, it is true, but saddening to experience between paper walls, far from the clear sun shining outside, with no other fire than a brazier in a minute heating-dish.

And then Mademoiselle April-Shower has *never* finished her toilet. They hurry away to warn her as soon as I arrive, but each time I must count upon an hour before she appears, an hour of boredom in front of the doll's dinner-set on the floor, and an exchange of witless remarks with two or three servants prostrate before me.

When she does come in at last, my little dressed-up kitten, there is always the surprise of new attire for me, of extravagant design, of fantastic colourings. From the end of the great room, a little in twilight, she comes forward and flashes upon me with marionette pomp; she is almost a little dwarf; no, beyond anything else, a little

fairy; and her body, a mere nothingness in itself, is drowned in the waves of her robes, which are stiffly padded at the foot, so that her train billows out pompously all round her. That which above all makes the unreality of the little personage is, I am quite sure, the length of her neck and the very small size of her head. But the spell, the real cat-expression, is in the eyes; eyes bridled, drawn up, coaxing, intelligent, and all the time baffling.

Mademoiselle Matsuko, the geisha, follows a few steps behind, very pretty too, but sulky, her expression full of offended dignity, understanding too well that I am not come for her sake, and affecting more and more to dress herself without interest, in faded tones.

Not only does Mademoiselle April-Shower dance, but she sings too, or she declaims, as she executes the steps that Mademoiselle Matsuko plays for her on the long mandolin. And there come a series of little miaulings, just like a cat's, but scarcely audible, with, from time to time, as she drops her head, indescribable sounds drawn from the bottom of her throat aiming at the notes of a baritone—as when marmosets are very angry.

She danced for me to-day the dance of the "Wheels of Flowers," which called for play with many wreaths adorned with red camellias, and

the measure of "La Source," with two streamers of white silk, to which she contrived to give a continuous and inexplicable motion of swaying, reminiscent of the rippling waters of running streams.

CHAPTER X

December 27th.

DESPITE the perfect discretion with which the idea has been suggested, it became quite clear to me to-day that Madame Renoncule would without displeasure see me reassume my title of son-in-law by a morganatic union with Mademoiselle Elder-berry-Flower, the youngest of her daughters. I pretended not to understand, and my mother-in-law, with her usual tact, not pressing the matter too far, kept me in her good graces. I thought it becoming, all the same, to plead the exigencies of service, on the eve of her dinner party, not finding myself in truth sufficiently one of the family to share in it.

CHAPTER XI

December 31st.

THE immense and formidable flotilla which foregathered this summer, from every corner of the world, in the Gulf of Petchili, has been perforce dispersed by the coming of the ice. The iron monsters, which can no longer prowl round the approaches to Pekin, have gone by various ways to seek shelter, in regions less bitter, and to wait for spring, when they will assemble anew like a pack of beasts of prey.

Many of these monsters have sought asylum, as we did, in the great warm sheltered bay of Nagasaki. There we lie, a number of battleships and cruisers, immobilised for some months, and waiting.

Hundreds of sailors, strangely differing in appearance and speech, enliven each evening with their songs and their shouts the quarters of the city where amusement is to be found, innumerable American bars taking the place of the old-time tea houses. Ours fraternise a little with the Russians, but far more with the Germans, who are, besides, noticeable for their personal smartness and good turn-out. It was wholly unexpected, this sympathy between French and German

sailors, who stroll through the streets arm in arm, always in alliance, and ready to set upon the English sailors the moment they catch sight of them.

In this crowd the little Japanese sailors, vigorous, nimble, clean, cut a very good figure. And the Japanese battleships, irreproachably kept up, ultra-modern, terrible, seem of the first order.

How long shall we stay in this bay? To which country shall we be dispatched then? And what will be this adventure's end? . . . War, to begin with, war between Russia and Japan. War proclaims itself inevitable and imminent. It may even burst, without a declaration perhaps, tomorrow, through some impulsive folly of outposts, so firmly has each little yellow brain decided upon it; the most insignificant porter in the streets talks of it as though it had begun, and reckons insolently upon victory.

Despite all the future's uncertainty, at the present moment we can amuse ourselves with this life; after our stay in Chinese waters, which were so austere, so wearisome and unkind, this bay seems a delightful garden, to which we have been sent for our holidays, amongst pretty toys and treasures.

Doubtful and far away though our return may be, we certainly find amusement in this life, whilst our Admiral, sent here dying, grows stronger day

by day, in this almost artificial climate, between these mountains which cut off the icy storms. A sun, which looks as though it shone through glass, overheats, almost every day, the deliciously wooded slopes between which Nagasaki shuts itself in. On those that face the south the oranges are ripening; the enormous cypresses, a hundred years old, which, on the thresholds of the old pagodas, look like clusters of antediluvian trees, steep their green plumage in the light; against the walls of the gardens camellias are in flower, with the last of the roses, and one can sit outdoors as though it were spring, in front of the little tea houses perched above the town, on different levels, amongst the temples and the thousands of tombs.

Towards the end of the day, when the sun goes, and the hour comes to return on board, it grows just so cold that one finds one's little room with the sheet-iron walls hospitable and pleasant, and the steam-heated wardroom, where one dines with good friends, comfortably warm.

And to-day, last day of the year and the century, in warm weather, mild and tranquil, I called upon the Japanese gardeners, who, from father to son, put trees to long torture, in tiny pots, among tiny grottos, to obtain those old dwarfs which are sold for such high prices. In St. Sylvester's sunshine, all along the alleys, rows of pottery were warming, and then one saw oaks,

pines, and cedars, hundreds of years old, crazily venerable, no taller than cabbages. But I was only wanting cut flowers, roses late-blooming, branches of camellias with red petals, to fill two push-carts which have crossed the town in my train.

This evening, then, all that foam of flowers was in my cabin on the "Redoutable," until it looked like a florist's shop. Two good sailor-lads under my directions made it into bunches, and, at tea time, I carried them to our Admiral, who, three weeks ago, seemed to us dying, but who has regained the look he had in his good days; who has recovered, as if by miracle, in this calm which Japan afforded him.

CHAPTER XII

January 1st, 1901.

I WAS awakened by a clamorous serenade, vivacious, joyful, ringing out before dawn in the depths of the enormous sleeping battleship—the ship's "reveille," the music which turns the sailors out. But this time, on this first morning of the year and the century, bugles and drums, down in the darkness, never stop playing all the airs in their repertory: never have the crew of the "Redoutable" had such a long holiday din to awaken them.

Where am I? So often during my life have I changed my ground, that sometimes, waking from sleep of a sudden like that, I have not known where I was. . . . The electric light which I snapped on mechanically shows me a narrow retreat hung with red drugget, and filled with red camellias; long branches, almost shrubs of camellias, in bronze vases. And goddesses in golden robes, very smooth of face, are sitting there beside me with their eyes lowered, as in the temples of the Forbidden City, where they dwelt for thrice a hundred years.

Why—yes! My cabin on the "Redoutable." . . . I am back from China and am in Japan. . . .

There comes a gentle rapping at my door; four or five sailors, who have just turned out, come in to wish me a happy year, and century, with ingenuous little compliments. So to-day really is the beginning of the twentieth century. I had thought, myself, that it began last year, during the night of January 1st, 1900, on the Indian Ocean, whilst a boat belonging to the Maharajah of Travancore bore me under the starlight, between two endless curtains of great black palm trees; but no, I was mistaken, say the chronologers, and only this morning shall I see the dawn of the new century.

January dawn, slow to come; yet an hour passes ere the two goddesses, guardians of my room, brighten with a little daylight.

But when at last I open my window, the Japan which then appears before me, vague and almost dream-like, half pearl-grey, half rose, is more strange, more distant, more *Japan*, than the paintings upon fans and porcelain; a Japan before sunrise, a Japan barely revealed, under a veil of mist, in a mystery of half-tones. Close beside me the waters gleam, like mirrors reflecting the rosy light, and then, stretching into the distance, this tranquil sea surface turns formless mother-o'-pearl, loses itself in a paling nothingness. Fleecy mist, coloured puffs of mist like hydrangea clusters, envelop and disguise any seashore there

may be; only, higher up, and all rosy, the pale rose of a grey cameo, are sketched bouquets of trees hung in the air, crags all but unbelievable, so daring or so fantastic are they, and last the mountains or the reflections of mountains, having no base, nothing but summits, fangs, peaks jutting into the nothingness of the sky. One is scarcely sure that these transparent things exist; did one breathe upon them, one would surely risk changing all this imaginary decoration. It was ideally mild; in the air, so nearly warm, you feel the smell of the sea and a little of the perfume of those scented sticks which the people burn here always on the tombs or on the altars of the dead. And now comes a huge junk, one from the older days, which passes with its antique sails and its trireme poop: on that unreal ground, before that fanciful drop-scene, which has the shades of mother-o'-pearl and flowers, it glides without your hearing any sound of moving water, and the enveloping mist swells it; you would think it a phantom ship if it were not all rose itself upon that ground of rose.

Ten o'clock; the morning mists have melted in the sun, which is as hot to-day as a sun of May.

The Admiral deputes me to go, in my epaulettes and side-arms, to bear to the Japanese governor his good wishes for the New Year, and a whaler from the "Redoutable" carries me on its oars, over the sea, now turned very blue.

The masses of Nippon in the streets are already in festal array.

I must have two runners in my *'rikisha* for speed, but, more important, for propriety, in my capacity as a French officer; however, it is difficult to enlist them on this first day of the year, for the gentlemen in question are away paying visits and have laid their carts aside. When in the end I have found my carriage, we set off at full speed, shouting to scatter the mob.

Such a quaint and graceful mob! A crowd all smiles and bows, hurrying to a thousand ceremonious duties, and exchanging compliments all along the road, with a seriousness quite unknown to us on our first day of the year. Mousmés go in bands, as fast as their sandals, strapped inside the big toe, will let them; they are dressed in light colours, tender shades, and knots of artificial flowers heighten the effect of their hair, piled like little snail shells. Adorable babies, with eyes like cats, trot along taking hands, with an air of importance, in long robes of ceremony; their hair is dressed in very affected fashion, with little tufts and little tails of hair standing out in different directions. Then the gentlemen, porters or runners, are themselves in gala array, in blue cotton dresses, very new and very stiff, adorned with large white inscriptions on the back and the chest; in their hands they carry visiting cards

which they distribute, running, to their brilliant relations.

A new house, almost European, whose approaches are encumbered by the *jinrikishas* of innumerable visitors: here lives the Governor of the city, who receives us in the embroidered frock-coat and with the official smile of the Eastern prefect.

After a large officers' lunch party at the Admiral's table, I swiftly slip off my sailor's uniform to return to earth, to mingle with the Japanese crowd.

Nagasaki, from one end of its streets to the other, is uniformly garlanded. All the length of the little wooden houses, old or new, runs an endless green fringe, made of bunches of seed grass between the long green fronds of fern hanging down by their stalks. And before the entrance of each dwelling, to the knot which holds up this fringe, a pendant is attached which is always the same, made up of the red shell of a lobster, two egg-shells, and a few leaves. All this, so it seems, is traditional, symbolic; unalterable decoration for the first day of each year.

Between these unbroken garlands, the smiling movement of the crowd sways at will under the winter sun: neat little mousmés, pallid, quaint, aged duennas with shaven eyebrows, their teeth black-lacquered, salute each other in passing, and salute yet once more, as though each repeated meeting were a joy and surprise that would never

come again; ladies, meeting face to face at a cross-road, stand an hour opposite one another, bent double by the deepest of bows, waiting until one or other should summon courage to straighten herself again. As for the men, even of those who still dress as Japanese, the bowler hats are much in evidence, and some particular dandies, faithful still to the silk robes of their ancestors, have yet made a concession to modern taste by wearing top-hats.

Visitors, both men and women, overwhelmed with attentions, are usually received in the hall of the house—the little hall with its white floor matting where you will find on this day a tray filled with quaint sweets, besides the inevitable bronze bowl holding the brazier to light the ladies' miniature pipes.

Volubly they twitter compliments, polite little visitors, compliments punctuated with bows, and choose and pick up with their finger-tips, after a thousand ceremonies and flourishes, one of the little sweets shaped like flowers or birds, uneatable, quite, to us. Then they go their way, turning back many times in the street to bow again.

Oh! . . . My little cat goes a-calling too! . . . My little cat is clad in colours all but severe, befitting the streets, and is as preoccupied as grand folk with the performance of courtesy's rites! . . . No, he who has not seen little Mademoiselle April-

Shower sitting with dignity in her push-cart, and holding visiting cards, as Lilliputian as herself, in her hand; who has not met the little figure and received as he passes a ceremonious inclination, will never imagine the grace and charm of a mousmé of twelve years old, graduate of Dance and Deportment. . . .

So much quaint bustle, and so clear a sunshine upon these oddities of dress, drive away the sadness which each fresh New Year brings in its train; but it was not far away, it prowled in the air, that sadness from which one cannot escape on this day, and soon enough we foregather again, like old friends, wearied of knowing each other too well; foregather in the midst of the decaying quarter, silent to-day, which shuts away for the immense city her dead, where slips past from time to time some furtive mousmé, flashing the gleam of her holiday robe between the ancient trees and venerable stones. Nagasaki ends at the abrupt mountain, rising loaded with temples and tombs, which everywhere make one universal cemetery, a tier above the city of the living, a cemetery a little overpowering perhaps, but so full of shade. . . .

At the very foot of the necropolis runs an abandoned road, where, old and withered, Madame L'Ourse, my florist-in-ordinary, dwells. On one side are little old-time houses, age-old shops where flowers for the graves are sold, and, second-hand,

little domestic gods, or lacquer altars for one's ancestors; on the other there is the mountain's very flank, broken here and there by timeless portals, the great stairways which lead to the pagodas, or else by little goat tracks, carpeted by hair-fern and by moss, that run to lose themselves amongst my lords and ladies, the dead.

Often do I come here, to this road, not only for the sake of Madame L'Ourse, but to take thence one of the climbing paths and mount into the immense delicious cemetery. Above all, when, as this evening, the sun is failing, in a heavy warmth such as you meet in an orange grove, I know not if there exists in all the world a more adorable spot; it is a labyrinth of little terraces, one upon another, of tiny paths, tiny steps, amongst the moss, the lichen, and the finest maidenhair with its thin, black, wiry stems. As one climbs one soon rises above all the ancient pagodas, ranged round the mountain's base as though to serve as atrium to those airy quarters where sleep the older generations; the glance that dives to their complicated roofs, the courts with their gloomy flag-stones, their symbols, their monsters. From thence, all this city of Nagasaki, seen as from a bird's vantage, spreads wide its thousands of funny little houses, the colour of old wood, of dust; further still come the green borders, the deep bay, the blue-lapped sea, the tortured stone

flutter upon us like a flight of tiny bewildering fairies. There are just so many as there are guests—and evil be to him who evil thinks, for all goes as it would in good society; these ladies, geishas of renown, whom the two-sworded *seigneur* presents to us for the evening, have only undertaken the responsibility of amusing us, of sharing our feast, of pleasing our eyes; nothing more. Each of us will have his own; each of us, at the very moment at which he slips off his shoes, is monopolised by one of these charming creatures, who will leave him no more; at the very first instant, even in the confusion of arrival, couples are formed, almost without choice, as though by chance, and two by two, hand in hand, we mount the staircase, to a music of little forced laughs, childish, though lacking in *naïveté*, but pretty all the same.

On the first floor, the reception-room would easily hold two hundred merrymakers, whilst, with our geishas, there are only twelve of us; we seem to be lost in it, in the midst of the immaculate white of the wall-paper, and of the matting covering the floor. And there was nothing whatever to adorn that white solitude; it was an excess in taste; nothing but a great frail bough which sprang from a rare and ancient vase, placed upon a tall ebony stand; all the luxury of the place lay in its vast proportions, its space, and

in the finish of the woodwork, its spotless purity.

Our aristocrat, to welcome us, had put on again his long silk robes; but for his close-cropped hair he would have become once more a Japanese of olden time. As for the fittings, they too were of the old order, except for the electric light, that too modern light, falling here and there from the ceiling, yet quietly enough, veiled by roughened glass.

When we are all settled cross-legged on the ground, in an orderly row at the end of the *salon*, on black velvet cushions, six servants, all dressed alike, appear at the door in the distance of this little desert of matting and paper, prostrate themselves and make their first, purely ritual, entrance to bring in, and place before each seated couple, the inevitable bronze heating-dish. These servants are people of middle age, and of respectable appearance, pale, distinguished, their hair bound back like ravens' wings; they have donned the vesture and colour of full uniform, the special uniform of New Year's feasts which must only be worn during the first week of each year; a robe of black crepe, of a deep and lustreless black, like the veil of night, with a white blazon in the middle of the back; a robe which trails behind, trails at the sides, trails in front and which, thanks to an intricate arrangement of interior padding, stays

always majestically billowing around the shrivelled little waiting-women.

And so the doll's feast on the ground begins. Each course is brought in good order and time by the six correct servants, who, sombrely suggestive, advance each time as though for the extremely official obsequies of some aloof and absurd personage.

We are given the same tiny Japanese banquet that is given to one everywhere; the same seaweed soup, the enigmatic minute morsels for dolls. But all is most exquisitely refined, served in diaphanous porcelain, in lightest lacquer, so light as almost to be imponderable. And there are amazing pastries imitating scenery and places in a dream-Japan, grottos of brown sugar, old cedars of greenish sugar with very delicately modelled leaves.

After supper the ladies, who are highly placed and very highly paid, consent to withdraw from the crepe coverings their long locust-voiced guitars and the ivory spatulas that serve for bows. They sing, like young cats miauling at evening from the top of some wall. And then they dance with various masks; the Ghoul's Dance, the Dance of a stout and stupid chubby-cheeked old dame, the Dance of the Wheel of Flowers, the measure of "La Source," all those to which my little friend, Mademoiselle April-Shower, has already intro-

duced me at the Maison de la Grue, all of an infinitely ancient tradition, are reproduced for me here, in a hall more vast, more distinguished and still more empty.

These ladies wear dresses adorably tinted, that pass from the ashen blue of night to the rose of dawn, across which huge fanciful flowers trail, or flights of swans with golden plumage. By dint of airs and artifice they are almost pretty, and one would yield to their studied charm if it were less cold. But one freezes on these mats, in a room whch is far too large, where the fumes from the pretty warming-dish affect our heads without giving any heat. And the January moon, whose spectral pallor we can see through the rice-paper shutters, in conjunction with the electric light, reminds us that out of doors the hoar frost of earliest morning must have begun to settle upon the sleeping town. It is time to leave this place, with its strange ideas of elegance.

To wind up with, we play a childish game with no amusement in it. On the ground, in that very empty room, we set a circle with the funereal velvet cushions, the length of a mousmé between each, and there in a circle are we, all running round in single file, in step to the rhythm of a song a hundred years old. The Japanese used to amuse themselves with this game in the night of time; the old drawings witness to it. He

loses who is not perched upon the velvet of a black cushion when the song abruptly stops, and then you hear the little laughter of the geishas, like a trilling cascade of sham pearls.

Oh, the folly and the sadness of it, in the midst of this extreme of the exotic, at the foot of the pagoda of the Jade Horse, in the great silence of these surroundings and the cold of a January midnight! . . .

Let's be off! Our runners, below, are waiting for us, asleep in rugs beside our shoes. With these put on again we settle into our little chairs, and the keen air catches us, outer night envelops us, whilst the geishas, standing on the staircase in a resplendent group, dazzling with colour, bend in charming salutations. On the sky, blue in the rays of the moon, the old sacred cedars of the temple cut out in black their twisted branches, with their infrequent clusters of leafage, in a design which is very Japanese. And little by little we gather speed as our runners grow wider awake; we are away now for a long run, crossing a Nagasaki all blue-pallor, misty of the moon, which sleeps, bathed in wintry vapour.

CHAPTER XIV

Tuesday, January 8th.

Oh! The astonishing little people whom I met to-day in the country! I saw them from far off coming along the road towards me, fifty of them, in rank, almost like a squad of soldiers, all alike and all white. Wrappers of white calico—with shapeless sleeves, and fastened in at the waist by a belt, without any corset—made of them well-rounded women of the common people, in the costume and appearance of a fat, coarse peasant girl. Calico bonnets, quite simple and quite stiff, but too pompous, blown out as though by the wind, like bells or sun-bonnets on their heads. . . . Who on earth could they be, those people? Japanese women, so grotesquely dressed, clumsily, tastelessly? Impossible.

I quickened my steps to make sure. And, under those absurd high bonnets, I certainly did see the flat faces of mousmés, or of young Japanese women; but these ladies had such a serious expression, absorbed, with never a smile to spare; the usual chaffing encounter evidently was not in order, and I passed them, restraining a smile myself.

In the end I found out; it was the ambulance school for the army, taking a training march for

their health's sake! . . . Everything tends to war, just now, all is preparation for the grand trial of strength with Russia—which, by the way, will not be the first manifestation of the immense Yellow Peril.

I am told that, in the ranks of these little packed-parcels of creatures in their hospital clothes, are noble ladies, descendants of those old families into which we, the foreigners, cannot yet make our way. And officers, friends of mine, who have already been cared for and bandaged by them, have the liveliest recollections of the kindness of their hands, hands so small, soft, adroit, of such untiring patience.

But those enormous wind-blown bonnets, those coiffe-like things after the Caux peasants' style, who can explain me them? . . .

CHAPTER XV

Saturday, January 12th.

MADAME RENONCULE, my mother-in-law, is most certainly gifted with every refinement. Despite my marked reserve in the matter of Mademoiselle Elderberry-Flower, my sister-in-law, she once more invited me to a family dinner yesterday evening, which it would be in too bad taste to refuse again. All the same I hoped to get a little amusement out of it, and I am bound to admit that the general attitude was somewhat strained. We froze, in our socks, on the floor mats. We made forced and empty remarks, gallant, but with reservations, at which we tried to laugh. The thin soup was cold in the tiny bowls. Everything was cold.

It would all have been colourless, had not, towards the end of dinner, one of my cousins, quite recently married, Madame Cherry Blossom—a very distinguished personage, but one who from her tenderest years had often been the victim of a too-inflammable temperament—had she not been so taken by Osman that she went so far as to propose to him to cast aside all her duties for his sake. After this incident, which none of us could sufficiently deplore, a very marked

discomfort slipped into my relations with my connections by marriage.

However, my relations with Mme. Prune have not suffered on that account, and I went with her this morning as far as the tomb of the late poor M. Sucre, where she had felt the need of laying a few flowers with me. Really it is touching, this cult she has for the memory of that light-hearted spouse, who possibly could not satisfy all the ardour of her nature, but in whom so many complaisant qualities flowered, who understood, as no one else could do, the tact of timely disappearance.

They were late chrysanthemums, rust coloured, gracefully interwoven with twigs of cryptomeria, that Madame Prune had chosen for her pious offering.

The corner of the cemetery where M. Sucre rests seemed to me a little neglected, though pleasantly placed on the mountain, with an attractive view. At the four corners of the tomb, bamboo tubes, stuck into the earth, make simple flower-holders in which we put our flowers, with some little effort after their right arrangement. A short invocation of the spirits of the ancestors; a few sticks of incense lit in the little funeral perfume censer, and the widow with a sigh tore herself away from the melancholy spot; we had to hurry, for the rain threatened to overtake us in the midst of our duties.

The downpour, moreover, made more intimate our return, for, on the downward paths, suddenly become slippery and dangerous, Madame Prune, in her little wooden sandals, was obliged to seek safety on my arm, and we returned together under her large umbrella.

It was huge, Madame Prune's umbrella, with a thousand spines, and covered with oiled paper; all round it, transparently painted, storks played—interpreted something after the manner of the dear departed, who will always remain the incomparable painter of these particular birds.

CHAPTER XVI

January 16th.

To-day, a visit which was intriguing me before ever I paid it, my first to Mademoiselle April-Shower, in her own home. And I found it exactly as I had imagined it, this dwelling-place for a little grasshopper creature of no hereafter, that exists only in her ephemeral grace, in the glitter of her finery, precisely like some butterfly born to please our eyes. It is in an old road which climbs, not towards the mountains of the temples and the tombs, but towards the "Round Mountain," a sort of isolated hill in the midst of the city, bearing only tea-houses, and the houses of pleasure. There on the first story of a building in the old style, all cedar wood and paper, the little dancer's nest projects balcony-wise, above the heads of the rare and well-mannered passers-by. One slips off one's shoes, of course, at the foot of the staircase with its white mats, and everything is scrupulously clean in the echoing little house, whose woodwork, dried up these hundred years, vibrates like the shell of a guitar.

Mademoiselle April-Shower lives with Monsieur Swong, an enormous cat, a thickly furred tom-cat of imposing appearance, who wears a frilly collar,

and Madame Pigeon, an old, old white-haired woman whom she calls "Grandmother"—some Madame Prune of the past, no doubt, but who has cheery eyes, the air of a kindly relative, gentle and almost respectable.

After many bows, whilst they hasten to prepare sweets and tea for me, I carry out, from the corner of my eye, an inspection of the apartment. It feels odd to be there, and Mademoiselle April-Shower, as mistress of the house—how can I make you see her good manners, her earnestness, and the seriousness of her indescribable little air? . . . Quite a modest interior; here one is amongst folk who are of the common people, but particular. The only striking things about it are the lacquer chests holding dance dresses, some of which, thrown here and there, seem like fairies' clothes lying about in a cottage. On the walls, of dry wood and white paper, are photographs of Mademoiselle April-Shower and some of her companions, in their successful rôles; pretty little faces, like little cats, in the finery of olden time Japanese princesses, or in dowagers' wigs. And—by virtue of an exotic curiosity—there are also two European portraits: the Empress Eugénie and King Victor Emmanuel. . . . However, I cannot see the ancestors' table anywhere about, that venerated spot, a little blackened always by the smoke of incense sticks, which one finds even in the poorest

homes. No, it is missing here, the altar which is the emblem of a properly constituted family; the little dancer then has no parents, and goes through life unchaperoned save by that great crafty cat, and that chance-found grandmother.

On the heels of that—why has the self-styled grandmother, with her frank eyes, slipped away? . . . And why does M. Swong sitting gravely upright in his Medici collar with its stiff frills, observe me so fixedly with his green eyes? . . . In this *milieu* all is mysterious and everything is possible. . . . But . . . oh, no, I cannot believe that the disappearance of Madame Pigeon was deliberate; such a suspicion would spoil this spotless dwelling for me, this delicate little creature, and the feast laid before me upon the matting on the floor. Drive out the evil doubt; . . . let us sit on the ground for our tiny banquet, ceremoniously, as though we were in Society. . . .

When the time came to take leave, I kissed Mademoiselle April-Shower and M. Swong, each on the cheek, and they saw me out most amiably, most cordially, after expressing a hope of seeing me again. Most certainly will I return, for all is as one could wish, nothing was in the least dubious, and on the lowest step of the staircase Mademoiselle April-Shower, bent double, fan in hand, follows me with a frank and gentle smile. . . .

But what can there possibly be inside the dancer's tiny little head, and in that little heart? . . . Always the melancholy unanswerable questioning, that I have so often scrutinised in beings so widely differing from myself, and as inscrutable, as cats, monkeys, or children of human races far removed from ours, whose glances have plunged into mine through some deep channel of sympathy. . . . And then, what will be her to-morrows, what ignoble submissions wait upon her? Will she but stay pretty as she grows, when the bloom of childhood has faded from her cheeks? And again, if she does not stay pretty, in what misery may she not end, little child of the lovely robes? . . .

And as I dream of the morrows of Mademoiselle April-Shower, in whom is born a dream of old Japan, Japan of lacquer and fans, I drop down again into modern Nagasaki, where are the quays and the American bars. This is the hour at which the pitiable crowd of workers leave the factories, with faces blackened by this hideous coal out of the earth, which will have proved, more than alcohol perhaps, the destroying flail of our species. And down there, on the opposite bank that once knew naught but cedars, bamboos and the pagodas, chimneys smoke, smoke poisons the evening air, and machines whistle and scream, Punch and Judy fashion; there lies the naval arsenal,

where day and night men's energies are bent on the construction of the most ingenious machines for such wholesale butcheries as were undreamed of by our forebears.

CHAPTER XVII

Thursday, January 17th.

THE rain was falling fast on the sea, which was crinkled with it, and seemed to smoke under the lash of those thousands of stinging drops.

In my room on the "Redoutable"—door closed to minimise that perpetual din of 'tween-decks crammed with sailors—such a downpour brought on the evening darkness out of due time. The piano, which I had just opened, gave out the muffled sounds it produces on rainy days, and the soft pedal, always down for my neighbours' sake, thinned Wagner's music, as though it were being played at the bottom of a shut closet; it was a passage from "Tristan and Iseult" which I was accompanying rather absent-mindedly at first, and which my attendant, Osman, was singing below his breath. Through the window one glimpsed the green of the banks through a greyness which was fast blotting it out. Drowned lay the green, drowned the crags, the leaves and grass, flattened under the rainfall; one felt surrounded by water, shut in by rushing streams.

Shut though the door was, the life, movement, and restrained clamour of six hundred men crowded together on a rainy day in the flanks of the ship, reached me all the same through the iron defences;

but the symphony was so much a matter of course that I scarcely heard it, heard it indeed less and less as the Wagnerian theme grew upon me, as the voice rose, and the accompaniment took fire.

Just as the words came: ". . . in a distant land, in a land where twilight triumphs," a cannon-shot came of a sudden, shaking the shuttered room . . . shots at intervals, funeral intervals, not like the salutes which, in a squadron such as ours, one hears every day. . . . And I sent Osman off for information.

He came quickly back to tell me, without any visible change in his cheerful face: "It's the old Queen that's dead!" And a signaller, a moment later, came along with more respect to announce also: "Commander, the English are saluting for Queen Victoria, who has passed away." Oh, well, if that's it, all the ships will be joining in; and the "Redoutable" too; we shall have these long pompous reports all the evening. Let us get on, then, with "Tristan and Iseult," in spite of the din outside. Besides, the news does not interrupt the gymnastics of the sailors who are doing their physical drill above my head, nor their cheery voices as they count, all together: "one, two, three!" without the least attention to this official mourning.

However, the cannonade spreads over every point in the bay, wherein so many warships are assembled, and the echo from the mountain mingles with it, replies like a distant thunder.

Well, so the same thing is happening right round the world. And it is odd, when one dwells upon it, how that death reverberates through the world. . . . Thus, an old woman, satiate with days, comes to pass away down there, right away down there in a foggy island; thousands of other creatures, here and there, yield up their souls at the same time, of whom one takes no smallest notice. But this particular woman, through one of the oldest and most childish of human conventions, personifies a people, the "beasts of prey"; so, a wire thread, encircling the lands and seas, has spread the news, and it becomes a terrible sound, troubling the peace of all; in every place, in every corner where men have grouped the killing machines together, a thunderous noise breaks forth, even as here in this strange and distant bay.

Some have called her good, and pitiful towards suffering, this old, old Queen who has just died; then, how must her decline have been tortured by the ghosts of the Transvaal, if she but kept her heart a little motherly in spite of pride, through the intoxication of worship and of pomp? No one meant less to me than she, and yet her end almost disturbs me, on this rainy winter's day; it is because she was reigning many years before my birth, and as a child I often used to hear her name spoken, in those days when it was popular

with the French; a period dies with her interminable reign, and it seems as if she drags us all a little in her train into the past.

But it was written that, in this country, I should be able to take nothing seriously, not even a royal mourning. . . . And at this very minute I am thinking of the mousmés' impressions, in all those little houses perched on the shores, between the green trees all soaked with rain, of their surprise on hearing these reports which will not stop; the little paper shutters, the little sliding paper partitions opening everywhere, in these tenements as fragile as Nuremburg toys, and those little heads, so sweetly comic, risking the downpour to ask each other, after the prescribed bows: "What is it, Mademoiselle Tulip? . . . What is going on there, Mademoiselle Moon? . . ." So a smile comes in spite of myself, that irresistible smile which the faces of mousmés or of kittens always win from me. . . .

At evening, when the real twilight adds to the shadow of the clouds and the rain, the cannonade by degrees grows less. At long intervals a few last rounds still growl, prolonged by the echo. And then an infinite silence falls again upon the dead, with the night that comes; the page of history is turned; the proud old lady begins her eternal descent into peace, perhaps, of a surety into dust and oblivion. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

Undated.

THE last chrysanthemums, spoiled by the morning frosts, have disappeared from the show-window of Madame L'Ourse, of whom I usually buy, to make room for camellias and small boughs of willow, already decorated with those little yellowish pendants which are among the first flowers of this renaissance. Our indeterminate stay in this country extends from week to week, and we shall end by seeing the dawn of spring.

In its old road, always in twilight, flanking the mountains and the foundations of the temples, Madame L'Ourse's shop is a point at which I halt each day, before I go up to isolate myself, there in the glades of the dead. Besides, we always flirt a little, Madame L'Ourse and I: one can't avoid it.

Her little wooden house is blackish and as crazy as the whole street mouldering in the shade of the mossy terraces that support the pagodas and the city of the dead. In the foreground stand a number of bamboo tubes filled with water in which are arranged flowers, leaves, ferns, herbs. The Japanese, even of the lowest class, as all the world knows, are many centuries ahead of us in

good taste in bouquets, in the art of composing, with the commonest plants, bunches of inimitable grace, worthy of their thousand-shaped vases.

At Madame L'Ourse's—who is of about Madame Prune's age, that is to say in that period of life when women are most friendly—the price of flowers is always debated at length, just for the pleasure of bargaining, and for the little attentions I pay her. Mingled with them are little conceits which I address to her charms, and she has the wit to return the compliments with perfect courtesy. The other ladies of the neighbourhood then come out to join the lists of gallantry: Madame Painted-Hill, who sells bric-à-brac at the corner of the road, or Madame Cloud, who stocks incense-sticks for the dead, or, again, Madame Tuberose, whose husband, at the bottom of a dusty shed, regilds the hundred-year Buddhas and restores ancestors' altars.

When at length my nosegay is chosen and paid for, I leave it in my merchant's care (my excuse for returning) and begin my almost daily climb of the sacred mountain which overhangs us.

Many roads offer themselves to me, all along that old street which, for lack of sun, is colder than any other. Soon I am on my way by the narrow tracks that climb amongst crags all green with velvet-shining mosses, maidenhair ferns with wiry black stems, tiny streamlets scattering drops like glass pearls on the grasses.

Or perhaps I mount more leisurely by the great granite stairways and the temple terraces. But there the smile is cut short, for suddenly an unknown religious dread emerges from the old obscure sanctuaries. There is material for fresh discoveries every day, in these silent, deserted quarters, that stand in tiers above the town, fronted by their many vestibules, their terraces and their gloomy portals. In the flagged courtyards trees, which have seen the centuries pass, stretch their great dying branches, upheld here and there by props of wood or granite; here too spring giant cycas, whose manifold trunks are shaped like candelabra; cycas which can support the cold, permitting, when they must, the snow to lie upon their lovely feathery heads; living triumphantly through the winters in this country, as, too, does many another delicate plant, as do the monkeys in the forests, the great butterflies like those of the tropics, Japan, so it would seem, being endowed with the flora and fauna which do not belong to its climate. Covered galleries with cedar columns surround with a shadow-zone the sanctuaries, almost always shut, where one sees, through the bars of the gates, worn gildings glitter, shining on the hands and the faces of the gods sitting in order upon chairs of state. These temples, like their trees, have seen the years roll past by hundreds, and the moment approaches

when their woodwork, their lacquer, will fall into debris, dust. On the altars, or in the dusty roofs, on the friezes of the old colonnades, behind the spiders' webs, there is mystery everywhere: everywhere something strange and something disquieting, in the least forms of the shapes and symbols. And here one feels clearly that, deep in the soul of this comical people, at the very bottom of it, beyond our fathoming, something other than frivolity and laughter must dwell, beyond any doubt some terrible conception of the destiny of the human race, of life and ceasing to live. . . .

Still climbing, here one reaches the host of little granite Buddhas, lichen-bearded, and the boundaries of the innumerable tombs, interwoven by tiny-leaved plants; here is the network of paths which multiply among the graves, under the bamboos and the wild camellias; here is the labyrinth of the dead. At this height I find again, almost every time, this evening sun, copper-coloured, which, before it plunges, yonder, into the Yellow Sea, dallies so languorously on these slopes exposed to south and west, to bring to them a warmth unnatural, as if shut in, giving me always the same illusion of a conservatory. Here and there, lying on some mortuary terrace, a miniature porter's chair, very small and made of very thin white wood, marks the resting-place of some one, newly dead, brought to this high domain; it was in that

chair that they brought his ashes, and custom has it that one must leave the flimsy vehicle to rot where it rests, with the silver-paper lotus flowers used in the procession. Where do they burn their dead, in what clandestine spot, and why this shame at showing them? For one never meets them: they are already consumed, already shrunken, quiet, weigh no more, but are lightly borne upon the shoulder upon wands in their little white wooden palanquins, of neat and exact workmanship; and when I have questioned Japanese about the place of burning they answer me evasively each time: "In the mountains . . . down there . . . up over there. . . ." So there is nothing here but the dust of humanity, no corpses ever, nor decomposition—nor loathsome shapes; and that removes all horror from these shades.

The evening is of all hours the best, in these high cemeteries where the wintry smell of dead leaves, of mosses and of lichen mingles with the perfume of the incense-sticks burning on the graves. It is, too, the hour at which I can best conceive the immensity of the distances; as I watch from the height of my quiet observatory Japan's sun setting, which at this very moment is rising over my own land, I have, as it were, a physical impression, rather dizzying, of the convexity of the Earth, and of its immense curve. And I feel so

far, so very far away in the growing dusk, that a shiver of homesickness overtakes me at the thought of the Basque countryside, or of the house of my birth. . . .

Most often the sun has set when I pass before Madame L'Ourse's house again, but she waits for me before drawing to the old wooden panels which close her forecourt. With a glance full of second meanings, she never fails to add to the bunch I had bought two or three flowers, for me especially precious, since they are a gift, a surprise which she had kept for me.

And now, a *'rikisha* quickly, a runner with sturdy legs, to recross the city of Nippon that I may not miss the last boat of the evening. First we pass the long street of the merchants where are poised like butterflies in front of the wooden shops, the porcelains, the fans, the enamels, the lacquers, all those affected pretty things that the Japanese make by thousands and the laughing mousmés sell. There string out, with the same intent as mine, many other hurrying *'rikishas* which are carrying back to the sea officers of our squadron or of the foreign battleships, each with a number of little ingeniously wrapped parcels, little boxes delicately enwrapped; the exasperating trinkets from which no one can escape here.

Along the new quays, in the American style, where the panting runners put us down, we meet

each other again: we sort ourselves by nations, under a frozen little wind which rarely fails to rise in the evening and to scatter spray over our return aboard.

So often have we been accused of looting, in certain journals, all of us, officers and men of the China expedition, that we have adopted the word "loot" for all things Chinese or Japanese, however honestly come by it may be, paid with ringing coin. Now it is a custom on my ship that after supper, as soon as we come to cigarettes, each man shall exhibit his day's "loot": so each evening the wardroom table is loaded with astonishing things, introduced by their respective proprietors. Ah, God! how good it is, on winter nights, in a quiet roadstead, to be safe aboard, amongst good friends, returned to that little floating France which bears one so faithfully, yet which neighbours with, one after another, the most ridiculous countries in the world!

CHAPTER XIX

Monday, January 21st.

MADAME PRUNE had been, these many days, nursing the dream of coming to see me on board ship, as in old days she came on the "Triomphante," almost fifteen years ago, alas! in the days when, in all their first freshness, her feelings for me were expanding.

I had agreed with gallantry, but, as a man of good taste who would be the last to give gossip an opening, called upon Madame Renoncule, my mother-in-law, to beg her to chaperon my visitor. And with the idea of avoiding any possible idea of the clandestine about this interview, I had invited two of my sisters-in-law and four young geishas of my acquaintance, suggesting that they should bring guitars with them.

It had then been necessary to warn the Japanese police, for the following reasons. For years Japan held the monopoly for exporting to all seaport towns of the Far East young persons of gay character, specially destined to make mariners forget the hardships of the sea; but to-day the Mikado's Government wishes to suppress this usage, which it regards as derogatory to the national fame, and it becomes very circumspect

whenever there is any question of allowing ladies to visit ships alone.

The prospect of being presented to Madame Prune had filled my friends with mild excitement. They spent a certain amount of money, ordered flowers for the table, and very ingenious sweetmeats. And at the hour appointed their other halves drifted discreetly on to all the sampans in the roadstead, to spy upon the arrival of our guests.

Half an hour later no one had arrived. At the end of an hour, still no one. And I sent off for information to the quay.

Some policemen—poor judges of character, unfortunately—had opposed the ladies' embarkation, in spite of the permission given to us the previous evening, thinking it the departure of a reinforcement of lodgers for certain houses in Shanghai or Singapore.

Madame Renoncule, it appeared, always so much mistress of herself, had received this blow with her head held high, and had contented herself with reconducting my sisters-in-law with dignity to their abode.

But, at the idea of being taken for one of these migratory courtesans, who are not afraid to abandon the altar of their ancestors to go sell their laughter in a foreign land, Madame Prune fainted.

CHAPTER XX

Wednesday, January 23rd.

I WAS quietly strolling with one of my comrades of the "Redoutable" in Motokagomachi, along the great shopping street, looking at the extraordinary knick-knacks in the shop fronts, and the smiles of the dainty little personages whose eyes are so bridled. But, some way ahead of us, a crowd very quickly began to form, whence came shrill, rough, jarring shouts, like those of Chinese at war. And in the middle of this excited group, two French officers, against whom the general fury seemed to have turned! . . . So we ran up too, naturally.

They were two sub-lieutenants, come to Nagasaki yesterday on a cruiser. The people round them had their fists in the air, their short yellow arms projecting to the shoulder from the sleeves of their robes. Yet we knew these people well: they were Japanese vase merchants of the neighbourhood, whom we were in the habit of visiting, folk full of laughter and more prodigal of bows than any others, people ordinarily obsequious and wheedling—but so transformed by anger to-day! Their little eyes became terrifying, their mouths contracted into a wild beast snarl! Absolutely

new creatures to us, like war masks grimacing death, which the Japanese might very well have taken to some extent as models.

These Frenchmen had kicked off a dog belonging to one of the shopkeepers, when it was going to bite—that was absolutely all: and so, immediate need for national revenge upon the two strangers . . .

The somewhat contemptuous calm of the attacked men, and our arrival too, who were known to be reasonably good customers, prevented the shindy from going as far as the first blow; but, apart from that, we were blindly hustled by the mob, and not less blindly dragged off to the station by a squad of police, just as happened last week to the officers of another European fleet.

This little people, arrogant and full of mystery, hides, under a gracious exterior, a savage hatred of men of the white races.

Could one so much as imagine that one of their grounds for jealousy of the Europeans is that they themselves cannot, because of their flat faces, wear pince-nez! So their dandies are the more determined to wear them, even if they have no need of them, supposing they can discover in the middle of their faces a suspicion of anything sufficient to perch them upon.

CHAPTER XXI

Friday, January 25th.

THE temple of "The Fox" has become, these last few days, one of my usual pilgrimage places.

A road of green shade, in a fold of the mountain, brings you to it by the climb of a sort of staircase at the edge of a little dancing frosty cascade. Fifteen years ago I was able to live for a whole summer at Nagasaki without knowing of it, and I should never have discovered it this time but for the religious emblems echelonned at different heights among the branches, all along the almost clandestine path. These emblems are white foxes, sitting upon pedestals—fantastic foxes, naturally, foxes deformed by the Japanese imagination, and translated into the shapes of thin brutes with bats' ears, showing their teeth in one of those grins at which we should not look, such as the heads of dead men wear; or else they are frail porches of joiners' work, painted red and covered with black inscriptions, sometimes spaced at random, sometimes so close together that they form a sort of reddish vault, under the other vault of the green leaves. A few little houses, too, are staged along the track, humble kiosks of incense-sticks for the temple, sweets for the children who climb on

pilgrimage, or little plaster foxes, no bigger than your finger, but modelled upon those along the path and showing the horrible convulsive grin of their type. Everywhere are strewn fallen branches, moss, ferns; beautiful tangerine trees, laden with golden fruits which attain tardy ripeness in the winter sun. Smooth rocks, rounded by time and marbled by the imperceptible lichen, deep in shade, in soft, rare colours; ashy greens, and greys turning into rose. And here and there, perched upon some old stone, a miniature temple, the size of a Punch and Judy show, itself of great age, very worn, but having its enigmatic emblems, its white foxes and bunches of rice, brought thither as offerings. The cascade, most often hidden in deep fissures, accompanies you with its musical murmur, as you mount under the branches, by the difficult track or up the worn steps.

At last the temple itself appears, before a curtain of great trees. A little temple, indeed, but so strange! It is open like a barn and very simple, like all the sanctuaries of this god, and swept of any idol in human shape. It is of wood, ancient no doubt, but of indefinable age, so well has it been preserved, so scrupulously washed its panels and its columns. In the midst there hangs from the roof like a lustre an enormous bell, itself also of wood, upon which the faithful strike on arriving, and it is there that the god, away idling perhaps

among the clouds, may be warned that they are come, and demand an audience. All about, men have arranged the natural surroundings, already in themselves almost too lovely, to make something more delightful still, above all more complex, adding grottos to the rocks, creating little rivulets to throw bridges across them. The most delicate plants, the mosses, the whole exquisite wild growth of this spot, bring their own intimate charm to these arrangements, which with us would be nothing but pretentions. Moreover, the temple, and the symbolic objects which, bewildering in their bizarre simplicity, one sees in the background upon the altar, impregnate this lovely garden with, as it were, some transcendental, incommunicable spirit of Japan. And above it all the mountain is set with its thicket-belts of greenery.

Just opposite the sanctuary an old and dainty tea-house half hides itself in the trees; one attains to it by a granite arch, lichen-clad, which strides across a torrent, and near to it, in a vast cage, two white geese, red-crested, the large variety, stand motionless: sacred pensionaries of the temple, of course, but most melancholy prisoners.

The proprietress of this somewhat modest and little-frequented tea-house calls herself Madame Stork. Although this dame doubtless reckons a dozen springs fewer than Madame Prune, she has beyond all question attained maturity, but has

not yet abdicated, and day by day I come to persuade myself that time has left her, too, some charms.

As soon as she catches sight of me, at the mouth of the green path, Madame Stork prostrates herself and assumes an ecstatic expression which seems to say: "Can I believe my eyes? What an unhoped-for favour has Heaven sent to me?" I make it my duty to salute very courteously in turn, before taking my seat on the white matting in front of the little veranda, bordered with plants which are grown wan in the shadow of so many trees, where a few pale winter roses languidly flower.

Madame Stork, after renewed bows, introduces me next to the house cat, whom I honour with my friendship, a certain Mademoiselle Sato, a young person of six months, with grey fur, who has still kept to the daft tricks of her infancy. Then comes my cup of tea, with the exactly right amount of sugar, as ever. And then the sweetmeats that I love and two slender little slips of wood wherewith to pick them up. But for a few pilgrims who come here for refreshment, after genuflexions and religious exercises prolonged unduly in the temple, I am almost always the only client, which favours long *tête-à-tetês* between us. In the path near by there is not a soul, no one passes, save from time to time a few water-

sellers, athletic, and half naked, who go climbing down, carrying on their shoulders, at the end of a stick, wooden vessels filled at the clear springs in the mountains. No other sound is heard than that of the little pearly cascades tumbling down under the grasses; or else, in the branches, the quiet twittering of the birds, saddened because the January sunshine is still colourless.

The place is peaceful, strange, and undiscovered. One breathes the scent of the dead leaves and of the damp earth. Despite the sprightly presence of the lady, one becomes saturated, in the silence, with that particular spirit of Japan which exhales from the temple of the simple lines, a spirit high and serene. One is conscious of the dæmons, essences very little known, prowling in the forest, sleeping under the huge, round-topped stones. And the fall of evening gives you, in this corner of Japan, a delicious little terror, for whose undiscoverable reason you may seek in vain.

Often, when I leave the tea-house, I continue to follow the climbing track, until the point at which it ends in the undergrowth. On the mossy rocks emerging from the soil are two or three more old doll's temples, which it is disquieting to come upon for all that they are as small as children's toys; but the ferns and the rocks have it more and more their own way, in the deepening green night, and soon all is lost in the heart of the

woods, where the buds of wild camellias, later than those in the garden below, are scarcely beginning to redden. . . .

To be quite frank with myself, I am bound to admit that I am beginning a little flirtation with Madame Stork. . . .

to linger on, or to die, in some hospital along the Chinese coast. . . . Such is the merciless order which reaches us. Farewell to our return!

To think over this change in my future and to try to submit myself to it, I should have liked to have gone up yonder, on the exquisite mountain of cemeteries, my favourite place for meditation, and to have sat down before the setting sun. But a little bitter winter rain is falling, which smells of snow. Failing a more congenial occupation, I shall go to the tea-house where my usual toys, my two little music-dolls, between thin paper walls shall distract me with a guitar and some masks.

Never had the white empty *salon*, with its thin walls, seemed to me so melancholy as when an hour later I found myself there, cross-legged upon a black velvet cushion. Mademoiselle Matsuko, the geisha, who no more takes the trouble to wear her best dresses in my honour, soon arrives, modestly robed in pearl-grey crepe. She settles down upon the floor, prettily sulking, and then begins with an air of resignation to scrape the strings of her "chamecen" with her ivory comb. In the silence, in the grey light, already dusk, the little music thrills and weeps, so sad as to bring tears, so eerie as to bring shivers—as we wait for the other to appear, she who is half-fairy, half-cat, Mademoiselle April-Shower, with her sweeping train and her bows.

I was wrong to come here. It is sadder than my room on the "Redoutable"! The sound of this guitar is as the song of a winter grasshopper, shut up in a paper cage, a grasshopper from a far-off land, whose thin voice calls up an unknown world; I hear it without listening, but it is enough to keep alive in me this notion of things utterly exotic, which sharpens my homesickness.

So—two years in the China Seas! . . . But the days, alas! are no more, when I used to agonise, as the too long drawn out voyages ran on, lest I should not find again the dear, the worshipped face of her to whom since childhood one had brought everything, of her whose place none in all the world can fill. . . . That misgiving has to-day changed into certainty, over which a little resignation even has begun to spread. From that point of view, then, the length of my absence matters little, since I shall find her again no more, on any of my home-comings, for ever. . . . However, there are strong attachments binding me still to the hearthstone—and, besides, my years are drawing too far in, that I should waste them in exile. . . .

The geisha, who is visibly wearied, rises; she puts her long guitar down and begins gracefully and indolently to walk up and down, so lightly that the floor does not seem even to notice her—this thin floor which was creaking but now under the

servants' steps, when the little meal was served for us. And, at the moment that her monotonous music stopped, I was dreaming of a certain old garden which is situated right underneath us, at the other side of the earth, and which, in my childhood, stood to me for the world. At the very moment at which this dream-cricket stopped singing, it was that garden which I was seeing again, after having turned over so many things in my memory, the garden with its vine-arbours, its old trees, and, above all, a pomegranate planted by an ancestor, which, in each June for a hundred years, sows a rain of red petals over the sand of an alley. It will not now be next spring that I see that scatter of red flowers again, nor even the spring after; perhaps it will be never again. . . .

The geisha with a restless hand opens one of the wood and paper sliding shutters through which the pale light reaches us: "Look," says she, "the snow!" And quickly she shuts the flimsy panel again, which has let an icy breath enter the room which was already so cold. Snow; I had time to see it in that second in which the panel was open; white flakes which slowly twirl, in a dead sky, above a Japanese roof of little round tiles, blackish grey.

Oh, it is impossible to stay here longer!

Happily, here comes the necessary diversion:

children's steps on the staircase, rustlings of silk; my little cat has come!

She appears, the little Miss April-Shower, astonishing as ever in her finery, frail and almost without substance, just a bundle in her stuffs of many folds. She comes as a dame of olden days, and carries an immense court fan. She salutes, takes a few steps, salutes again, again advances, and this time she prostrates herself for a solemn reverence in the antique mode, an imperceptible expression of mischief crinkles the corners of her upward slanting eyes, her mouth opens to let a cat's "mi-aou" escape—so well imitated, so unexpected, that I burst with laughter. . . .

"Oh!" Mademoiselle Matsuko cries sharply, "she has been practising that these three days to amuse your lordship. She has been rehearsing —with that great tom-cat, her Monsieur Swong." . . .

Never mind, let it pass, little fairy. It is all as it should be; thou hast succeeded in amusing him who pays thee for it, and he thanks thee.

Now, behind thee there, turn round, turn on the electric light, it will be less gloomy. And then begin one of thy dances or thy acted scenes—for instance, the one of the fisherman asleep for a hundred years under the sea; the one, thou knowest, that needs in its last tableau a mask of a wan old man with a beard like white sea-weed.

This evening, on board ship, whilst the snow is falling heavily from the night sky, I receive visits from some of my friends among the seamen, in search of more definite information about the appalling news, who cherish a vague hope that I will give it the lie perhaps, and reassure them a little.

The last to come is an all-but giant from Brittany, with fine, soft, sad eyes, deeply set under a large, heavily-moulded brow. He was to have been married in a month, when the ship, which had seemed safe for a long stay in French waters, received the unexpected order for the voyage to China. When our return was notified he had used his savings to buy a piece of white crepe for the wedding dress, and various Japanese trinkets to decorate the rooms. But now in the midst of his child-like dismay, one of the things that disturb him most is the fear that it might all be spoiled in two years, in the damp forecastle, and he timidly asks me if I cannot store the box, if it is not troubling me too much, in a corner of my cabin.

How am I to refuse him this consolation? Certainly, even though I am already almost too encumbered to know what to do with things, I will extend my hospitality to the pretty piece of white crepe, and the modest wedding presents.

CHAPTER XXIII

February 1*st.*

YIELDING to Madame Prune's tears, I went back yesterday to the Japanese police, to represent to these gentlemen that there was no question of a migration, but of a simple courtesy-call, and that at the end of an hour or two we would return all the ladies intact to their hearths. Accordingly, apologies were made for the insulting mistake, and to-day we have had the pleasure of receiving our visitors under a spring sky.

Two sampans, which appeared transformed into Cytherean barques, all seduction and grace, brought them to us for tea on the stroke of three.

Madame Renoncule, as a prudent mother, preferred this time, however, not to bring her daughters; but we had Madame Prune surrounded by a bevy of young geishas. A gentle gaiety, in the best taste, reigned throughout the ladies' visit. They were most festively arrayed, and Madame Prune's chignon in particular, amplified by clever hairdressing to her heart's content, will remain in all our memories. To make the gathering the more piquant, my friends had procured some of those Japanese sweetmeats, composed with such spirit—allegorically, one might almost say—which

represent, sometimes common objects, sometimes the oddest fragments of the human anatomy; they had, of course, chosen them specially for the principal guest, and moreover, with as much finesse as tact and discretion. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

February 2nd.

So we are to stay here until spring; that is, about two months more, for it will doubtless need the April sun to melt the ice over there, which closes the sinister entry of Peiho to us.

And the spring-time of this year shows no signs of coming, even in the enclosed bay, protected though it is against the north winds, where our fleet shelters.

On the contrary, we are more than ever in the full swing of the storms and the snow. Then this Japan, so amusing in sunshine, becomes a pitiable thing when it is muddy, streaming with water, dishevelled. Besides, they are dying like flies in Nagasaki at this very moment; between the squalls, as soon as the winter sun is showing, the graceful *cortèges* of dead little lords and ladies hurry away to the necropolis on the mountain; sometimes one meets two or three together, run into each other at a cross-roads. They exchange elaborate courtesies, strive each to let the other pass, block the traffic, and hold up mud-spattered *jinrikishas* by the dozen. At their head a few bonzes march, in antique bonnet, sombre robes, and surplices of old golden brocade. Then comes

the hero of the procession, reduced to his simplest common term, carried shoulder high in the invariable little coffer of fine white carpentry. Shoulder high, too, come several wooden vases, out of which escape, to dominate the crowd, fantastic artificial plants; gigantesque lotus with silver leaves, Japanese maples all scarlet, and red cherries or peach in full flower; then a train of ladies or of mousmés in mourning, in white from head to foot. And last touch of high comedy in the convoy, the men in silk robes and bowler hats; a few morning coats; many spectacles, and above all, blue spectacles, unstable ever upon faces far too flat for them. When a shower comes on, umbrellas open, our own hideous umbrellas, and here and there a few others, Japanese, of oiled paper, with little paintings of flowers and storks in flight. These strike that gayer note which Madame Prune still loves to accentuate in her own affairs.

And they all make their way to the pagodas and the mountain; by the wet and slippery paths they climb, through the charming old tombs which already jostle each other in their crowded ranks.

It is of consumption for the most part that these poor little mannikins die; even the peasants, the hardy Japanese peasants, short, well set-up, limbed like athletes, die of that complaint, since Americanism has forced them to wear clothes instead of living naked like their ancestors.

CHAPTER XXV

February 3rd.

STILL the snow, and a heavy leaden sky. This evening, on the hill of the European concession where I seldom go, I walked on a road peppered with snow, which was admirably kept, quite straight, and bordered by consulates; one might have believed oneself in Europe, at fall of a winter's night, but for a few quaintly muffled mousmés whom one met from time to time, who brought back with them the notion of a far-away land.

I was going to the Russian hospital to visit an officer of a Grodno regiment, wounded near Mukden. By his bedside, a young man in patient's costume was watching, with whom I began talking without, at first, an introduction; another officer evidently, of smart appearance, with a thin, very French face, speaking our language with an imperceptible Spanish accent. It was Don Jaime de Bourbon, son of Don Carlos, and Carlist pretender to the throne of Spain. Taken on in the Russian Army, he had demanded to go to the Far East, to see something of war, in real French spirit, and now he was here, convalescing from a serious attack of typhus caught in Manchuria.

CHAPTER XXVI

February 5th.

In the shops of the bric-à-brac sellers, which multiply daily in Nagasaki, the strangest objects neighbour each other, hatched sometimes with a thousand years between them, but brought together there on the clean little shelves, carefully dusted and scarcely tarnished by the ashes of the centuries.

A quantity of debris from the Imperial Palace of Peking, taken and sold again by the soldiers, has also come on offer in these shops; bronzes, jades, and porcelain. And the merchants, if only by the price they demand, if only by the respectful tone in which they say; "That comes from China"—render involuntary homage to the art of that country—that pronounced primordial type of art, from which Japanese art derives, as a particularly graceful branch, frail, however, and thinner in tone, might have sprung from an exuberant tree. For the profusion and magnificence of their Chinese masters, these little islanders opposite have substituted tasteful simplicity, and meticulous precision; for frank gaiety of colours, for the splash of greens linked to rose, they employ low-toned, degraded, almost fugitive

shades. And finally, for the palaces and temples, instead of that perpetual flare of red-gold, which has become an obsession from one end of China to the other, they have adopted black lacquer polished like glass, colourless woodwork as delicately adjusted as the parts of a clock, and panels of impeccable white paper.

Amongst so many astonishing shops, those which make one most reflective are, so I think, in a street which foreigners seldom see. In these dusty barns are heaped together old armour, old cuirasses, old steel masks, the whole terror-inspiring panoply of ancient battles, and the pennons of the Samurai, their rallying signs, their standards. On the phantoms of mannikins, standing no longer erect in them, the scaly armour poses, halves of bearded faces, masks grinning death. A tangled heap of wildly wicked things lies about, bears no resemblance to anything which we know, might, indeed, have fallen from some planet of a different system. This half-fantastic Japan, suddenly collapsed after enduring for thousands of years, lies there in utter confusion, and still disseminates a vague terror. Thus the fathers, or at the very most, the grandfathers, of the little soldiers of to-day so quaintly correct in their Western uniforms, still used to disguise themselves as nightmare monsters, scarcely fifty years ago when they got them ready to go to war; they wore these horns, these crests, these

antennæ; they looked like scarabæus, hippocamp, or chimera; through the holes of the grinning masks shone their oblique eyes, came their cries of anger or of agony. . . . And in the valleys and the plains of this green and gentle country those unique scenes took place; the meetings and the hand-to-hand fighting of rival armies, clad in this demoniac art, whilst the long, keen swords held two-handed at the end of short and muscular arms, swept like windmills in the air, everywhere made their bloody gashes, mowed down together the horned helmets and masked faces.

However radical may be the change in costumes and arms which has come about in our day, in imitation of Europe, a people which, but yesterday, dreamed and fashioned such horrors, must hold a horrible, cruel, and merciless conception of war.

CHAPTER XXVII

February 7th.

AFTER two months of Japan, Nagasaki has become as familiar to me again as though I had never ceased to live there. Between this stay and the first, ties are knotting closer and closer, so that sometimes the fifteen years between them are themselves thrown into the background. My companions in exile, too, grow more Japanese day by day, without noticing it themselves. We are becoming accustomed to the embrace of these mountains, and their fanged crests; we do not think their peaks so singular or so "Japanese." We are growing accustomed to the woods hung about us, to the green carpets spread on all the slopes, from sky to sea, to this almost too pretty place which the rosy mists of February mornings often distort and complicate into the most delightful unrealities. We go our ways through this town as though we were at home, through the crowd of little wood and paper houses, queer as children's toys. We collect from this side and from that, as we go through the streets, the smiles and bows of numbers of mousmés who know us; we have friends both men and women, throughout this little world, which on its surface is so hospitable and

good-natured—in its soul so close, exclusive, vain and hostile.

And as yet there is no sign of spring, which will force us to leave this country to go to our labours on the shores of great funereal China.

Of a truth I made a mistake, fifteen years ago, in not rather marrying Madame Renoncule, my mother-in-law. Each day adds to my regret at having so misunderstood her. She, too, if I am not wrong, laments it secretly, and to-day, with the irrevocable separating us, never fails to treat me as her son-in-law, to maintain at least this link between us, since we can have no better.

During the cold winter rains, I spend homesick hours with her listening to the wailing of her long guitar, in the silence of her house, in the eternal twilight behind her paper shutters, before her grottos, green with shadow, her dwarf trees that cannot have grown for a century, her old doll's garden, where a grey day lingers, between the walls. . . . Oh, that garden, whose very appearance in other days, even in August, was enough to distress me, who can tell of its melancholy under the wan light of February? . . . From the end of the room where you sit in even deeper shadow, to listen to the thin, mysterious music escaping from the shrill strings, you can see, beyond the veranda, a sort of savage spot which at first glance unsettles you by seeming something out of

focus, unnatural. Are those real old trees, on the rocks, a real rustic distance seen through a spy-glass which falsifies perspective? Yet one would certainly say that it was all tiny and close at hand. Might it not rather be a romantic setting, cut up and painted for a maisonette stage, on which a reflector throws that greenish light? Not a corner of real sky shows above the shut-in scene; but the wall at its foot, all subdued greys, ends, as the day declines, by having no more the air of a wall; it plays the part of heavy clouds, clouds like winding sheets, heaped upon a world etiolate through age, which might have lost the sun.

Not all the gardens of Nagasaki are so distressing as this one; but in all are these patient reductions from nature's scale, dwarf trees, long tortured, and dwarf mountains with temples a foot high which look a hundred years old. How can one reconcile in the Japanese soul that atavistic predilection for all that is minute, arch, pretentiously dainty, how reconcile that with this transcendent taste for the horrible, this diabolic conception of battle which has bred the masks and horns of the fighters, all the terrifying shapes of gods and warriors? And how make their excess of politeness, their bows and smiles, march in step with their national arrogance and their proud hatred of the foreigner? . . .

My mother-in-law's afternoon teas are much sought after, and very select. Whilst the guitar

tinkles so sadly, or groans, soul-shattering, ceremonious neighbours arrive on tiptoe, mousmés as fragile as porcelain statuettes; noiselessly they settle down beside my young sisters, to listen to the music or to accept a sweetmeat, which they pick up with the ends of tiny sticks. Their oblique almond eyes, so bridled that one would like to split them open with a penknife at each corner, are like a cat's, when she half-closes the pupils in indolent coaxing. The beautiful, elaborate, shining chignons make the heads too large for the thin necks, the delicate shoulders. . . . And it is this strange little world which meditates a ferocious attack upon enormous Russia; the husbands and brothers of these Saxe toys wish to face the armies of the Tzar! . . . One cannot overcome one's astonishment at such confidence and audacity, above all when in the streets one sees the Japanese soldiers and sailors, very neat and very small, beardless little yellow babies, beside the heavy, four-square blond lads of the Russian crews.

In the gloaming, before the cups of fine blue china and the miniature plates, the little people stay sitting on the floor, motionless for the sake of the guitar, which casts a spell over them, and hypnotised by the artificial countryside, fast fading, on which a little snow often falls—real snow, whose flakes seem too big for the trees on which they rest. Madame Renoncule, a famous geisha

of other days, recovers in these grey hours her power and her charm. As used to happen to Madame Chrysanthème, her daughter, a change comes over her face, which grows nobler; her eyes are no longer childish or bridled; they reflect fathomless dreams of the yellow race, whilst one guesses at their savage energy, and one's first ideas of this laughter-loving folk are all upset.

I have been undergoing the beginnings of initiation into this far-away music, which at first seemed to me nothing but a debauch of incoherent and discordant sounds; evening by evening it penetrates more deeply; almost as much as our own it makes me shiver, a less understandable shiver, it is true; when that woman with the altered eyes feverishly plays upon the strings with her ivory spatula, I could almost swear that the shadows of religious myths, insecurely shut up in the temples near by, come prowling round, behind those old paper shutters which now no longer make safe walls for us; through the little old house, more and more wrapped in dusk and winter, I feel terrors of an unknown order pass. . . . There are, too, moments when the melody descends to notes of deepest bass, turns suddenly harsh, savage, and so primitive that we, too, must have some part in it, as in so many other things Japanese, through the earliest of man's ancestors, settled

in these islands in the beginning of time. When at last the shadows have finally descended, when there is no more left than the ghost of a wan light on the tops of the dwarf trees to sketch for us that false landscape, the old geisha, who will not allow us to turn on the light, grows weary, torpid. Her guitar, to which the seated ladies still listen in the darkness, gives out no more than little deep sounds, cut short, intermittent notes which come by two's and three's, spaced groups. The dying guitar no more calls up the invisible myths, thrills us no more, nor terrifies; quite simply it distils sadness, nameless sorrow, that falls upon us like the slow rain from a dead heaven; to me it speaks of exile, of the two years of China that lie before me, the flight of youth and of the days; above all, it makes me feel, even to the point of anguish, the isolation of my French spirit in the midst of the legions of the Japanese, alien, hostile spirits which crowd in upon me in this distant quarter, at the feet of the pagodas and the tombs, now that night comes.

And now it is that I long to go. Now I feel an almost childish haste to take my way by those muddy gutters, where the many queer lanterns, tormented by the snow and wind, glitter in the puddles; to reach the deserted quays as quickly as I can; to throw myself into a boat, which yet will be shaken, in the blackness, by a thousand

little wicked waves—to reach at last that kind of sheltering islet, that ship which is a corner of France, where I shall see once more the honest faces of our own land with their straight, wide-open eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

February 10th.

AMONGST other charms against which time's hand has proved so powerless, Madame Prune incontestably possesses that of a nape o' the neck, a droop of the shoulders, and a lovely falling line of back. She is truly of those who gain by being seen from behind, especially since the curves of her hair-dressing have taken on an amplitude, for my benefit perhaps, greater than their wont.

This evening I was led, doubtless by a presentiment of good fortune awaiting me, into one of the four or five big theatres of the town; it was a theatre of the lighter order, and the hall was already full, owing to the appearance of a fashionable comedy actor, an incomparable specialist in the part of husbands in misfortune. However, room was ungraciously made for me, in spite of the ever-increasing arrogance which the Japanese affect towards foreigners, and a seat was given to me in the floor of the hall, in the compact rows of the crowd which was sitting on the floor.

There is never any interior decoration to these theatres: all is plain woodwork and the galleries and roof are supported by practically unshaped

beams—the simplicity of a stable. But from my first glance the audience seemed fairly select; all around one saw only the most carefully arranged chignons, shining as though they had been varnished. Very few evening clothes: almost all the spectators of both sexes were dressed in robes of those dark blues and greys which are here the most favoured. (Contrary to the general belief at home, nothing is more severe in colour than a Japanese crowd in the evening, except under special circumstances, such as on holiday or pilgrimage.) Each family party had beside it a little box of smoker's materials, with hot embers in a light heating dish, and a gracefully shaped bowl into which the ashes of all the tiny pipes are shaken. There were also numbers of babies there, sleeping nurselings which the young mothers held on their knees, and they were so small, so dainty, offspring of dainty creatures, and so pretty, so quaint, that one might have taken them for those Japanese dolls which are to-day scattered up and down our Western bazaars.

Two ladies squatting in front of me, who shared the same smoker's set, suddenly captivated my attention. With my first glance at them, I had judged them of the better class; with much dignity in their bearing, and robes of sea-blue silk, which is the correct colour *par excellence*. Furthermore, there was a gracefulness about the

shoulders and neck of one of them which I seemed to have seen before.

The comedy began to unfold amid laughter as yet restrained and discreet: an ingenious imbroglio in Regnard's manner; a succession of unparalleled misfortunes coming upon a poor husband who spent his time, candle in hand, looking in every corner of his house for Don Juans who could never be discovered. (It is astonishing to note that in no country in the world does this class of misfortune evoke the sympathy it deserves.) Whilst the other actors moved and walked like the rest of the world, this husband of an erring spouse, bearing his eternal lighted candle, flitted perpetually with little steps to the gay cadence of an unchanging air which the orchestra sounded the moment that he entered upon the scene.

The two ladies, all this time, never turned round. But of a sudden she whose neck was so captivating began to knock out her little pipe against the edge of her box, with a quick, nervous hand: rap, rap, rap, rap! And this noise, which a careless ear would have confounded with the innumerable rap rap, rap, raps, of other smokers in the hall, was unique for me, had in it something heard a thousand times before, of old, during the nights of summer and the languid days. This neighbour in front of me disturbed me more and more. . . . Then to lighten my heart of it I ventured to tickle her

spine gently with the tip of a fan, one of those harmless familiarities which in Japan, and with a well-bred lady, would never be taken amiss. . . .

I was not wrong: it was, indeed, Madame Prune.

Her companion was Madame Renoncule, my mother-in-law. And yielding to their friendly persuasion I advanced a row and sat down between them.

The comedy went on amid growing hilarity, which always kept within the limits of good taste: The principal comedian had some facial tricks which were really great art, whenever he got upon the scent of a new wrong to his home. I often looked back behind me, over the whole sombrely clothed crowd. Under the shining coils of their ebony hair, the round and pallid faces of the mousmés which normally have their eyes but half open seemed to have lost them altogether this evening, convulsed as they were by laughter; and the innumerable babies, smaller and prettier than nature meant babies to be, continued to slumber, doll-like, in their mothers' arms.

My mother-in-law, who is at heart a straightforward creature, whose only object in life has been to give the greatest possible number of citizens and citizenesses to the nation, was frankly amused, without, however, letting her amusement show more than is conventional. Madame Prune, on the other hand, who in her first youth—one

may admit it without offending—had been quite as advanced as the ladies on the stage, who had trifled somewhat with the serious question of the Empire's population, Madame Prune seemed melancholy and hipped. Madame Renoncule and I hardly realised until too late that the performance was badly chosen so far as she was concerned; she might find many uncomfortable allusions in it; and further, no doubt she, widowed so recently, was suffering in her cult of the memory of the lamented M. Sucre, at seeing the chief actor in the comedy exciting such incomprehensible mirth in the public.

The unhappy husband, in the end, tired of never finding the guilty party on the stage, bursts into the audience still with his candlestick in his hand, still tripping to the same little air from the orchestra, and begins, with a look of savage suspicion, to peer round amongst the male spectators in the floor of the hall. Then delirious hand-clapping breaks out. And all the little dolls, which it upsets, begin to cry, rolling their jet-black eyes.

Madame Prune alone remained stiff, and spared not her criticisms upon the piece: "it was not taken from life—did not live; besides, would M. Sucre"—who in her eyes remains the ideal of the type—"would M. Sucre ever have had the idea, like that, of going hunting round everywhere with a lantern? . . ."

CHAPTER XXIX

February 12th.

Snow, and still more snow, which does not last long on the ground it is true, but is sufficient to whiten, for a few hours of each day, trees, houses and pagodas.

This evening, as night was falling in the European concession, three hundred feet up, I was walking along a fine white road powdered with rime, like all surrounding objects. I could see on different sides the distances of the mountains and of the sea, loaded with warships, spreading away from my feet. Not a breath of wind stirred: the air was scarcely cold, so still it was. A low and leaden sky; leaden, too, the mountains; and all things terrestrial, against the too-brilliant contrast of the snow, clotted together in leaden inky tones. Behind me the town, in process of an astonishing transformation, was lighting up its ancient lanterns alongside its electric lamps. In the roadstead, like a wide sheet of colourless glass, the ships, dotted about like black insects, began to light up for the night; they were motionless, like the air and all else, but it seemed to be an immobility full of expectancy; they seemed to be gathered for events and battles close at hand; so many

battleships forgathered in the Far East, so many cruisers and torpedo-boats belonging to every nation in Europe, gave me this evening, in the midst of this immense reflective calm, a presentiment that the history of the world was approaching some grave decisive turning point. . . .

The solitary road led me to the Russian hospital, where I was to pick up Don Jaime de Bourbon, and we were to return together to the city of cedar-wood and rice paper, for a little private Japanese dinner, to the music of geishas and the dancing of maïkos, to which his Highness had been good enough to invite me.

After I had told the Prince, at our second meeting, how little of a Carlist I am, I felt myself free to let him know of the real sympathy to which he has a right just now from all of us. He is, when all is said, a Frenchman; the other day on board ship, when he came so simply to sit at table with us, sailors on a voyage, none of us had the impression that he was a stranger. More, at this moment he is, as I am, astray in the Yellow land, has, to please himself, risked his life under fire, has braved, too, the Chinese typhus of which he nearly died.

An hour later, in a private room at the "Maison du Phénix" (much recommended for special suppers for good company) we had settled down on the ground, Don Jaime, two other guests and

I, our shoes off, cross-legged on the eternal black velvet cushions, and at once the eternal tiny servants, bent double in endless salutation, had arrived to set before us on lacquer tripods adorable bowls, light as egg-shells and holding some two or three tea-spoonfuls of a lichen and seaweed soup. This private room, like those in all houses of the better class, was a vast white empty place with immaculate mats, and partitions all of paper which you could shift about at will; not a chair, nor scrap of furniture—nothing; only, in a niche as white as all the rest of the room, an odd and slender bouquet, some three feet high, escaping from a precious vase of antique bronze, two or three long branches only of some rare winter blossom, arranged with a deftness and grace that can be found nowhere outside Japan.

We were freezing when the meal began; each of us tried to sit upon his own toes, or to rub them with his hands, to ward off numbness. Little by little, however, the tiny bronze heating-dishes, ornamented with chimeras, which the mousmés had brought us full of scented embers, began to spread a little warmth, and stupefied us at the same time, in the hermetic enclosure of the paper walls. In disjointed phrases we gossiped of a hundred different things as we sat on our funereal cushions: of the Pays-Basque, of Madrid, of the Spanish Court, even of French history, and some-

how came upon the story of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. "Why, it's a fact," the Prince suddenly laughed and said to me, "my family must have tormented yours pretty well in those days!" More than a little, as a matter of fact. But, oh! the eternal topsy-turvy of human destinies. The grandchild of Louis XIV and the grandchild of obscure Huguenots whom the Sun-King had contemptuously persecuted are seated side by side for a dainty little dinner, in Japan, in a tea-house. . . .

We were waiting for the geishas, engaged to appear with the dessert. We were having *sake*, a rice liquor, which was served boiling in very delicate porcelain vases with long necks. His Highness had told me of a wonderful little dancer he had brought, whose name he could not remember, since his convalescence was but a few days old and he new to Japan. "She is compact of spirit," he said to me; "each separate gesture is a thought." And it seemed to me that this definition much resembled Mademoiselle April-Shower.

At length we heard their silken frou-frou, their childish laughter on the stairs.

They made their entrance and fell to their knees, nose flat upon the floor. Four tiny creatures, in amazing toilettes; two musicians and two dancers. And the leader, the star, as I had rightly guessed, was Mademoiselle April-Shower, the little cat in

clothes, favourite plaything in my hours of depression.

The other dancer a slender little thing of scarcely twelve, newly formed by the Conservatoire, was called Mademoiselle Flower-Garden; her nose, like the beak of a bird, her tiny nothing-at-all-ness of a nose lost in the midst of her white powdered face, her eyes like two little oblique slits incapable of opening and her narrow eyebrows perched in the middle of her forehead, realised the ideal type of Japanese beauty very rare in nature but revealed to us in their paintings. This child played the parts of noble ladies, of the old regime, and wore a robe in the antique mode.

They danced at a little distance in the drifting smoke of the sleep-giving embers; they mimed the ancient legends, under laughter- or fear-compelling masks, to the rhythm of the guitars and sad songs. We spoke no more, gently fascinated by the play of these little priestesses of the dance, by the arresting and unreal group which they made there, in the white emptiness of the over-large *salon*.

In time, however, the cold came back, and with it a little lassitude and boredom; we began to chafe our toes again, or to protect them as best we could in the velvet of the black cushions; perhaps we were growing sleepy. The Prince proposed ending the entertainment and returning in *'rikishas*.

Outside it was snowing, not malicious snow, but slow flakes which seemed to be drifting rather than falling.

To return home we had to cross a special quarter which is to be found in every Japanese town and is always called the Yochivara.

At Nagasaki the Yochivara is a street on so steep a slope that the *'rikishas* run a risk of collapsing as they descend. A long street, too; on either side, and from one end to the other, nothing but most hospitable houses, with their doors wide open and their halls gaily lit by painted lanterns. In any one of these dwellings, if you glance into them, you are always sure of seeing first, through a thin wooden grill, a *salon* of conventional appearance, ornamented with delicate wall paintings of flowers, or flights of geese against skies of delicate hue; in it, a few young persons with eyes downcast, cross-legged in a circle on the mats, converse in low tones or innocently puff at little pipes, from which now and again they shake the ashes, with as much grace as care, in a dainty box for the purpose—rap, rap, rap, rap! on the rim. All the houses of the accommodating street resemble one another as much in their interior arrangements as in the cordial hospitality of their outward appearance. All, that is, with one exception, an immense and sumptuous house which perches on the summit of the hill, to crown, one might think,

the sympathetic whole; and it remains shut, or opens its doors with utmost circumspection. Most intriguing, that vast mansion at the top, which feigns not to be, and yet certainly has the air of being. . . . What the devil can go on in there? . . .

The Yochivara is, of course, the quarter in which animation and quiet outdoor gaiety last longest into the night, especially just now, for a number of foreign sailors, who are wintering at Nagasaki, look upon it as a pleasant duty to introduce themselves to these young ladies. At the hour at which we pass (nearly eleven at night) the daily fair wags its merriest, despite the anodyne of snow which to us seems to be itself out for amusement. Japanese gentlemen circulate in crowds, dressed in silk robes or in charming little suits, wearing one a bowler, another a fashionable Homburg, and almost all of them shading their weak sight with blue glasses, held up by strong but almost invisible hooks behind their ears. Many sailors, too, making their visits in *'rikishas*, grouped in nations and moving in file: a company of Russians, another of Germans, etc.; they, I regret to say, manifest their satisfaction in a too uproarious fashion, perhaps, which may very well not be appreciated in these haunts of courtesy, and may bring discredit upon our Western education.

And now comes, I think, a cortège of Frenchmen! A dozen leave-men from the "Redoutable,"

with their *'rikishas* as neatly aligned as in the musketry school. And if I am not wrong, the first, leading the band, scrutinising with a keen eye the numbers written upon the lanterns on the doors, is No. 233 Legall, proficient marksman, my orderly!

Despite the innocence of my intentions I admit I find the encounter uncomfortable: one can never be sure of not being judged by appearances—especially when one has to do with simple souls, such as 233's must be? Yet in Nagasaki, the whole world passes through the Yochivara; the most timorous mothers cross it with their daughters; it is a recognised artery of communication....

"Halt! Action right!" orders 233, who has at last, no doubt, found his favourite house.

Most satisfactory! Now we shall not run into each other.

Nimbly they jump down and enter, attempting, not altogether unsuccessfully, some bows in the best local fashion, and at that moment exactly we pass the wide open hall. So I have the two-fold satisfaction of preserving my incognito, and of feeling assured by the flattering attentions of their reception, that my men have known how to awake genuine feelings in these *salons*.

At the next turning of the street I have to leave the Prince and the other two guests of our dinner party, who are to go up to the Russian

hospital, whilst I make my solitary way down the length of the quays to my usual steps. Arrived there, I shall make one of the Japanese boatmen, who lie hidden in the cabins of their sampans until morning, row me aboard.

Nearly midnight when I reach the granite steps that go down into the sea, and the snow is falling more heavily; the roadstead, full of heavy shadows between its mountain shores, looks a somewhat sinister gulf. I shout into the darkness:

"Sampan! Sampan!"

A muffled voice replies from below, and then a trap opens in a kind of little sarcophagus floating on the gloomy water, and a boatman's head appears, lit up by a lantern.

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Over there, to the big French battleship."

But whilst we are talking I pick out a human form lying on the ground, over whom a white sprinkling has fallen. A bluejacket! One of our sailors, perhaps: it does happen to them. . . . No, only an ally. The match, which burns a half second and then goes out in the snowy wind, shows me in its flash the face of a Russian, with a big blond moustache, dead drunk. What am I to do for the poor devil, whom the villainous little Japanese prowlers are capable of drowning, as has been seen more than once since the squadrons arrived?... Good! Here come two other human

silhouettes who grow definite as they draw nearer. More bluejackets. Ah! I recognise these men; two from the "Redoutable." A bit tipsy, anxious to go aboard, and not quite knowing how to get there. That's well, for I'll give them a lift and they shall carry the Russian, whom we will deposit on one of his country's ships as we pass. One at his feet and the other at his head, they carry him down, whilst the sampan man, swinging his little red balloon of a lantern at the end of a stick, throws what light he can upon the steps, where we stagger through our burial scene.

Then let us all squeeze into the sarcophagus, shut down over our heads the little trap-door, for we freeze, and so, by the grace of God and the sampan man, away over the dancing waves, into the darkness of Erebus wherein the white flakes whirl.

CHAPTER XXX

February.

MADAME ICHIHARA, the monkey seller and Mademoiselle Matsumoto, her daughter, came back to-day from a day in the country, in dresses of clear coloured silk, carrying long branches all white with flowers; they were of the wild aloe type, such as at home we call "black thorn," whose flowering, in our hedges and woods, always precedes spring. (I have been flirting, this last fortnight, with Madame Ichihara.)

These ladies had been to pick their gracious harbingers in a sheltered nook known only to themselves. At their friendly persuasion, I accepted from them a few of these first-fruits of the season, which I installed on board ship in bronze vases, setting myself to give Japanese grace to the frail bouquet.

Nowhere are the flowers of the earlier trees awaited with more impatience than in Japan, cherry blossom, peach blossom, or the apricot, which everyone plucks by branches, careless of fruit to come if they may plunge them into vases and rejoice their eyes for but a day.

Madame Ichihara, my new acquaintance, has a trade in tame baboons, the big baboons from the

island of Kiu-Siu, whose fur is always worn away, revealing the bare flesh on that part of their bodies on which they sit. The lady, who must be a contemporary of Madame Renoncule, is still in her maturity one of the prettiest people in Nagasaki; it is regrettable that her particular commerce impregnates her clothes with a painful aroma: Madame Ichihara smells of monkeys.

Every time that caprice impels me to the great pagoda of the Jade Horse, I stop on my way at her house, to flirt for a few moments with her. The whole lower floor of the house is full of her pensioners, some in cages, others merely chained, and frisking about right and left; as one passes one is always exposed to some outrage; a tiny nimble cold paw shoots out between two bars and pinches your ear, or some young frolic wag, perched on a high cross-bar, flings his drinking water in your face. But when one has succeeded in reaching the staircase and so the first floor, one is safe in a kind of very attractive little boudoir where the ladies are "at home."

Madame Ichihara, who has grown rich upon the monkeys, has just added to this trade an interesting side line in antiquities. She keeps old ivories in especial, daring or comic, and whilst she is busied, in all seeming innocence, in preparing your tea, her daughter never fails to make you admire some: elaborate distorted ivories, groups of people

no bigger than the end joint of one's finger, which move and often indulge themselves, alas! in most deplorable commerce! This Mademoiselle Matsumoto, a mousmé of sixteen, who smells of monkeys like her mother, but is candour itself, handles such subjects without discomfort, since she misses their suggestion; with her lowered, half-closed eyes and a modest smile on her lips, she sets in motion the subtle mechanisms, which are more delicate than the works of a watch, and has a marvellous aptitude for heightening the value of little *objets d'art* which would certainly put the pensioners in the cages downstairs to the blush.

Obscurity and ghastliness, mingled by brains the opposite of ours, to attain an horror to which we can give no name: such is a definition for the greater part of these minute ivories, yellowed like the teeth of octogenarians. Shapes of spectres or gnomes, so small that a magnifying glass would almost be needed to disclose all their loathliness; heads of dead men, from which snakes come crawling through the sockets of the eyes; wrinkled old men with foreheads bulging with water on the brain; human embryos with octopus tentacles; fragments of beings, interlaced, who writhe in ecstasy, whose bodies end in a confused tangle of roots or entrails. . . .

And this mousmé, so prettily dressed, beside a fine vase in which branches of flowers are posed

in exquisite arrangement, this mousmé with the eternal smile, tastefully displaying these many monstrosities which must have claimed months of labour, this mousmé is like a living allegory of her Japan, with the childishly pretty surface ways and inexhaustible store of patience, with, too, in its soul, things which are beyond our understanding, which disgust or terrify us. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

February 14th.

THE great pagoda of the Jade Horse, whither I went so often in old days, in the starry splendour of July nights, which to-day is the cause of my dallyings with Madame Ichihara, has taken on an air of old age, of neglect, and seems to me to have grown older, in these last fifteen years, by two or three centuries. I remember climbing in the old days up the immense granite steps, Titanic stairway that takes you half-way up the mountain, to the sound of music, and lighted on my way by lanterns, thousands of strange lanterns, and I was almost carried up them by the crowds making pilgrimage. To-day, when I go, I see no other visitor than myself, from top to bottom of the superb stairs on which I am almost lost. And how crumbled, worn and disjointed are the granite blocks of the steps and of the sacred gates, spaced along the rising approach—these gates to all the temples, always alike and always so much in contrast with Japan, rude and simple gates, as grandiose as the pylons of Egypt. On high in the last court, before the enormous cedar-wood pagoda, which has taken on a more grey and faded hue, the jade horse meditates in solitude upon his

ancient crumbling pedestal. Grass pushes up and the steps themselves are growing green. Each time I find the sanctuary shut and silent, in whose depths I remember having seen of old, above the prostrate crowd, the great golden gods surrounded by the golden lotus. . . . And what will Japan, which seems to me on the way to deny all its old dreams, make of its thousands of pagodas, some of which are so marvellous, which take up infinitely more room than do the churches with us? . . .

Going out through the left of this court in which the ancient jade horse still rules, one comes as of old to the terrace of tea-houses and green bowers, whose view embraces the whole of Nagasaki and its deep bay. Even the Donko-Tchaya, the Toads' Tea-house, is still there, whither I used to come with Madame Chrysanthème, and the fine flower of the mousmés of her day; the toads remain, too, those monster-toads that were the glory of the establishment, and as of old their great bass voices go, couax, couax, in the grottos of the pretty basins. All that has changed are the supplies of the house; to-day one sees cabaret tables there, bottles of whisky in rows with gin or Pernod absinthe, all the civilising drinks with which our West has dowered the world.

Above the terrace, the paths mount to a place of calm and shadow, suggesting some holy wood. Wild camellias, as big almost as our elms, which

are at this moment at the end of their winter flowering, scatter the earth with thin red petals; other trees, of evergreen leaf, huge trees which perhaps are as old as the temple, form a vault above a carpet of delicate grasses or little rare plants. And as one climbs, so one sees, in the middle distance on the farther side of the shut-in valley where Nagasaki has grouped her thousands of grey roofs, the opposing mountains towering, covered by funereal woods, pagodas, and tombs, where the soil is mingled with human ashes, and where the eternal perfume of the incense sticks, burned for the dead, exhales. Farther away, the great blue opening of the bay spreads between the battlements and the charming complications of the shores. And then, far down, scarcely sketched in, almost lost in the more and more conquering blue, the far-flung islets show, the outposts of Japan, islets which you would think too venturesome, in the immense waters around them, and too pretty, with their cedars on their shores, stooping to the sea.

Towards these summits, above the temples, one is in an admirable Japan, refined to its essence, supremely tasteful, wrapped in meditation, almost religious, and one ceases smiling to admire.

CHAPTER XXXII

February 15th.

As upon further reflection that austere house at the upper end of the Yochivara continued to intrigue me, I began by confiding in 233, who is a keen observer :

"Pooh!" he replied, "a box like the rest of them! . . . Only it's full of fine ladies who call themselves duchesses and countesses ; *they* wouldn't admit a poor sailor."

This first summing-up not being sufficient for me, I betook me to M. Marouyama, our official interpreter, a young Japanese as much scholar as man about town, and much in the know in affairs of gallantry.

"Sir," said he, "it is, as a matter of fact, a house inhabited by ladies, to which gentlemen are admitted who are looking for certain distractions for which they are ready to pay. But all the *pensionnaires* are young persons of good family and for the most part of the nobility, whom temporary reverses have obliged to make their own way : accordingly, their *salons* are kept rigidly closed, and regrettable national prejudices forbid that foreigners should be received."

Even on M. Marouyama's admission, these

young persons are much less pretty than the others and even less provided with eyes, but so distinguished! Well read, for the most part, and some of them even poetesses, knowing how to introduce into conversation, flirtation, jesting, and generally whatever is included in their rôle, a tone, a charm, absolutely without rival.

CHAPTER XXXIII

February 25th.

THE last camellias are disappearing from Madame L'Ourse's display in the bamboo tubes full of clear water, just as the chrysanthemums disappeared, and give place to branches of prune, covered with snowy flowers, to branches of rosy-red peach. All along the streets, in the shop windows, and even in the humblest workmen's dwellings, one sees these first blossoms of the real spring, arranged with delicate taste in some piece of porcelain or bronze. (Even the very lowest orders in this land are more artistic, more sensitive to beauty than most of our own middle class.)

And the mousmés, between two showers, when there comes a gleam of sunshine, promenade in lighter coloured robes—pearl-greys, ashen blues, and lilac, which discover fresh aspects of their prettiness, artificial perhaps, but always so artistically arranged. I even believe that they have a laugh appropriate to the season, an end-of-winter laugh, gayer and more contagious than that for December or January.

So it is really coming at last, this spring which will send us on our way, and which, happily for us, is always slow a-coming in Japan, after the

lovely autumns of sunlight. On the mountain of the temples and graves there are already numbers of fruit trees in a riot of blossom; they look like bunches of pink and white ribbons beside the pagodas whose grey tones grow, on the other hand, more sad and old by contrast with all this fresh sweetness; it looks like decoration for a holiday, artificial, fragile, lasting but a day. The Japanese especially love painting this ephemeral aspect of their orchards; they make pictures of them which, when we bring them home with us, seem too pretty, an exaggeration of colour.

CHAPTER XXXIV

February 26th.

MADAME PRUNE has never been a mother. . . . It is not without some inward disquiet that I have come to this knowledge.

To that, no doubt, she owes it that she has remained so young in her feelings and kept in every part of her that unripe youthfulness which I used to admire, without understanding why I did so. In one of those moments, *tête-à-tête*, when confidences flow, moments which she provokes only too daringly between us, which the spring-time makes more and more heady, she made up her mind to the delicate admission.

"But—why then—that pretty, chubby little Madame Oyouki? Only your adopted daughter?"

"Alas! no! . . . A slip on the part of the late M. Sucre. A child conceived outside the sacred ties of marriage. . . ."

"Madame Prune, am I to believe my ears? M. Sucre, that single-minded artist, capable of forgetting himself so! . . . How you have stained his memory for me! . . ."

To think that I could have lived a whole summer under the same roof with that little family and never suspected so weighty a secret!

CHAPTER XXXV

March 1st

DESPITE the spring-time fashions of the mousmés, despite the eager blossoming of the orchards and the lengthening of the evenings, we have had nothing but ill winds from the north, rain and snow, making Japan more gloomy, more damp and chill than in the heart of winter. And the orange groves are astonished, and the great budding cycas, in the courtyards of the pagodas, say that for a century they have not seen so much white powder on their lovely green plumes.

But see now how suddenly the spring has overtaken us with its intoxication in this Nagasaki where now our fourth month of petted exile draws to an end.

Up there, amongst my friends, the Dead, the mountain is carpeted with wild flowers, unknown to us; around the innumerable groves, the frail little world of ferns confidently unfurls its new fronds, of pale, rare colouring. In the green necropolis, wider than the city of the living—which I had abandoned through the time of snow, but now begin to visit again—there is no longer that languid failing warmth which harmonised so well with the tombs; there is a sunny renaissance,

an overwhelming gaiety of exuberant green life, which must surely shock the ashes of the poor dead, and make what little remains there of their drifting ghosts vanish the sooner. And the great guardian pagodas, under the all too clear rays, are revealed in their increasing age and unhappiness, their woodwork growing ever more rotten, their monsters wearing away.

Below, on the cedar-wood and paper city, the light is now holding high holiday; the thousands of little open shops catch the sunshine and its reflections on their china-ware, their lacquer, or their rolls of flower-coloured silks.

And in the evening, in the long cooling twilight, each street is filled by a myriad of tiny children, with bullet heads and cat-like eyes, half coaxing and half evil. In no land on the earth can you see su h an abundance of them. They pour by the dozen from every door. Almost all pretty, who as they grow will become so ugly, their heads are still dressed, as of old, with comic art, with a design superior to mere fooling, in little pigtails alternating with shaven patches—little tails which fall over their ears, or little tails which turn back down their necks, according to the type of the looks of the wearer. Their dresses are amply large, and too long, their pagoda sleeves much too big; so their general appearance is either harassed or pompous. They make no noise. They do not

laugh, in this land in which their elder sisters and their mothers know how to laugh so well. They are of the coming generation which will see all things change in the once changeless Empire of the Rising Sun, and already they have the air of attentively observing life, with their jet-black pupils peeping mysteriously between their bridled eyelids. Above all, they guard and care for one another, in pretty touching ways; there is none so small but has entrusted to him a brother, smaller still, and still more doll-like. Nevertheless, one does see some amusing themselves; gravely they hold the cord of one of the kites which, at the bats' hour, begin from every side to swoop through the sky, themselves the shape of bat, or moth, or fabulous chimera.

It is cold no more, but all is gaiety and light . . . and the charm of the mousmés, which fifteen years ago I had scarcely realised, is to-day in truth revealed to me.

And once more, as so often it has happened, one lets nature, the eternal cheat, deceive one, though her only end is to make ready the dead leaves and the yellowed strippings of an autumn close upon us. I yield to her, the cheat, and yet this spring there are two reasons for sadness at its coming: first, it was not here that we expected to see it, but each hoped to be away yonder, in his own little corner of homeland, when the

swallows come: and then that this fine weather heralds our departure for China; the ice of dread Petchili must be melting under this sun, and soon we shall be recalled to the exhausting fatigue of our station.

CHAPTER XXXVI

March 15th.

I HAD hardly set foot ashore to-day, in a burst of spring sunshine, when three mousmés in the street caught my eye. What was there unusual about them, at first glance escaping definition? Making queer little faces and struggling with spasms of laughter, they trotted along the road together, noses up in the warm wind, obviously *knowing* themselves to be quaint, to be carrying out some farce. . . . Ah! it was the way they had done their hair; they were wearing coils and chignons like their grandmothers. And when they understood from my glances that I had noticed, they answered with their eyes: "Oh, ho! Aren't we quaint?" And so, laughing, disappeared.

A few paces further, and two old ladies. . . . Now, what was there unusual about them, too? . . . .Ah, *their* hair! They had made themselves up with the coils and chignons of young girls, with a little catch of flowers at the side, such as Mademoiselle April-Shower wears. And their smile, too, said to me: "Yes, that's it, don't look displeased! Oh, we know well enough how comic we must appear!"

All along the street is the same masquerade;

a general exchange of hairdressing and age. (Naturally, one's eyes must be thoroughly accustomed to Japanese ways to receive so stupefying a shock as mine. It is as though at home, one fine day, all the elders appeared in pigtails, with bows halfway down their backs, and all the little girls in old-fashioned bonnets with corkscrew curls.)

Some few minutes later, I reach the suburb of Dion-djen-dji, close to my old abode. In front of me there strolls a lady in gay attire, with that incomparable line of neck and shoulder which would reveal her to me among a thousand: Madame Prune, coiffed to-day like a little mousmé, a little schoolgirl, with a knot of rose pompoms perched upon the end of a long tortoiseshell pin!

Warned by that sure instinct she has, she turned back to show me, in a smile, one of the last black-lacquered sets of teeth that Nagasaki owns: "Now, don't you think," her lowered eyes ask modestly, "don't you think, dear friend, it really looks rather pretty?"

"Madame Prune, I was just going to tell you so. But please, please, explain . . ."

So then she told me that, from the times of their far-off ancestors, it was the tradition that on this day of the year the ladies should do their hair as little girls, and the little girls as ladies.

And everything around us was lovely, lovely

with an oddity and studied unreality as in a Japanese water-colour. The very suburb through which we passed seemed intoxicated with the spring. Our footpath hung some two hundred feet above the blue roadstead, winding along its wooded banks. Round the little old houses with their paper walls, there were trees all white and trees all pink; and there were Chinese plants, too, with long clusters of flowers turning pale violet; and all this, little houses as pretty as toys, pink trees in little gardens, flowering shrubs engarlanded, poured down from our feet to the sea, in a huddled cascade, which looked insecure, if not impossible; all of it seemed held there by enchantment, careless of balance or of weight. A lovely delicate light, dazzling, yet not blinding, spread over all things equally, near at hand or in limpid distances. Into the sky sprang those most singular summits of the mountains of Kiu-Siu, which are like cones tapestried in green plush. And away down there, where the roadstead opens upon the China Sea, were no more human habitations, but a uniform cloak of green flung everywhere, even from top to bottom of the steepest crags; nothing but two or three little temples, perched on all-but-inaccessible niches, shy, too, scarcely peeping from the tangle of branches, dedicated to the Spirits of the Woods, who must surely reign sovereign over there, on those green slopes. One blot alone on

the immense laughing scene; a little behind us, on the opposite shore of the bay, squats a huddled, vile, and cursed spot, whence mounts a perpetual din of hammered iron; a mouth of hell puffing black breath through a thousand chimneys; the arsenal where night and day are made the new murder-machines.

Madame Prune, sentimentalising after her wont, whilst the cluster of pink pompoms wags above her opulently puffed hair, was insensibly leading me towards her home. And I, fascinated, as always, by her lacquered teeth, the colour of polished ebony, could take oath they had been newly dressed, doubtless with me in view; the painstaking specialists had introduced, here and there, little scraps of gold which on the black ground gained enormously in importance and effect, just as they do on the lacquer of dishes and bowls.

It is incredible how many dentists there are in Nagasaki; the poorest porter has his teeth gilded by their art. They go to work without any mystery, moreover, for I remember having seen, through open windows, ladies throw back their heads of nobly swelling hair upon the padded rests, and open their gaping jaws, which an operator seemed to be perforating with astonishing little drills. They learned this art, so it seems, in America. A number of our sailors, seduced by their descrip-

tive sign-boards, have entrusted their teeth to them, and warrant them marvellously dexterous.

In all things calling for cleverness, patience, and exactitude, these little Japanese cannot but excel. That is how they have so quickly taken up the work of our electricians and machine-makers; one is only surprised that they had not invented for themselves, thousands of years before us, all these things with which to-day they juggle like experts.

And our most modern engines of war, which, indeed, are no more than toys of absolute precision, will become, alas! in their quick, sure hands, very terrifying playthings. . . .

Ah, Heaven! Saving for Madame Prune, how lovely are all things about me to-day, as well beneath me, round the deep bay, as above me, towards the pale blue of the sky, to which the strange green peaks aspire! And how adorable is that isle of Kiu-Siu, rounding it off so, away down there, with cliffs magically garbed with trees, cliffs bearing little temples half hid in the green growth, cliffs which descend, like the ramparts of some enchanted fortress, into the vast nothingness of the sea, to-day so luminous, diaphanous! . . .

CHAPTER XXXVII

March 25th.

PLEASANTLY and softly go our days, now at the end of March, our last days in Japan, which we must soon leave, leave to-morrow, perhaps, or maybe the day after, on receipt of some abrupt and merciless order.

And I shall regret certain shady mossy places, amongst old granite boulders and clear fresh cascades, on the mountain slopes, above mysterious temples. . . .

The calm and shadowed veranda of the tea-house which Madame Stork owns, in front of the temple of the fox, the ancient terraces of the city of the dead, with their grey stones, under the hundred-year cedars—never shall I find again those hours of silence and of almost voluptuous melancholy, spent there under the green night of the trees.

Then, too, I have a friend, a mousmé, for whom I would gladly give Madame Renoncule, Madame Prune and Mademoiselle April-Shower, and whom I meet, in the very heart of the lofty necropolis, in a kind of enclosed wood, environed by a world of tombs. (Oh! But our meetings are perfectly correct and honourable: it may so happen, even

in Japan.) And I think it is she, this mousmé, who personifies for me, at present, Nagasaki and the exquisite mountain of her dead. Almost always there must be one woman, no matter where chance has exiled you—it is so, isn't it?—one young and feminine soul (whose envelope must have some little charm, since that is an essential part of the lure) to come to one's aid in the great solitude—even, at times, in all honour, a little sister of passage, for whom one keeps, for some time after one leaves, soft thoughts and then, forgets. . . .

I have never spoken of her until now, little mousmé Inamoto. Yet it is now more than three months since we made acquaintance; it was still in the time of the tranquil red suns of the autumn evenings which lay upon the scattered dead leaves. And since then we have never interrupted our innocent meetings, high in that same sad, screened wood, save in the time of snow: yet they have remained such childish meetings that I am not sure that they have not some bitterness of absurdity about them. Is it she whom I shall regret on the day of departure, or only the mountain with its mystery and shadow, with its hidden closes of old stones and of moss? . . . Of a truth I am a man of little old walls in woods, little old grey walls, mossy and full of ferns in every cranny; I lived in intimacy with them when I was a child,

I have loved them, and they still exercise over me a charm beyond my describing. The finding, on that Japanese mountain, of walls just like those in my own country, was one of the first elements in the seduction which brought me back again, stronger than the peacefulness of that marvellous cemetery, stronger than the depth and strange magnificence of distances deploying all around.

As for the mousmé whose charm has come to be engrafted upon it, it was upon a lovely empurpled evening in December, in *last century*, that we abruptly met face to face. I was wandering alone in the necropolis, at that copper-red hour which announces the setting of the winter sun, when the idea seized me to climb a wall, higher than the rest, to explore the sort of little wood which it appeared to encircle.

I fell into an old deserted park, now half jungle, half forest, where a young girl, sitting upon the moss, and apparently quite at home there, was turning the pages of a picture-book representing gods and goddesses in the clouds.

Naturally—being Japanese and a mousmé—she began by laughing, before she asked me: "Who are you? Where have you come from? Who gave you leave to climb over the wall?" She had eyes which were scarcely bridled in at all, eyes almost like those of a little brunette of

Provence or Spain, the colour of amber rust; she breathed health, fresh youth, and her glance was so honest that at once I dropped with her that jesting tone which it is always correct to adopt in the *salons* of Madame Prune or Madame Renoncule, my mother-in-law.

I learned on this first evening that she was called Inamoto, that she was the daughter of the bonze, or perhaps only of the caretaker, of a certain huge pagoda, which I could see, some hundred and fifty feet below, its tortured roof and funereal flagged court showing through the branches of the trees.

"Little Mademoiselle Inamoto," said I, before climbing out again, "it would give me pleasure to see you again some time. The day after to-morrow, if neither rain nor snow fall, I will return here at this same hour. And will you come too?"

"I will come," said she. "I come every day that it does not rain."

She added, with a bow, "Sayonara!" (farewell!), and began climbing down by a goat-path towards the temple, carefully guarding the pretty coils of her smooth hair against the little branches of bamboo which whipped her face as she passed.

Since that day I must have climbed that old wall, at the same place, a good fifty times. . . . And all has been as chaste as with Mademoiselle April-Shower, but different, deeper; this has been

no affair with a little cat in clothes, but with a maiden, whose eyes, despite her mousmé laugh, are candid and sometimes grave.

How is it the affair can last between us without weariness, since the difference in language prevents any deep communion between our two souls, doubtless essentially different, and since, too, in our meetings there has never been an equivocal moment, an instant of disquiet ? . . .

And though the necropolis is lonely enough, sometimes one had to be as cunning as an Apache to get there unseen—and that, too, is amusing. She grows more and more frightened lest we should be seen, lest her father should scold her, lest she should be forbidden to come. Sometimes it is a water-carrier, coming down from the heights, who disturbs us; next day it is an old woman who keeps us long in check, occupied in unhurried disposal of branches of green stuff in the bamboo tubes at the four corners of a tomb, or perhaps in burning incense-sticks to her ancestors, or merely in looking at the panorama of the pagodas, the city, and the sea, away below her feet. And I stay hidden behind some great cedar, and watch, above the wall, very black hair, a forehead and two peeping eyes appearing over the stones (never a glimpse of nose or a scrap of anything more); my little friend who is perching up there, watching, too, for the outcome of the incident, always ready

to disappear at the least danger, like a dainty toy in a marionette show, popping back into its box.

Yes, it is all childish and absurd enough. Its continuance has only been possible because of its extreme exotic charm, of the attraction of the unique place and the attraction of Inamoto herself, all combined.

Is it she whom I shall regret, or her mountain, or even the old grey wall, guardian of our meetings? Really, I do not know, so much for me is her sweet personality a part of her surroundings.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

March 26th.

NEW-COMERS from China say that the ice-floes at the mouth of Peiho are melting; so our departure may come at any moment, and we count the days of grace that remain to us, feeling ourselves more under the influence of Japan than we thought, now that we must leave it all behind us.

My tiny friend, April-Shower, came to-day to pay me a visit aboard ship, accompanied by the old dame whom she calls grandmother. It was but a friendly unceremonious call; she had put on a dress which, for her, was really plain, but over which all the same great flowers of fantastic hues sprawled on an ivory ground.

She is so well known, and such a baby creature besides, that the police agents let her come and go. On board, the sailors recognise her, too, and say: "Here comes the Kitten." To-day she was taken up with our guns; who would have believed it, and where may war's preoccupation not alight?

"Are our Japanese boats like this? Can the Russians kill at such distances?" Oh, but she was comic beside one of the huge guns of the "Redoutable," which two gunners amused themselves by opening for her, when she poked her little head inside, with its pretty chignon, to examine the rifling.

CHAPTER XXXIX

March 31st.

In the morning, about ten o'clock, there closed behind us the long corridor of green, at the bottom of which Nagasaki spreads her store of pagodas and cemeteries. Then trailed past us those little islets which are like the advanced guards of Japan —charming little islets, which everybody knows, through having seen them painted upon so many vases and fans. And then the sea, the open sea, began to enfold us in its majestic serenity and its silence, the more striking, by contrast, after the dainty little manners and the strummings and the pretty little laughter to which we have long become accustomed.

Our sailing orders had been very abrupt. Scarcely could I find time to salute my fluttering mother-in-law. And the two hours which I had were so short a time in which to reach the mountain to say good-bye to Inamoto, the mousmé.

I must have climbed that old wall round the sheltered wood so often to have left the traces of my passage so clearly upon the grey of the stones! I had never noticed as on this day of departure how much there was to betray me, and when I come back I shall have to change my tracks. In the grass, too, my steps have traced

a faint path, like those crushed ways which the forest beasts make.

Mousmé, whose eyes are not the ordinary eyes of the mousmé, enigmatic pretty flower of pagoda and cemetery, what have I learned of her, and what has she learned of me? Nothing that I at least am able to define. Seated side by side on the ground in that wood, saying perforce things puerile because of a language of which I know but too few words, we were like two sphinx that played at children, for want of means, a key, to open ourselves to each other, but who were held there, each by the unknown soul of the other, vaguely divined. Certainly between us that kind of bond which is called affection was beginning to be knotted, of which there is neither argument nor analysis, which often draws together beings who are infinitely unlike. . . . Above the wall were the gentle brow and pair of young eyes which followed me yesterday evening whilst I fled across the labyrinth of funereal terraces and tombs, and I turned twice to look back upon them; when I saw them disappear, I think I felt myself more alone than ever in these far-off yellow lands. . . . And the little contraction of my heart as I went away was like the faintest reflection—twilit, if one may use the word—of the agonies which, in the days of my youth, accompanied my big leave-takings so often. It is true

I am sure to come back, so far as one can be sure of the things of to-morrow, for we are staying two years, unluckily, on the China station, and Nagasaki will be our refitting and rest place. And I shall see this mousmé again, shall again hear her voice so sweetly quaint, repeating the French words which she plays at learning. . . .

As for Madame Prune, the suburb where she lives was too high up for me this time. But we shall come back; we shall come back, and if the Goddess of Grace so pleases, this idyll, sketched in, nigh on sixteen years ago between us, is not yet come to an end. . . .

This evening, then, at the hour when the sun sets in long streamers of fog, Japan disappeared; the amusing island has vanished into the distance of pallid immensity, which gleams like an endless mirror, undulating very gently in treacherous playfulness. We are on our way to the north and to China. Fifteen years ago, after an enervating stay in this same corner of Japan and a mock-marriage with a certain little Chrysanthême, I was making my way like this up the Yellow Sea, in just such a calm, under mists such as these, on just such a wan evening. And the great nothingness of the sea, as now, enveloped me with its mournful calm.

I was going with less melancholy—doubtless because my life was still before me in those days, whilst now the most of it is behind. . . .

CHAPTER XI

AT SEOUL

In the Street

June, 1901.

In the splendour of June, which down there is more brilliant and limpid-clear than it is at home, I remember being lodged for some days in a little house in Seoul, before the palace of the Emperor of Korea, straight opposite the great gate. Even before dawn—naturally very early at this season—bugle calls woke me, the morning call of the guard; a long-drawn-out military parade, in which a thousand men take part each time. Then begin the other noises of Seoul, dominated by the continuous neighing of horses—little Korean horses, disorderly ill-tempered little beasts, always kicking and biting.

This Emperor's palace is hid behind walls. Leaning from my window I could see nothing of it save the gloomy surrounding wall and the great red gateway, decorated in Chinese fashion, with monsters on the frieze. Strange little soldiers, dressed like Europeans, mounted guard before this closed dwelling, the same whose bugles sounded daily before sunrise: under kepis, such as our

soldiers wear, their flat yellow faces seem utterly astonished at the novelty of such accoutrements.

From my window one could also see, in enfilade, a wide, straight street, where a crowd, uniformly dressed in white muslin, was moving between two rows of little low, ridiculous houses, of a dull grey colour, and rather Chinese in appearance.

Parade over, there came the hour for audiences and councils. Then in elegant lacquer chairs were brought a number of ceremonious personages in flowered silk robes, hatted in that high bonnet —with two flag-like wings like protruding ears or antennæ—which went out of fashion in China some three centuries ago. And whilst the approaches to the red door became encumbered with the fine chairs at rest with their long flexible poles leaning to the ground, I watched these courtiers climb one after another up the steps of the Imperial threshold and then disappear into the palace; antediluvian dignitaries, who were come to set in order the affairs of the crumbling old empire; under their robes of pomp they looked like great insects, with complicated heads and wing shields of shot colours.

All round the June sun spread a holiday light over the grey cameo of Seoul, which remains the most perfectly grey of all the ancient cities that are still alive in farthest Asia. And the sun was scorching, for the Korean climate is one of

extremes, like that of China; without transition there succeed always to winters almost Siberian hot weather and wonderful springs.

From earliest morning this sun had been blazing upon the immense grey city, shut in by its crenellated ramparts and its ring of grey mountains. Straight roads, a league long and a hundred yards wide, of grey earth, between myriads of dusty little houses, almost all alike, all of the same size, and covered with the same turtle-shells of ashy-grey tiles. And dominating these thousand little objects, swelling up on all sides into the sky, like a terrible wall of dark stones, stands the chain of encircling mountains, there as though to imprison, preserve, condense the sadness and the immobility of Seoul—an old, old capital, far from the sea, without even a river to bring to her the ships which are ever the carriers of ideas and things new.

So large and so bare are the streets of this city, that one could see from end to end of them; one could see them, away in the far distance and the dust, stretch to the gates of the ramparts which were crowned, as in Peking, by enormous black turreted dungeons. The white crowds, all in white muslin, parading on the long footpaths, evoked, for us Europeans, the idea of a procession of young girls gathered for some summer saint's day; but the promenaders were almost all men, with flat

faces and beards as coarse and sparse as those of baby seals. The boys and young men who had not yet entered upon legal marriage went bare-headed, virginal seeming in their immaculate dress, with a parting in the middle and a pigtail down their back, in the fashion in vogue amongst little girls in the west. As for the married men, they were irresistibly comic, all with their hair tied up in a knot, in accord with all-compelling custom, and wearing a kind of little high hat, mimicking our "toppers," of black hair, with ribbons to knot under the chin; tiny hats, ridiculously tiny hats, such as you would see on the music halls at home. As this was in June, and it was very hot, many people wore, under their light dress, a sort of framework, a crinoline of woven reed, round their chests and over their arms, to hold the muslin away from their bodies; it made of them fat little fellows, as round as balloons of inflated gold-beater's skin.

In the midst of the white of these thousands of dresses, some splashes of red flared up in the crowd like poppies: the babies, all in scarlet mantles with gold capes. And a few spots of fresh green colour: ladies of quality, in clear green mantles, with a broad band of white stuff for head-dress, like Neapolitan women, leaning as they walked upon long canes, like the sheep crooks of the Trianon shepherdesses; costumes high-necked

enough in other respects, but with two openings to allow the tips of their breasts to appear. And the men in mourning! . . . Dressed in white, like all the rest, they disappeared under hats, at least three feet wide, of rice-straw, shaped like lamp-shades, and, further, they hide behind a ceremonial double hand-screen, held with both hands so that they can clap it over their faces, sealing them hermetically.* Moreover, through all that *bizarrerie* of costume, one could feel no trace of either China or Japan, the two redoubtable neighbouring countries; no, the effect was something very much apart, something which had germinated exactly here, between these mountains, at the foot of these heaps of grey boulders.

Before the humble little open shops along the streets there were spread in the sun and dust things for the most part commonplace and humble enough: plenty of harness, for the shaggy little horses with their wicked tempers: plenty of red lacquer chests, with gilt locks, all alike. And above all, thousands of objects made of marvellous Korean copper, which is as pale as dying coral and yet has a brilliance which never dims: bowls; incense chalices, and tall torchlinks of exquisite grace.

* It was in this effective disguise of mourning apparel that the Bishop of Seoul himself and some priests, who had escaped martyrdom, took the risk of returning here, after the last great massacre of Christians in Korea.

The Koreans of the olden times, however, were masters of many inventions. It was they who of old initiated the Japanese into the making of porcelain; and, in the tombs of their legendary sovereigns, one finds adorable bits of china, almost always grey, mouse-coloured, of which the sobriety and the strangeness, inspired by the leaf and flower of the lotus, attest a very high degree of art. It was by them, too, about the eleventh century, that the secret of the mariners' compass was revealed to the Arabian navigators, who brought it to our barbarous West. But now the immense Asiatic decrepitude is spread over this people, which is too old; and Korea, like the Celestial Empire, is dying.

I remember these thousands of little carapaces, long and narrow, which serve for roofing on the houses of Seoul, looked most oddly like tombstones when one had a bird's-eye view of them. The city, seen from the great watch-towers crowning the gates, looked astonishingly like a cemetery; I should have called it an infinite scatter of graves within a crenellated boundary—with long avenues on which moved a race of phantoms, all in diaphanous white raiment.

On going through the ramparts, once past the heavy gates of the dungeons, I came upon an infinitely peaceful and melancholy countryside. A stony soil; outcroppings of greyish rock, like

the surrounding mountains. Cedars, willows, greenery, all as fresh as if newly open: a marvellous apotheosis of the spring at this latter end of June; a carpet of flowers flooded with light; a perpetual whirring of grasshoppers. And people of gentle aspect, playing with their fans—a people robed in white muslin, of course, and wearing the tiny little clown's hat, of black hair, with ribbons—came up, timidly and politely, to try to converse, with three French or Latin words, learned in the schools; they asked me, too, to sit down with them, at the roadside, beneath the roof of some little shanty where most innocent drinks, very sugary, and freshened with snow, were sold; all this with apparently the greatest good will, and yet, a fortnight later, in the south of the Empire, in the island of Quelpart, great massacres of Christians took place, with refinements of atrocious cruelty.

The massacres! Massacres past, present, or to come: in farthest Asia we must always reckon with them. . . . No matter that in Seoul there was an enormous absurd cathedral, such as our missionaries obstinately dream of building in the Yellow Empire, in spite of the almost absolute certainty that it will be sacked, and the missionaries themselves, whether priests or nuns, who have fled for refuge to this last asylum, will meet

there with a horrible death. . . . It was superbly posed upon a hill, this adventurous church of Seoul, dominating the thousands of little houses with their turtle-shell roofs, which, seen from the height of its Gothic spire, look like a world of wood-lice. And all round it was the French mission; for the time being an attractive and peaceful quarter where our good sisters from home were bringing up bands of little kittenish Korean boys and girls, teaching them humble trades and to speak a little of our tongue.

Farther away were two or three streets in which you might have thought yourself back in Nagasaki or Yeddo; you met again the laughing mousmés with their pretty shining hair, the clean little shops and the dainty tea-houses, enlivened with pretentious bunches of flowers in bronze vases. And this was where the Japanese infiltration, one of the most menacing dangers to the existence of Korea, was beginning.

* * * * *

Oh, the drollery of a rainy day in Seoul! I had never expected it. The amusing recollections I have of it! On that day, on opening my window in the morning, I saw the sky, usually so clear, all overcast and cloudy. Around the grey city, the queer, too-sharply peaked mountains, seemed to stab at one universal thick veil which little by

little grew lower and little by little shrouded all things in mist. And drops of water, very fine at first, had begun to fall: the rain, the real rain, which the Emperor himself, the previous evening, had gone to demand of the gods of Korea, with his own hand sacrificing a sheep on a rock in the country. Then there took place a complete change in the appearance of the populace; in the twinkling of an eye the country became a kingdom of oiled cloth, of a canary yellow colour. Before the Imperial entrance, where as usual the sedan chairs of many great folk were assembled, the lackeys swiftly spread yellow wax-cloth coverings over all those beautiful black and gold lacquered shells. On top of their little clown hats, passers-by all balanced an immense cone of a similar yellow wax-cloth; and those who most feared water had donned an immense ballooned vest, of the same stuff and same colour. Great umbrellas, of a thousand pleats, always of yellow wax-cloth, spread abroad everywhere above all heads. And the robes of white muslin, which they tucked up as high as possible, now all soft and crumpled, were soaked with mud. Until evening the rain fell from the heavy sky, fell quietly and incessantly. In the muddy roads the crowds passed, as busy as ever; only, in place of the white in which they ordinarily were, they now went in yellow uniform, and the hundreds of heads, with their huge magi-

cians' bonnets curving down to the level of their eyes, were now surmounted by sharp-pointed cones on which the downpour rustled.

And last of all I have a memory of a young sparrow, escaped too soon from its nest, which fell into my room that day, unable to fly further, so much rain had fallen upon his poor little new feathers. Next morning, dry and comforted, he went off through the open window to rejoin his brothers, fledglings of the same brood, who were cheeping in the beautiful sunshine which had returned again, perched on the gnomes of plaster and pottery upon the frieze of the Imperial portico just opposite.

At Court

At the Korean Court, when I passed that way, the great affair of the day's programme was the translation of the remains of the Empress who, some seven years before, had been stabbed by assassins one night in her old palace. The unalterable rites demand that, having died by violence, she should begin by two long sojourns underground, in different graves, before coming to her last resting-place, with her tranquil ancestors, after her release, in the provisional sepultures, from certain very restless demons who always take possession of the corpses of assassinated persons. Now the

time was come to carry out the first transfer; * before digging the second ditch the Emperor's three great necromancers were consulted upon the choice of ground—which must be friable, free from stones and even pebbles; but, behold, at barely five feet deep rock had been found! So the three necromancers were condemned to death on the spot;† however, that did not put matters right; the place for the second burial grew no less uncertain; so, it seemed, they were all very perplexed on the opposite side of the road, behind the Imperial wall.

But that old palace, where the Empress died under the knife, and which from the night of the crime was abandoned in terror! . . . On a June morning, in lovely settled sunshine, I was taken on the oddest pilgrimage there—under the guidance of two cheery little fellows in white muslin robes and little "toppers" of black hair. In the midst of silent walled parks, already turning to the wild, to primitive undergrowths, was a confusion of heavy pompous buildings or frail kiosks, all closely shut, and shadowed by immense roller-blinds; something like the quarter of the "Yellow City" at Peking, with the same crooked roof-line of

* Each of these transportations necessitates a paved road, specially made; each place of burial calls for a special palace, built above the temporary resting place. At Seoul well-informed people estimate the total expenditure on these obsequies at forty million francs.

† Sentence commuted next day to perpetual banishment.

pottery, the same marble terraces; on all the stairs monstrous guardians, squatting as they do over there, but with something other in their aspect, a grin of different ferocity. In the flagged courtyards wild grass was growing between the great white stone slabs; between the marble steps, already falling apart, there flourished little wild strawberries, which I plucked as I walked. Everywhere over the dismal pallor their pretty little red splashes of colour glowed. There were, too, between walls or actual crags, some little gardens shut carefully away for the mysterious pacing of princesses of olden times; amongst the urns and the pretentious rockeries there sprawled peonies, roses, iris, despite the invasion of the brambles and the frolic flowering grasses. The arbutus, too, and the cherry trees, scattered to earth their useless red fruits, lost even to the birds, who never seem to visit this palace of terror. The little sombre chamber of the crime, with its blinds lowered, was strewn with deathly disorder: with smashed and blackened woodwork, such as fire has licked. The great hall of state was vaulted with sunk panels, blood-red, and everywhere paintings represented the divinities and the beasts which haunt the dreams of men in these parts; the throne of Korea, of the same sinister red, rose in the midst; it stood detached, isolated, on a strange dusky painting, spread like the floor-

cloth before stage scenery, where in clouds of livid gold rose a huge bloodstained planet, over chaotic mountains.

The Emperor, then, unable to bear living longer in this palace, where he saw hands, without their bodies, and soaked with blood, moving all about him as soon as the dark came on, gave orders for the building of the paltry little modern palace, at the opposite end of Seoul, close to the European concession, just in front of my lodgings here; and all went to rack and ruin around his sumptuous ancestors.

Then, on the same morning, we went off to another palace, yet older than that of the crime, rolled there in little chairs by runners at top speed. It was very far away, through dead quarters, long deserted avenues, and gates surmounted by black dungeons. The courts, the dependencies, the gardens and the parks, took up an immense amount of room, a whole belt of country which was holy and forbidden ground, for ever useless and lost. There, too, there were immense buildings, planted upon terraces of marble. There was a throne-room, abandoned some two or three centuries ago, where hundreds of pigeons, nesting in the red lacquer vaulting and not expecting our visit, kept up a winnowing noise of scared wings over our heads; and this yet more venerable throne stood out alone, like the former, upon a

nightmare landscape, with forests and ramparts of hills, and the rising of a giant moon, or some strange phantom of a rayless star. The rooms for the princesses were small, dark, sepulchral, decorated with terrifying paintings, and one wondered how the beauties of olden times had been able, in such darkness, to make their toilet and don their trailing raiment. But the parks had a melancholy grandeur, with clumps of centenary cedars, lakes full of reeds and lotus, real solitudes, and almost savage horizons, in the heart of the city, within the embrace of the ramparts; wild things lived there as in the bush, herons, pheasants, stags and deer—and my guides told me that at night tigers, inhabitants who refuse to be ejected from the surrounding mountains, climb the walls of the enclosure to come and hunt therein.

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Three or four days after my arrival at Seoul, our admiral himself came there, with other officers, for a visit to the Emperor. And one evening we were all to be seen in full dress crossing the threshold of the new palace.

Our surprise in that first moment of entering was complete: there was no trace of magnificence nor even of the bizarre in this modern construction. The magicians, who had been consulted as to the apartment in which it would be advisable to

receive us in order to avoid any disastrous consequences, had obstinately insisted upon a kind of shed, of bronze green woodwork with certain vermilion paintings; carpets had been spread about in haste, and a splendid canopy of white silk put up, which was the only suggestion of luxury in the open hall. So in front of this setting of ivory white, broidered and re-embroidered with flowers, birds, and butterflies, we appeared before the Emperor and the Crown Prince, both of them standing in the prescribed attitude, hand resting upon a little table; the father dressed in the Imperial yellow, the son in cherry red. Their sumptuous robes, stiff with gold, with panels like the wing-shields of beetles, were gathered in at the waist by belts of precious stones. A few official personages, interpreters and ministers, stood by their side, dressed in sombre silks. And all wore the high bonnets, with scarabæus' antennæ, which were worn of old in Peking in the time of the Ming Emperors—which, by the way, is the only case in which the Koreans have borrowed from Chinese customs. The Emperor himself has a face of pale parchment, a most smiling expression, and grey chops; tiny little mobile lively eyes; much distinction, intelligence and good nature. The prince, on the contrary, whose mask is hard, and mien irritable and cruel, appeared scarcely able to put up with our presence; all the time it

seemed to us that his father was obliged to soothe him, with a gentle, pleading glance, a word softly spoken in an undertone, or with a caressing hand which took hold of his to place it on the little table and keep it there. Who can tell what inner drama there may not be between those two silken fetishes, the one red, the other yellow ?

The Emperor, whose expression grew more and more open, questioned the admiral upon the war with China, which we had just finished, upon our armaments, battleships, torpedo-boats, and, after a very lengthy audience which seemed to interest him, dismissed us with a courteous gesture.

There followed then, in a nondescript new hall, specially built for the reception of Europeans, a grand dinner in honour of our admiral and his officers, of the French minister and the attachés of his legation. All the wines and all the dishes were from home, brought here at great expense ; a dinner which might have been laid at the Elysée.* The only foreign note was struck by the strange high bonnets of certain Court officials whom the Emperor, become himself invisible again, had delegated to sit among us, though almost in silence. But we knew that in the evening the Emperor's *corps de ballet* was to dance to please us, and we

* Arranged by an old, and most respectable, Frenchwoman, who has been long attached to the Emperor's service, to make purchases in Europe and to order these meals.

had something amusing to which we could look forward.

In the open air, under the beautiful sweet night, they brought coffee, liqueurs and cigars to us where we sat, on a vast improvised platform, covered with European carpets, all quite new, and draperies newly nailed up. In the midst of our little tables was left a large empty circle—doubtless for the dancers we were expecting, who had not yet appeared. The squadron's band, brought by the admiral to give the aged sovereign a moment's amusement, was playing noisily some banality or other, "Les Cloches de Corneville" or "La Mascotte." And one would have thought oneself at some travelling show, anywhere, except in the high-walled palace of an Emperor of Seoul.

But as soon as the lively music came to a stop, a Korean orchestra, which we could not see, began, without any interval, to play. The air was filled with sinister roarings blown by deep-toned trumpets, which tom-toms on different notes accompanied with their din. It was brusque, unexpected, astounding, but so mournful to listen to that one shivered at it rather than smiled. And during the first moment's bewilderment two enormous tigers, which sprang out as though from some trap-door, bounded into the midst of us, into the empty circle reserved for the dancers. Two striped Mongolian tigers, far bigger than nature, artificial

monsters in black and yellow velvet, each moved from within by two men whose legs aped their taloned paws. Their great round heads, with squint eyes and hair of silk floss, were presented with all that science of the grimacing and the ferocious, with that transcendent art of the convulsive grin which is peculiar to the peoples of farthest Asia. The orchestra played for them some sad and savage strain, unlike anything known to us, but through which, little by little, one could pick out ingenious harmonies. And they, the two tigers, danced in time, a bear's dance, wagging their savage-smiling heads.

After them appeared acrobats, astonishingly thick-set, with bull-necks, their white muslin dresses allowing the swell of their knotted muscles to show. When they had done some tricks, they gathered in a circle to sing; little bird or grasshopper voices, endless trills executed in unison, with perfect finish and extraordinary cleverness, on the highest possible notes. From a distance it must have sounded like the joyous chorus of insects in the hay-fields on the lovely summer evenings. We were told that they were the non-commissioned officers of the guard, who had changed into civilian dress for the occasion.

Then lackeys brought bunches of artificial poppies of supernatural size; others came forward to set up a little triumphal arch of painted cardboard;

and these were the accessories of the eagerly awaited dancing girls, who at last appeared. . . .

A dozen of such odd roguish little people, rather pale of face, with such modest airs in their long robes! Flat miniature faces, eyes so bridled that it looked impossible to open them, unnatural erections of corded hair, each one representing the heads of a dozen normal women; and little shepherdess hats perched a-top! There was something of our French eighteenth century to be found in these fashions, but in an infinitely more ancient mode; they had a deceitful appearance of Louis XVI dolls. Never would we have imagined Asiatic dancing girls under such an aspect; but in Korea everything is absurd and impossible to foresee.

With lowered eyes and expressionless faces they first executed a kind of tragedy step, brandishing cutlasses in their frail hands. Then, taking off their quaint little hats, they played an interminable and childishly silly game. One after the other, with soft languishing gestures, they came forward to throw a light ball, which had to pass through the pretty cardboard portico by a hole cut in the frieze; when the ball went through neatly, the other dolls, with a thousand artificial airs and graces, made haste to plant a monstrous poppy, as reward, in the false hair of the adroit little lady; but if the ball failed to pass, the guilty person was punished with a black cross, which one

of her companions traced in Indian ink upon her cheek, with many affected gestures.

At the end of the game all had bearded cheeks, and each, above her extravagant chignon, an edifice of flowers. The continual repetition of the same mannered poses, and the same studied languors, grew wearisome and hypnotic. It dragged on to the sound of the Korean music, no longer now terrible and roaring as lately for the tiger dance, but mysteriously tranquil, sad yet not plaintive, expressing as it were resignation to the immense ennui of life. It was wearisome, and despite oneself one watched, listened, submitted a little to its fascination; there was elegance in it, rhythm, and a far away art.

On the following day we all left Seoul together to rejoin the squadron, loaded with presents by the Emperor: a quantity of packets carefully wrapped in rice-paper, and bearing our names written in Korean: for each of us a coffer of steel inlaid with silver and another of green marble, and contents of exquisite workmanship, *objets d'art* and paintings on white silk, signed by artists of repute in this country.

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How much longer will this strange Korea last? Scarcely has she shaken off the careless yoke of China, than menaces from every quarter threaten her: Japan covets her as an easy prey, within

arm's reach; and, from the North, Russia approaches with giant strides, across the Siberian steppes and the plains of Manchuria. The old Emperor, mummified long ago, begins to waken, in terror, to feel himself from day to day more tightly squeezed by the gentle civilisation of the Western races. He wants railroads, smoking factories. And swiftly he arms his soldiers, sends for rifles, cannons, all the pretty things which we ourselves have for dealing swift and distant Death.

CHAPTER XLI

June 30th.

THREE months have passed. I have seen again immense Peking of the ruins and the dust; I have taken the long ride to the tombs of Tsin; I have visited the Emperor of Seoul and his ancient Court. Now I am nearing home and the pretty islets which herald Japan are coming into sight. Now we are returning tired, all of us, and our heavy ironclad, as though it too were weary, seems to drag across the warm seas, under the crushing sun. The summer storms are hatching in great dark clouds with which the country seems enwrapped.

We stifle in Madame Prune's bay, in the corridor between the mountains, when we enter it. But how pretty it is! And now I feel more at home than on our last arrival; I rediscover the endless concert of the cicalas and the magnificence of the June green too, as fifteen years ago. Ah, the yearly green, how it sweeps away with its fair freshness the hues of the winter trees, cedars, pines or camellias, which reigned here alone when we came in December.

You would think that they are not the same stout healthy sailors whom the "Redoutable" now restores to Nagasaki; some of them you

certainly would not recognise again. Our crew has suffered long on the restless tainted waters of Takou, suffered, above all, more from the evil heat and confinement, than from the painful toil and continual expenditure of strength. Under the sun of China, to live, six or seven hundred strong, in an iron chest in which enormous coal fires are alight day and night, to hear an eternal din increased by the ringing of metal, to receive air which has already passed through hundreds of lungs, and which an artificial ventilation unwillingly sends you, to breathe through holes, to be constantly bathed in sweat! . . . It was time we reached here, where we shall be able to relax, to walk, run, forget.

Nearly four o'clock in the afternoon before I can at last reach the shore. In the street I find all the mousmés pretty; so much green growth, so many flowers, enchant me; after China, the grandiose and gloomy, where the faces are close and sullen, each of the little people that I see here makes me want to laugh, as do these little houses, little playthings, little gardens. And we are to stay in this island for one month: *Dieu*! How amusing life is going to be then!

Too late to go to Inamoto's mountain, where anyway she awaits me not; first then, I will go to pay my family calls, salute Madame Renoncule and my sisters-in-law; then I will go up and see my little friend

April-Shower—and perhaps, who knows, Madame Prune, for I feel in the mood this evening for a little jesting mockery, and the notion draws me thither.

The climbing road which leads to the dancer's little house is lonely as ever, and sad this time, under a stormy sombre sky, and tufts of grass, tokens of its neglect, have been sown by the month of June between the paving stones. At that door over there, that great cat sitting in dignity to watch the swallows pass, is, if I am not mistaken, Monsieur Swong-san himself, his small face pompously framed by his Medici collar of frilled muslin, fastened by a rosette under his chin. And behind the paper-shutter which has just opened, on the first floor, that little girl in the simple frock, who is rolling up her sleeves, soap in hand, for a plunge with both arms into a china tub, is April-Shower, the tiny fairy of the tea-houses and temples, devoting herself to-day to little household cares, like the least among mousmés.

And how dainty she is, surprised thus! I had never seen her in that humble cotton dress, nor imagined her as washing her own fine stockings with their separate big toe, carrying out the duties of a careful householder. Poor little mountebank, when all is said, despite the raiment of her trade, a little poor child, obliged perhaps to count her pennies more than once to keep up her household of three: herself, the old lady, and the cat. . . .

Swift she must adorn herself, a little in confusion, must put on a fine dress to offer me tea.

"No, no! Please! Go on wearing your little workgirl's dress, my little April-Shower; you seem more real to me like that and more touching; stay like that!"

As I climbed to Madame Prune's house, a sort of presentiment seized me of the too daring situation which might await me. It was the bath hour, in which the children of Nippon on summer evenings indulge without any mystery. In this high suburb, where manners have remained simpler than in the city, things still happen as they did in the days of Chrysanthème; people without guile, whether of one sex or the other, were refreshing themselves in wooden tubs or jars of pottery, set in the doorways or the little gardens, and their faces, emerging from the clear water, gave proof of their innocent well-being. . . . If Madame Prune, too, said I to myself, has gone to her bath! . . .

And she was in it!

When I turned the secret lock of the gateway, I saw at once a tub, which was already known to me of old, whence escaped a charming nape, as a flower from a flower vase. And the bather, lively and full of enjoyment in even the most prosaic affairs of life, was happily amusing herself all alone; going "Blou, blou, blou, brr!" as she blew with a great noise under water.

CHAPTER XLII

July 1st.

How things have changed in the footpaths on the mountain! A wild herbaceous vegetation has swallowed everything; it has almost submerged the tombs, like a fresh and innocent green sea, come up in silence from every side at once. As I climb to-day to the house of Inamoto the mousmé, under a lowering sky charged with showers, my feet are entangled in the grasses and ferns, and, along the wall which encloses the wood, the track which I made is no more to be seen.

Inamoto the mousmé—I had never expected that she would be there, waiting for me, and I feel gripped by emotion to see above the grey wall her forehead, and her two eyes which watch me coming.

"You are waiting for me? You knew then?"

"Yesterday," she said, "when the cannons were fired. I recognised the big French warship. Yours is the only one so big and painted black."

And I had thought that I should not find her again, or that seeing her again I should be disenchanted! I think that she has only grown a little, like the ferns in her park, but she is even more pretty, and I love the expression of her eyes more than ever.

Once more then we are here together and in the shelter of the other side of the wall, settled upon the ground and the grasses, our heads full of things which we wish to discuss, but obliged to keep to very simple words, and phrases quite childish, which express nothing at all.

And scarcely am I seated when, slap, I receive a smack on my left hand, slap, another on my right. "What's the matter with you, little mousmé? You were so demure before." Ah! the mosquitoes. . . . This winter they were unborn. In a minute, coming out by hundreds from the thick greenery, they are gathered round us like a cloud, and these friendly blows were to rid me of them. So then I, too, return her the like, and, slap, on her hands, and, slap, on her bare arms, where each prick makes a great spot instantaneously, rosier than the amber of her flesh. . . . With most of the Japanese ladies of my acquaintance such a game would degenerate at once; with Madame Prune, for instance, I would never adventure upon it; but, with Inamoto, there is no risk of it becoming more than modest child's-play.

"To-morrow," said she, "I will bring two fans, one for you and one for me; fanning yourself very hard is the best thing for it; they go away if you do that."

CHAPTER XLIII

July 2nd.

MADAME L'OURSE has not, like Inamoto, grown at all, but it seems to me that she has lost freshness, and that her smile, a little forward, reveals teeth which have grown longer. However, I continue to pay visits to her little old shop, whose beams are blackened and gnawed by time, first of all because she is on the way to the overhanging necropolis, almost in its shadow, and then because I can buy there just now those lovely lotus flowers, which are incomparable in the old cloisonné jars in my room on board ship. I am persuaded that certain very ancient forms of Chinese vases were invented solely for the lotus.

Flowers of June and July, flowers of full summer, the great rosy chalices are spread upon every Japanese lake. Madame Chrysanthême in the old days used to put some each morning in our room, and their scent, even more than the sad music of her mother's guitar, brings back to me the time of my doll's household—on the first floor, above the home of Monsieur Sucre and Madame Prune.

But had we to put up with such enervating heat in this bay in other days? I have no recollection of it, nor yet of these oppressive stormy skies. One

stifles between these mountains. Our poor weary sailors are far from regaining health; Nagasaki at this season is a bad place in which to stay for the anæmia patients from China, who have still to exist, as on the other side, in a fire chest. Amongst others they have just carried away to hospital the Breton fiancé who entrusted the little box of presents and the white dress to my care. And our admiral, whom Japan so miraculously restored after our last voyage, is again causing us anxiety; he who had recovered by the end of the winter his cheerful gaiety—and never failed, when I returned on board, to enquire, in various tones of imperturbable gravity, after the health of Madame Prune—he is never heard joking or laughing; the lines of weariness and suffering have appeared again upon his face.

CHAPTER XLIV

July 3rd.

A BITTER disillusion awaited me to-day at the Temple of the Fox, at Madame Stork's house, to which I had set out to pay a call upon my arrival, a duty to be performed without delay.

I had set out upon the paths of the shady mountain in heavy weather, under low clouds full of storms, which seem as if they will never leave us. The paths, like those which lead to Inamoto, were all changed, all swallowed in crazy grasses and tall ferns; one came across great strange butterflies, which settled with pretentious airs upon the highest fronds, as if to show themselves off; I breathed a damp warmth, saturated with the scent of plants; under a vault of an amazingly thick green growth everything seemed heated and wet; you would have thought yourself in a tropical country in the unhealthy season.

When I had got up there I saw Madame Stork from afar, in an attitude of watchfulness. She crouched under her veranda, garlanded with the same roses as in the winter, the same pale roses, blanched by the shade of the trees, but fuller blown, more numerous now, dropping their petals over the foot-path, like flowers dying of their own lavish prodigality.

And yet the lady showed me nothing but coldness when she caught sight of me, and contented herself with bowing me to a humble seat in a corner.

Her eyes were fixed, below and opposite us, on the open temple where three ladies of quality, accompanied by a little boy of not more than four, were just falling in prayer, after ringing on the clapper of mandrake-wood, ringing with all their strength as if for some important message to the god within. They were obviously very wealthy folk, belonging to a world into which my connections could give me no introduction. Faces to the altar, kneeling and on all fours, they showed us only their backs, or rather the bottom of their backs, and their prostrations, nose to floor, revealed, each time, underclothes in the most elegant and perfect taste. Their child, dressed like a doll, seemed to pray, as they did, with touching earnestness; but with him on the contrary underclothing had been suppressed, no doubt because of the temperature, and at each of his plunges forward his silk robe rose to show us, in innocent candour, his little bottom.

What could they really have to ask of the strange god, symbolised on the altar by these two or three objects of such mysterious simplicity of form? What particular notions of divinity tormented their little brains under their lustrous shell-like domes of hair? What agonies of the world beyond, of

the great enigma, kept them so many minutes on their knees before so inattentive a god, so malign and fugitive, whom one had constantly to call to order by clapping hands or ringing the mandrake bell ?

At last they rose, their devotions ended, and there followed an anxious moment for Madame Stork, who, as they delayed, came forward as far as the roadway. Would they visit the humble tea-house for refreshment, these lovely ladies, or would they rather go straight down again to Nagasaki, along the mossy pathway through the ferns ? . . .

Oh joy ! . . . Their hesitation ended ; they came our way ! Then did Madame Stork, with ecstatic face, fall upon all fours, murmuring in undertones little obsequious things that flowed away like the purling of a fountain.

It was delightful to see the visitors approaching, and crossing the torrent by the old granite arch overhung by drooping boughs. All three were pretty, their eyes just so much bridled as to hall-mark them with the seal of farthest Asia ; slim and almost bodiless, dressed in rare silks, which fell straight and betrayed no sign of contours, and whose padded trains spread stiffly, artificially, abroad ; their hair dressed and faces painted to perfection like the ladies whom the paintings of the best period of pure Japanese art represent. The

open pagoda behind them made an ultra-bizarre background of alien worship. Above them was the half-night of the branches, of bunched boughs, with a corner of the mountain retreating into the great clouds close at hand. And below was the steep descent of torrent and footpath, plunging side by side into an ever deepening green darkness, beneath layers of boughs laid close upon each other amongst the pale grey polished boulders which looked like the foreheads and the backs of elephants sprawling in the deep fern.

The three beauteous ladies came softly on, smiling vaguely, their souls, it may be, still in prayer to the god who reigns here. And the pretty cascades, escaping under the grasses and the harts-tongues, played them a quiet and discreet entrance march, like a tinkling upon glass rods.

They sat down in the place of honour, and Madame Stork, still upon all fours, received a long order from them, packed with detail, confidential so it seemed, and interspersed with salutations which they scarcely ever stopped giving and returning. I noticed that they only spoke in "degozarimas," which, as all the world knows, is the most elegant mode, and consists in interposing that word between each verb and its ending. I had never heard Madame Stork express herself with so much distinction nor approve herself so conversant with the ways of the polite world.

But what on earth could the ladies have been ordering? Madame Stork, now very busy, had rolled up her sleeves and washed her hands at the dancing spring in the nearest grotto. She then began to knead with her fingers some dense, heavy and blackish substance, which seemed very resistant, in a large porcelain bowl.

Of this kneading there presently resulted some twenty darkish balls, as big as oranges; Madame Stork, who had been handling them so rudely, seemed afraid to touch them even with the tips of her fingers, now that they were finished; to avoid so much as ruffling them, she served them to the ladies with the aid of little sticks, as cautiously as a cat that fears to singe itself; and the balls fell, bump, bump, on the plates, like lumps of putty or cement.

After they had nibbled at a few little sweetmeats, each of these distinguished ladies, with a thousand little airs, swallowed half a dozen of the compact black objects. Ostriches would have died of them on the spot. The infant of the simplified small-clothes swallowed three. And when it came to paying their bill, there was a dialogue in the following terms:

"How many degozarimasu do we owe you?"

"It amounts to degozarimasu two francs seventy-five centimes."*

* Ikoura degozarimasuka? Itchi yen ni djou sen degozarimasu.

But you can understand that the clumsy translation I have made is only too powerless to render the play of delightful intonations, all the discreet consideration which Madame Stork, if only by her very way of spinning out each syllable, is able to introduce into the revelation of the account. And her rather stubborn little curtsey, sketched at the end of the phrase to make it the more piquant, came to soften it with the least little suggestion of comicality.

Then the ladies, unwilling to be behind her in good manners, offered each in turn their bits of money, little finger raised, imitating the mischievous air of a monkey offering a piece of sugar to another monkey, whilst making pretence of disputing it with him in a little friendly farce. . . .

Certainly nowhere but in Japan does such friendly and real *savoir-vivre* obtain!

When at last the beauties had gone, Madame Stork, after a last long prostration, did her best to renew relations with me and to mollify me by her kittenish ways. But the blow had struck home. I knew now that I was nothing more to her than one of those chance acquaintances whom one is scarcely willing to admit to in front of the really smartest of one's clientèle.

CHAPTER XLV

July 25th.

THE butterflies along Madame Stork's pathway were but vulgar insects compared with that which cruised this evening above my mother-in-law's garden.

In the usual half-light of the house we had tea at four o'clock sitting on white mats on the floor itself, lazily waving our fans, as much for our refreshing as to scare away a few indiscreet mosquitoes. Madame Prune—for she was there, having taken to calling assiduously upon Madame Renoncule since my return to the country—Madame Prune, so subject to the vapours during the dog-days, opened with one hand the folds of her corsage to fan her stomach, and so sent happy little knavish puffs upon an intimate exploration, which the clasped girdle at her waist modestly prevented from venturing too far. Three of my young nephews, children of five or six, were seated with us, behaving beautifully and struggling against sleep. We were all, as usual, staring at the everlasting artificial landscape, which is the pride of the house, at its dwarf trees, its dwarf mountains, admiring themselves in the little mummified river with its surface tarnished with dust. A ray of

sunshine passed above these sickly things, without touching them, a luminous trail which could not reach even the top of the rockeries, grown green with damp, or the counterfeit cedars with their ancient look, and nothing, in this morbid place, could have made one foresee the visit of the butterfly which suddenly descended upon us from over the wall. It was of those astonishing creatures which exotic vegetation brings forth, with wings extravagantly cut, too large and too sumptuous for the frail, featherweight body which scarcely could support them. It flew clumsily and showily, plaything for the least puff of air that might be stirring; it stayed, as though intentionally, in the ray of sunshine, which made of it a brilliant and luminous little thing above the gloomy scene that lay wholly in dead shadow. And the contrast with this eye-deceiving, pigmy garden gave the butterfly so much importance that it seemed of supernatural size. It stayed fluttering about us for a long time, a precious and a lovely thing, without settling anywhere. In other countries, children who had seen it would have been after it, waving their hats to catch it; my little Japanese nephews, on the other hand, never stirred, contenting themselves with watching it; all the while the onyx circles of their pupils rolled from right to left in the narrow slit of eyelids, following the flight which was enchanting them; doubtless

they were storing up in their brains documents of which later to compose those designs and paintings in which the Japanese excel in rendering, whilst they exaggerate them, the attitudes of insects and the grace of flowers.

When the butterfly had finished his display, he went off to please other eyes elsewhere. And never had I so clearly realised that there are innocent little beings which are purely decorative, created solely for the charm of their colouring or their form. . . . But then, having done so much, why not have invented things still more delightful? Why are there, side by side with a few butterflies and beetles which are really rather wonderful, these thousands of dull and insignificant others, which are like attempts that ought to be destroyed?

Nothing is so disturbing to the soul as the perception, amongst created things, of indications of fumbling or powerlessness. And still more, to come upon the proofs of thought, design, calculation, which are undeniably present, but at the same time so naïve, clumsy, and short-sighted. Thus, among a thousand examples, the thorns on the stems of roses seem to prove clearly that, ages perhaps, before the creation of man, the human hand, the only thing capable of attempting to pluck them, had been foreseen. But then, why not have been able to foresee the knife or

scissors which would later come to mock at the childish means of defence ?

My mother-in-law, after the butterfly's departure, had drawn from a red silk case her long guitar, which now holds charm or anguish for me. The chords began to wail something like a hymn to the unknown. And the onyx eyes of the three children, who had nothing more to watch in the empty garden, grew immobile once more ; but they did not grow sleepy ; their feline young brains, subtle and doubtless now clearer, became interested in the mystery of the sounds, felt themselves aroused and enthralled, without being able to define the cause. . . .

Of all the mysteries through which our lives pass, in astonishment and unrest, with never a comprehension of any of them, that of music is, I think, one of the most baffling : that such a sequence or such a collection of notes—scarcely different from another merely banal—can paint us epochs, races, regions of the earth or elsewhere ; bring us sorrows, fears of some unknown future state, or perhaps from others passed through countless centuries ago ; give us (as, for instance, do certain fragments from Bach or César Franck), the vision and almost the assurance of a heavenly life to come ; or again, perhaps, make us realise something (such as this woman's guitar chants to me) of ferocious lower worlds, terrifying and for ever alien of idea, wholly Japanese in spirit. . . .

CHAPTER XLVI

REPATRIATION OF THE ZOUAVES

August.

"To the Admiral,

"I am in receipt of your dispatch and have just announced it to the Battalion; the men gave three cheers in your honour.

"You were not mistaken, the salute with our colours was a salute from the 2nd Brigade to our brothers of the Fleet, who, after having so ably sketched out our task for us at the opening of the campaign, then took over for months the heavy, painful and thankless task of looking after our welfare.

"But in the minds of us all, the salute was also, and above all, to go to you, Admiral, whose ardent love of his country we have felt vibrate, whom we all love and would be happy to serve. . . .

"Etc.,

"——, Colonel,

"Commanding the **th Regiment of the Line."

When I re-read that very military, but also very simple and affecting letter, which our dear Admiral has set aside amongst his papers to keep, the scene

of the Zouaves' departure suddenly springs up again in my memory.

The place is sinister, remote: the gulf of Petchili. The sea inert, under the burden of a colourless sky which seems to bow beneath fatigue and fever. And then, of a sudden, in the heavy atmosphere, in the midst of the dejected silence, a magnificent young clamour; some hundreds of young children of France, wildly giving tongue, whilst, before their eyes, dip in grandiose farewell those sublime rags which are called "the colours."

The men who yelled, full-throated, were sailors and Zouaves. The Zouaves were returning to their home villages, or to their second home, Algeria. But the sailors were staying behind; for an unknown number of long months their exile must still last. And this took place, these cheers and farewells, at the extremity of a stifling gulf of the Yellow Sea, in the season of the July storms, the horrible Chinese dog-days. Our "Redoutable"—though her crew, for a moment, went so wild with young enthusiasm—lay lazily motionless, seemed dead, between the mud-coloured skies and the leaden sea; and her iron walls condensed, as they did each day, the damp warmth in which robust health eventually grew anæmic and the face of the twenty-year old pale. On the other hand, the lighter packet-boat, which was to carry the thousand Zouaves, was moving at this moment with

an appearance of ease over the sleepy sea; it so manœuvred as to pass beneath the stern of our enormous ironclad, to pay our Admiral the salute due from those whose work was over and who were about to go.

We had known these Zouaves for a long time, and a peculiar kind of brotherliness united our men to them. It was we who, a year earlier, had settled them, at the foot of the Great Wall, in the Chinese fort which they had occupied for the winter; and then we had been responsible for feeding them and in this forgotten corner keeping them in touch with the rest of the world. When, in the end, some of their men fell under Russian fire, we came to attend their funeral, our Admiral himself conducting the mourning party—a cortège which I can still see, under the pallid light of a November morning, in the first autumn chill, whilst the mournful Chinese willows dropped their leaves upon us. . . . And in memory of that and a thousand other things their battalion had called themselves "Admiral Pottier's battalion."

Now the time was come for them to leave the fearsome Yellow Empire. But for twenty, who slept in the land of exile, in the little improvised cemetery of Ning-Hai, they were returning to Europe. Our sailors, all the previous night, on a disturbed and dangerous sea, had laboured over the embarkation of their munitions and baggage—

and done it with their customary self-abnegation, without a murmur, without asking themselves: "Why are they going, these Zouaves? Why are all the soldiers going, whilst there is no question of return for us sailors, fatally pledged by the very conditions of this particular campaign to obscure labours and crushing fatigue? . . ."

So the packet-boat which was carrying "Admiral Pottier's battalion" came quietly up to the "Redoutable" with all the Zouaves on deck, in serried ranks, turning hundreds of bronzed heads, capped with scarlet bonnets, towards us. It was at the setting of the sun, which, though itself invisible, diffused an evil, ruddy light through the thick skies and over the muddy seas; the horizon's ring was indefinitely drawn, lost in the vapours of storms which ever menaced us and never broke; and here and there monstrous black clouds of smoke, like the panting of volcanoes, blown by the warships, completed the dismal ugliness of a view with which we had become familiar through many months in the gulf of Takou.

However, we had brought all our sailors on deck to watch the Zouaves go. And when the band of the "Redoutable" broke into the Marseillaise in their honour, one first saw, on the approaching packet, the hundreds of red caps fall, with one concerted movement, disclosing the velvet of shorn

hair on dark and fair heads; then there broke out the usual cries: "Long live the sailors! Long live the Admiral!"—the sailors replying: "Long live the Zouaves!"

At some Quartermaster's whistle or word of command, the volume of cheering became orderly, so that words emerged in unison, and were clearly heard. And the splendid noise of these men's voices drowned the sound of the drums and brass, shook each time the dreary air, whilst the flags of the two ships dipped and rose again in salute, their wide tricolour bunting showing up sharply against the sad hues of sea and sky.

But, since this, even now, went no further than the customary ceremonial of leave-taking, the Commanding Officer of the Zouaves improvised a thing which had never been seen before: on passing the stern of the ironclad, under the gallery on which the Admiral stood, he unfurled the battalion's standard, the African colours, and lowered it before him.

Then, at the sight, which none had expected, of their old three-coloured fetish, cheers yet more tremendous rose again from the thousand lungs of the exiles—come hither, to this gloomy gulf, to sacrifice without a murmur their years of youth, and to risk death. There was something beautiful and living in all this! Enthusiasm of men—young, brave and simple—for ideas which are simple, too,

but superbly generous—and doubtless eternal, despite the efforts of a modern sect to destroy them.

The shouts came to an end and silence had just fallen, when a signaller came up to tell me that I was wanted by the Admiral in the gallery.

"I wanted to know," he said, "if you were on the bridge and took part in it? Wasn't it splendid? . . ."

And whilst he still smilingly saluted the Zouaves' ship as it drew away, I saw that his eyes were filmed with tears.

Their packet rapidly dwindled away, a little fugitive thing, trailing its black smoke into the distance of that shapeless nothingness and neutral shade, the sea. It seemed so unlikely that this absurd small thing, drowned in the infinite emptiness, should one day reach France, for this evening one felt it to be at a dizzying distance, beyond continents and oceans; yet one knew that at the end of a month, of five or six weeks, it would get there; so a few of the sailors who had but now been shouting so joyfully, watched, away down in the greyness of the evening, the disappearance of that atom of a packet boat, with a different expression on their faces, and, in their eyes, the sadness of children.

CHAPTER XLVII

September 23rd.

TOWARDS the middle of July, the "Redoutable" had left Nagasaki to return to China, to Taku, her wearisome station. Then, after two months' painful work, the re-embarkation of the expeditionary force was finished, and we set our course for the north of Japan, that the whole crew might inhale a little clean, cold air, before going down again to the coast of Cochin-China, which is very hot and enervating.

And to-day we have anchored off Yokohama, in such fresh weather as to restore life to the anæmic. All the same, we should have preferred Nagasaki, but there is no room for question about it in our winter's programme, and so doubtless we must put on our mourning, for we shall never see it again.

Yokohama, fifteen years ago, was already the most Europeanised city in Japan. And since then benevolent Progress has advanced so fast that there is nothing recognisable left of it. In the streets, which electric wires now envelop like the endless threads of an immense spider's web, what a pitiful masquerade. Bowler hats of all styles, little suits, the colour of puce or rats' tails, all the old stock

of clothes unsaleable in Europe, poured out, take 'em or leave 'em, on these gentlemen who now scarcely ever dress in silks. Vast modern counting-houses in which for American export are sold, wholesale, imitations, faked deformities of those *objets d'art*, which are too mannered for my taste, but unusual and graceful, which in older days the Japanese composed with so much patience and dreamy thought.

Soldiers, everywhere there are soldiers, regiments on manœuvres or parade; war reigns.

And to brim the measure, as I turned the corner of a road, I was buttonholed, interviewed, briskly and in English, by a journalist with a yellow face, who wore a frock-coat and top-hat. . . . No! I return aboard, unwilling to learn anything more of this side of Japan. . . .

CHAPTER XLVIII

October 5th.

And I remained firm with regard to this city and its surroundings up to the time we left it.

Some of my comrades went to visit the great neighbouring arsenal; they found there such a concentration, and clouds of black smoke, as one sees on the Thames, and came back, stupefied by the number of ships and war machines which night and day were feverishly being got ready there.

Others went to Tokio to accompany our Admiral to a reception by their Japanese majesties. In the streets they encountered bands of students, demonstrating against foreigners, and one of them, maliciously upset out of his chair, had his arm broken. They saw the Empress, looking, nowadays, like a respectable little woman dressed by a good firm in Paris, elegant still, despite this disguise, still pretty, still almost young beneath her plaster mask. All the time she wore that air, which she had in the old days, of a goddess offended that any should dare to look at her.

But how much do I prefer to have never seen her again, and to rest upon that first exquisite vision: that Springtide Empress, in the midst of

her gardens, environed by folly-topped chrysanthemums, and, in such raiment as was never seen, looking unlike any terrestrial creature.

So I have never again set foot on shore in this neo-Japan, throughout the length of our visit.

Now we are going down towards the south again, easily, through the Inner Sea, and this evening, at nightfall, we dropped anchor for two days before Miyasima, the sacred isle, which is governed by strange and special laws. At that hour, the island seemed to us a place of mystery, unwilling to allow itself to be too clearly seen. It must surely be a block of tall mountains, but we only see the deliciously green base where it borders upon the beaches and the sea: all the rest is veiled from us by the jealous guardian mists, which for a little more would come down and trail across the waters.

Against all expectation, it seemed to have been decided that we are to stop two or three weeks at Nagasaki on our way, for repairs to the vessel, and it comes as a holiday almost, revisiting that dainty feminine world, in its pretty bay. There at least many nooks of the past exist unaltered! And we will fill our eyes and our memories a last time with a thousand things all drawing to an end, which to-morrow will have vanished to make way for the uttermost of vulgar ugliness.

For when all is said, Japan is nothing save for her gracefulness and the incomparable charm of

the places dedicated to her religion. Once all that has vanished before the breath of beneficent "Progress," what will there be left? The ugliest people in the world, physically speaking. And an excitable, quarrelsome, pride-puffed people, envious of the good fortune of others, handling, with the cruelty and adroitness of monkeys, the machines and explosives whose secrets we were so unspeakably wanting in foresight as to hand over to them. A very small people, which will be, in the midst of the huge yellow family, the hate-ferment against our white races, the provoker of slaughter and invasions in the future.

CHAPTER XLIX

Sunday, October 6th.

REALLY, sometimes these Japanese confound you, extort of a sudden your unreserved admiration, by some pure and ideal conception of art; then, for a time, you forget their ridiculousness, their utter absurdity, their overweening vanity; they hold you under a spell.

For example, this sacred isle of Miyasima, this Eden-refuge in which it is forbidden to slay a beast or cut down a tree, in which none has the right *to be born or to die*! . . . No other spot on earth can be compared to it, and the men, who, in olden times, thought to preserve it by such laws, were marvellous dreamers.

Since yesterday, since we came and dropped anchor opposite it, the same low cloudy sky still weighs upon the holy island; it hides it in part, robs us of all its higher forests, as would a veil hung before a sanctuary, and this adds still more to the impression which it makes; one would say that through its summit it is in touch with the god of the clouds.

A little warm rain which scarcely wets me, and seems perfumed with the essence of forest plants, begins to fall, when to-day I make my way in the

whaler to Miyasima's tranquil beach. And first I see old temples, or rather, old temple gateways, coming right down into the water, holy gates perched upon piles, and reflected in the little enclosed sea, which knows no serious storms. I see, too, a village: but it does not look real, so prettily are the little houses arranged among the little gardens of rare plants; one would think it a village with no idea of utility, invented and built solely for the pleasure of the eyes. And above it, the dense green growth begins at once, the inviolable secular forest, which loses itself in the grey clouds. . . .

An isle from which it was intended to banish all suffering, even for the beasts, even for the trees, and where none has the right to be born or to die! . . . When any are sick, when a woman is near to being a mother, swift they are borne away in junks, to one of the big islands round about, which are lands of sorrow like the rest of the world. But here is no weeping, no wailing, no mourning. And peace, too, is here, security for the birds of the air, for the fallow deer and the roe deer of the forest. . . .

And now I find myself upon the fine sand of the shore, and greenness encompasses me on all sides, damp green which neighbours, above my head, with the low sky, and soon melts into the mystery of the clouds. On either side of the shadowy road which appears before me, tea-houses

open. They alternate with tiny kiosks for the service of pilgrims, who flow here from every point of the Nippon archipelago; little gods are sold in them, little emblems carved in the wood of some tree—dead in its own gentle fashion, of course, or none would have dared to cut it.

Then comes a path, and leads me to the near-by bay, which, in the immense worshipping-place which the whole island forms, plays perhaps the part of the altar. A way sealed with the impression of such thoughtful serenity that one is astonished to meet passers-by, Japanese just like those of other parts, a few smiling mousmés exactly as if this were some ordinary road. On the side nearest the sea it is bordered by a line of little religious structures, of granite, which succeed one another like the balusters upon a terrace—always the same little structures with horned roofs, of a shape unalterable since the very earliest times, and which, from one end of Japan to the other, announce the approach of temples or burial grounds, awaking for the initiated the idea of the unknown, or of death. On the mountain side it is dominated by overhanging boughs and stooping ferns; trees at whose age one cannot guess stretch their over-long and weary branches, which men have carefully propped with pillars of wood or stone; cycas, which would be as tall as African palms, but which bend, bowed with age, from

bamboo struts, and supports of plaited cords, to prolong their uncertain lives to the uttermost possible. And vague footpaths mount vertically across this kingdom of plants and lose themselves in the obscurity above, amongst the over-dense undergrowth, amongst the rain-clouds and the storms for ever overhanging; footpaths, or perhaps only tracks of the forest beasts, which here are innocent, to whom none do ill.

Of temples, properly speaking, there are none; the isle itself is the temple, and, as I said, the bay is the tabernacle. To close the great shadowy serenity of the bay to the profane, holy gates with many arches guard the entrance, advance, like mute imposing sentinels, some little way into the sea; they are very lofty, very pure in the ancient style, and parts of them are beginning to rot with old age, especially towards their bases, where for ever they receive the eternal damp kiss of Benten, the goddess of these parts. Above their reflection, eternally reversed, which lengthens them a half, they seem immense and too smoothly finished to be real.

One can, if one wishes, circle the bay; but the pilgrims' road crosses it by a holy bridge, which is borne on piles and covered in, all its length, with a roof of cedar-wood planks.

On either side of this light way, motionless on the calm water, emblems and mythological paintings

follow one another like stations upon some Road of the Cross; there is an air of antiquity about it which makes your flesh creep; and above all others, you see Benten, the pale thin goddess of the sea, wrapped about with her long hair streaming like sea water.

And as I followed the line of the strand, I came upon a narrow lawn of velvety grass, crushed between the beach and the perpendicular mountain with its green mantle. A hamlet of fisher-folk is there, of a heavenly tranquillity, surrounded by azaleas in rosy bloom. Before the doors of their cabins sat half-naked men of superb muscular development, mending their nets; a scene from the golden age. (The fish alone get no benefit of the general truce: they are caught and eaten. Besides, they constitute the principal nourishment of the Japanese, who would not know how to do without them.)

Further away, a spring gushed in a natural basin, and suddenly a troop of fallow deer, with their fawns, came down from the forest to drink. For fear of scaring them, I had at first slackened my pace, but I soon saw that they had no fear. And a moment later, we even found ourselves walking together through the same shady footpath, and they were so close to me that I felt their breath on my hand.

In the evening, as I came back by the bay,

which the great gateways in the water guard, still another troop of deer amused itself by crossing the frail holy bridge, between the images of the gods and goddesses. And when they reached the end, they were seized by a sudden whim for speed, a whim into which most assuredly no fear entered; so they fled away like the wind, then disappeared into the paths of the overhanging mountain, and soon doubtless into the near shadows—whither some divinity of hereabouts must have summoned them.

CHAPTER L

Monday, October 7th.

We are leaving this morning without having ever seen the summit of the isle of forests—the dome, as one might call it, of this immense green temple—for the same curtain of clouds persistently envelops it. And soon the abrupt, magnificently green tapestried banks disappear; so, too, disappear the holy gateways, sentinel-like on the margin, with their long reflections in the water. We go tranquilly over this Inner Sea, which is like an immense lake with happy borders. The huge old junks, which have sails like draped curtains, still circulate, in every sense of the expression, driven to-day by a rosy gentle breeze, summer-warm. Here and there, at the extremities of pretty bays, one sees neat villages, of little cedar-wood houses, always with some old pagoda perched above them, to protect them, in a place of shadows and great trees. At greater intervals come Samurai castles; fortresses with white walls and black dungeons—like the many-roofed Chinese dungeons, striking at once and unmistakably the note of farthest Asia. And, in Japan, agriculture does not make the countryside less beautiful as with us; the fields and rice-plots are thousands of

little super-imposed terraces; on the sides of the hills, in the distance, they look like innumerable green hatchings.

It is, in itself, for any people, a rare privilege, and a pledge for its existence, to be an *island people*; but above all is it a unique chance that it should have an inner sea, a sea absolutely to itself, on which it can in complete security open its arsenals and manœuvre its squadrons.

CHAPTER LI

Thursday, October 10th.

BEFORE leaving the Inner Sea this morning, we had stopped for a last day or two by some villages on its banks; villages every one alike, in which the same physical activity, and the same tranquillity of spirit, seemed to rule. There were little harbours encumbered with fishing junks, where one met the sharp smell of brine. There were little houses of fine and delicate craftsmanship, of ideal cleanliness, keeping the brightness of new wood. The population was alert and vigorous, singularly different from that of the towns, bronzed by the sea air, strongly and thickly built, with red blood in their cheeks. The men went naked like antique statues, and were often admirable, looking, with their stocky frames and excessive muscular development, like miniatures of the Farnese Hercules. To tell the truth the women lacked grace, despite their healthy hue and well ordered coils of hair; they were too solid, too stumpy, with great red hands. And innumerable little children were scattered about everywhere, choking the paths, playing on the sands, and squatting in rows on the edges of the junks like swarms of sparrows. It will not be long before

this people is overcrowded on its islands, and it must, most fatefully, spill itself elsewhere.

In the countryside, as one goes farther from the shore, one finds the same laborious broad-shouldered population; it is no longer in fishing that the energy of the men is expended here; it goes into working the Japanese soil, of which each little parcel is utilised with great care. The thousands of rice plots in terraces, which one sees *en masse*, are kept fresh by endless rivulets in little bamboo conduits, ingenious little aqueducts; all this must have already cost an enormous amount of labour and bears witness to the hereditary patience of many generations of indefatigable cultivators.

It is in these quiet fields that the Mikado counts upon finding, when the time has come, the reserves for his armies. And these little super-muscular peasants will make astonishing soldiers, with their wide, low, obstinate brows, their sideways cat-like glances, sober from father to son from the very beginnings, without nerves and so without fear of the running of red blood, having besides but two dreams, two cults, that of their native soil and that of their humble ancestors.

These peasants were of the privileged and the happy of this world, until the day when the crazy contagion, which we call progress, made its appearance in their country. But now here is alcohol beginning to infiltrate into the midst of their calm

villages; here are the crushing taxes, augmented each year, to pay for the new guns, the new battleships, for all the infernal machines; already they complain that they cannot live. And soon they will be sent, by thousands and hundreds of thousands, to strew with their corpses the plains of Manchuria, where the inevitable and not far distant war must unroll. . . . Poor little Japanese peasants!

So, during the morning, we left to-day the delicious old-time lake, the Inner Sea. And this evening, at nightfall, we came back to drop anchor in the bay of a thousand lights, before the city of Madame Prune; home again, for by now, one need scarcely say, we almost feel ourselves citizens of Nagasaki.

Moreover, a piece of good news was waiting for us on arrival, a despatch announcing that the "Redoutable" will return to France next January, after her twenty months' cruise. And every one of us, officers and men, went to sleep happy.

CHAPTER LII

Tuesday, October 15th.

AFTER much shuffling and many counter-orders, we are here again in Nagasaki after all, which I had thought I should never see again. I chuckled over it to myself early this morning, at réveillé, and, before ever I land, am getting much amusement out of it! At least three weeks to stay here, and during the most delightful season of the year, when the little gardens are full of flowers, and the warm October sun ripens the tangerines and the golden *kakis* from high up in a sky that is always blue.

My joyful haste to dress and run off is like a return of what I used to feel when quite a child, each time that I come to stay with my cousins in the Midi, where my holidays were spent; I could not keep still, on the first morning, in my hurry to go and rejoin my little companions of the year before, to go and revisit those nooks in the woods where we had played so many games, the corners of the vineyards where we had laughed so much in the autumn grape-harvests. . . .

And so I find myself to-day, or not far from it, which proves most decidedly that Japan still possesses a unique charm and quaint enchantment. Quick ashore, quick then a runner's chair, and at

last I am in the pretty streets, collecting as I pass bows from various little friends, from mousmés, geishas, toy-sellers, who laugh beneath the sunshine, in the midst of a holiday scene of colour and light.

Madame L'Ourse's shop glows from afar, like an enormous fresh bouquet on a dark background ; all her window is full of pink roses and yellow chrysanthemums. Opposite, the enormous foundations of the necropolis and the temples, walls or primitive rocks, have a decoration, like flying garlands of green lace, of maidenhair, with here and there the falling clusters of campanula.

Naturally I am going to Inamoto, the mousmé, first. That she who is not expecting me may catch sight of me, I must risk a visit to the court of the pagoda where she lives, and take up an observation post behind the trunk of a five hundred year old cedar. Never have I waited so long, hidden and observing all, in this venerable place where Inamoto lives, wherein was formed her spirit, so singular and so reverential towards all the ancient symbols of the place. Grass grows between the large flagstones of the court, whither the faithful surely cannot often come ; cycas spring in the middle upon giant stems, and the tree which shelters me stretches astonishingly long branches, which would have been broken a century ago if props did not support them here and there. All

about are terraces carrying granite Buddhas and tombs: the mass of the mountain, full of sepultures, dominates the place. Before me is the ancient cedar temple, once painted, gilded, and lacquered, to-day mouldering and the colour of dust: on either side of the closed door the two guardians of the threshold, shut up in cages like dangerous wild beasts, flash ferocious glances, as they have flashed them for centuries, from their great eyes, and maintain their gestures of fury.

I watch like a trapper in the forest. I know perfectly well that nothing very terrible can take place here, in Japan; but I should so regret to cause her the least annoyance, poor innocent little thing whom I am come to disturb! . . . Not a soul. . . . No noise but that of the light fall of October leaves. And such a calm about me, such calm as those two infuriated brutes in their cages fail utterly to explain. . . . The silence begins to trouble me. Is it possible that everything here has been deserted, and my little friend stolen away?

With the groaning of an old lock the temple gate at last opens, and Inamoto herself appears, in a simple little dress, her sleeves rolled back, a broom in her hands, sweeping the dead leaves strewn upon the steps. Oh, so pretty, between the two atrocious grimaces of the threshold divinities, who gnash their teeth behind their bars.

A sudden rosy cloud shows on her cheeks; in less than a second she has thrown her broom down, rolled down her pagoda sleeves, one after the other, to run towards me in a burst of childlike frank friendship.

But how her lack of fear, when she is usually so fearful, astonishes me!

It seems that I have come at a miraculously well-chosen moment; her little brothers are at school; her servant in the city; her father who never, never goes out, has left but a moment before to conduct a friend, another bonze, to his last resting place. Locked is the great lower gate, by which any pilgrim might come. So our security is complete, and we are safe at home.

I have brought for her from the holy isle a little goddess of the sea, of ivory, which she hides within her dress. And she laughs, her pretty mousmé laugh, which is not commonplace like the rest; she laughs because she is pleased, touched, because she is young, because the sunlight is clear, the weather limpid and soothing.

"Would you like to come and see our temple?" she suggests.

And we penetrate into the obscure old sanctuary, filled with uneasy symbols, contorted shapes, and menacing gestures half sketched in the shadows. Only at the heart of it is there a little peace, where the golden lotus, in great vases, spreads and droops

with the grace of natural flowers, before a sort of tabernacle veiled with ancient brocade. But, at the sides, gods of human stature, ranged along the walls, gesticulate with fury. And on the roof, hidden in the vaulting, vague things, half reptile, half roots or entrails, look down on us with great equivocal eyes.

"Would you like to see my house?" she then said.

And, after politely slipping my shoes off, we enter a house centuries old, but clean and white, where the bareness of the walls and the beauty of a bronze vase, filled with flowers, witness to the distinction of my hostess' family. The Ancestors' altar, of red lacquer and gold, much smoked by incense, is still very beautiful, and very long are the genealogies inscribed upon the holy tablets.

Suddenly terrified, as though she had committed sacrilege in showing me all this, my little friend looked at me with a burning question in the depths of her eyes. But my eyes showed nothing ironical, respect rather, and I was not smiling. So her youthful conscience grows calm again; she opens coffers shaped like cupboards, for me, each enclosing a gilded divinity whom she worships.

And so we find ourselves back in the same wood together, the wood which almost each evening shall unite us again for at least three more weeks—when I had really believed that all was ended, that

between us had fallen the leaden curtain of a separation beyond recall, without possibility of writing to each other, sharpened by immediate and eternal silence. . . .

"What a pity," Mademoiselle April-Shower said to me an hour later, sitting on the white matting on her floor with Monsieur Swong in her arms—"What a pity that you did not come straight to us this morning! . . . My grandmother would have shown you the way. . . . You should have gone straight to the pagoda of the Jade Horse, where there was a great fête and religious dances; we were nearly all there, all the best dancers in Nagasaki, and I was set high up, as if I was on a cloud; I played the part of a goddess and I threw golden arrows. But," she added, "now listen, to-morrow afternoon is the geishas' and maikos' holiday; it only happens once a year; we shall all appear beautifully dressed in groups, under magnificent canopies, and we shall represent scenes from history, on platforms put up for us in the streets. At least you must not miss that." . . .

As I came closer to Madame Renoncule's house, I made laudable efforts to work up some emotion. The fact was that I was about to meet the Pinson couple, my mother-in-law having told me, earlier on, that when autumn came they would be setting up house with her.

Superfluous worry, useless troubling of my

heart; following upon a wonder-working pilgrimage to a certain temple, much recommended for such obstinate cases as hers, Madame Chrysanthême, after fourteen barren years of marriage, had suddenly found herself in a far advanced stage of the interesting condition, which did not allow her to dream of a longer journey—and it was not without some trace of maternal pride that Madame Renoncule allowed me to hear of her hopes.

Come, then, the die is cast, and we shall not meet again. After all, it is better so. And then one should put oneself in one's neighbour's place: might not Monsieur Pinson have felt a little awkward when we were introduced?

Mon Dieu! but what is happening in Madame Prune's? It surely cannot be as with Madame Chrysanthême, the results of a too efficacious pilgrimage? . . . No, really, I refuse to believe that. . . . However, I see a doctor coming out of her house; and then, too, old busybodies with faces of grave import. And I hurry forward, much perplexed.

The kindly dame is stretched upon a light mattress; her shape disguised by a *fton*—which is a covering with two holes fitted with sleeves through which to slip the arms. Her face, which was supported on a little ebony stand, seemed to

me rather more plump, but with something calmer, less provocative, in its expression. And I was particularly surprised at the very little emotion which my presence aroused in her.

Two ladies upon their knees were busied in making her swallow a prayer, written upon rice-paper which they crushed into a ball, like a pill. And a person stood there whom I have not seen for fifteen years, but who certainly recognised me, and whom a beauty spot on the left nostril helped me, too, to identify: Mademoiselle Dédé, the old servant in the Sucre and Prune household, to-day become an imposing matron, a little worn, but pleasant still.

With a special smile, full of intimate confidences, Mademoiselle Dédé, who saw my distress, gave me at once to understand that it was nothing serious.

In the garden, whither she then led me—for I did not prolong an interview which scarcely seemed to give pleasure—she explained to me that Madame Prune, after an interminable youth, was at last, and indeed triumphantly, passing through a certain crisis, a certain turning-point in life by which all other women pass, though in general many years earlier.

And she told me, too, how she, Dédé-San, after having devoted fourteen years of her youth to one

of the most frequented houses in Nagasaki, found herself to-day stripped of so many, many illusions, that she has determined to retire, with her little savings, under the indulgent protection of Madame Prune.

CHAPTER LIII

Wednesday, October 16th.

"DON'T miss that, at least!" Mademoiselle April-Shower had said to me yesterday, speaking of to-day's pageant.

And the lovely sunshine sees me sauntering, at one o'clock, in the streets through which the little fairies are to pass.

A first canopy advances slowly, still in the distance, followed by a crowd of the curious. It is round and looks like an immense flat umbrella. Above it nods a crazy vegetation of pink lotus, far larger than in nature. It is very neatly encircled by a large fringe of funereal velvet, in which one can trace this people's taste for black and for precision of contour. A single man carries the edifice, though with difficulty, by a pole in its centre, like the stick of an umbrella. And draperies of gold brocade, which fall as half-closed inner curtains, allow you glimpses of five or six noble dames of olden days, each but some twelve years old; their faces seeming the more child-like for the solemn wigs which frame them—and painted and made up with a positively stupefying and alien art. But I cannot recognise any one in that little company. Let us move on!

A quarter of an hour later I come upon another canopy, encircled with black velvet like the last, but above which maple branches with red leaves imitate forest undergrowth. Smiles greet me from beneath it: two or three of the unreal little ladies glimpsed between the golden brocade curtains, bid me good-day; dancers, whose acquaintance I have vaguely made in tea-houses. But this is not what I am looking for. Move on again!

A third canopy appears in the distance, with its black fringe. This one is topped by a cherry-tree in flower, each branch snow-powdered with fresh white petals; a cherry-tree so well imitated that it almost brings an impression of the fragility of spring into this warm autumn day. Furthermore, it is the most richly ornamented, and is followed by the largest crowd: behind it trail a hundred children, mouskos * or mousmés, who doubtless have just escaped from school, for they still have their satchels and books on their backs. . . . Oh! What on earth have they got underneath it? What strange little creatures! . . . Little warriors of olden days, armed from head to foot, their bearing bold and fierce, but so Lilliputian. They seem still more comic beside the sturdy man who carries the pole of the canopy on his shoulder.

* Mousko, little boy.

And one of the little personages, who looked like Puss-in-Boots, popped her helmeted head through the curtains to wave to me, and wave again, with singular insistence. Is it . . . can it be? . . . April-Shower! . . . April-Shower as a two-sworded Samurai! No! I have never seen her so astonishing or so odd; a breastplate, a regular armoury, helmet and horns; on her little face streaks of paint to give that terrible air which the warriors in the old pictures wear, and, by some incomprehensible process, her eyebrows were raised to the middle of her forehead. Close beside her was her friend, Matsuko, also as a Sumurai, with her face too made up in ferocious style, and eyebrows which had changed position. And then three or four noble dowagers, of twelve and thirteen, highly bedizened, with trains to their dresses.

And this time, of course, I joined the procession.

At a certain cross-roads, the most busy in the city, a platform had been arranged, on which all these exquisite little Punch-and-Judy creatures took up their positions with much dignity.

Then an historical scene of considerable charm began. April-Shower, who played lead, and brandished her sabre with fine tragedy gestures, declaimed all the time in her loudest angry-marmoset voice. A voice she dragged up in some extraordinary fashion from the bottom of her

tiny throat. A voice which sometimes breaks, discovers its own little flute-like tones, in a child's high pipe—and it is then that she is most adorably precious, my serious tragedienne.

CHAPTER LIV

Thursday, October 17th.

To the private room of the tea-house, to which I had invited them to-day to do them honour, came my two little friends, April-Shower and Matsuko, who sulks no more, with languid airs and the *négligé* permissible to our familiar friendship. They brought neither masks nor guitars, knowing very well that it was not for their songs or their dances, as of old, but for themselves that I still came to see them. We are old friends to-day.

But how changed they are! It is not merely yesterday's fatigue, there is something else. . . . Oh! Their eyebrows are missing! The little barbarians have shaved them off, to put on patches half an inch higher. They are almost hideous now, so far up have they pushed them. And then there is no elaboration in their hair-dressing, no elegant rolls, or knots of flowers; with their hair still pulled back flat, as they wore it under their heavy helmets yesterday afternoon, they look like two poor little marmosets that have fallen into the water, whose fur is still wet. Almost hideous, yet neat and dainty creatures all the same.

They have brought me the photographs they promised me, to which it now remains to affix

the dedication. And at their orders, servants, mousmés, place beside them on the ground, a lacquer writing desk, with fine brushes, Indian ink, little saucers, everything they need. They too are sitting on the floor—on the floor, of course, everything takes place. First they argue gravely upon the terms of the dedication, and even, I believe, on a certain obscure point of spelling. Then with raised hand and sure, quick touch they trace, on the little cardboard slips which bear their images, obscure scrawls in downward strokes, no doubt a very friendly message, which I shall have translated later.

For the moment the messages may wait, the more so as the autumn sun shines, melancholy and soft, outside, and as Inamoto is waiting for me on the delicious mountain—where the ferns everywhere have grown long, so long, in this last end-of-summer development, where already the foot-paths are carpeted with rust and golden tapestry, through the falling of dead leaves.

How swiftly and lightly these last three weeks in Madame Prune's city will have slipped away, then. Is it possible that they are so close upon an end?

To-day is a real autumn Sunday, the first dark, cold day: the mountains around us seem crushed beneath a low and gloomy sky.

And then—one of the eternal alterations to our sea programme—yesterday we were all still joyous over the dispatch announcing the return of the "Redoutable" to France: to-day comes a boundless discouragement in face of new counter-orders which keep the vessel and her crew a third year in China waters. My more intimate friends and I will go home all the same next spring, on some steamship, with the admiral, whose staff we are; but our poor sailors will stay abroad, exiled for another year more, including the melancholy fiancé, with his little box of presents and his white silk for the wedding dress.

In any case, even if later on the "Redoutable" returns to Nagasaki, I shall not be there, and when she leaves this country next Wednesday *en route* for Annam, I must bid eternal farewell to all things Japanese. . . .

To-day is my very last rendezvous in the mountain with Inamoto, my sweet friend, whom to-morrow her father carries off, whither I know not, into the interior of the island, far away from here. Under the darkened sky I make my way, then, a last time to the old deserted park, high up there in the midst of the city of the dead. In this grey weather, autumnal for the first time this season, I feel once more in the climbing paths, among the dead leaves and the tall sumptuous ferns, my heart-sickness of last autumn. How familiar to

me now were the least things on their slopes, each winding of the paths, each tomb enwrapped in its Japanese ivy with the tiny leaves, and the little old Buddhas of granite, with their smiles like those of dead children, and the pale green lichens on the trunks of the great cedars. . . . Truly I cannot bring myself to believe that I shall never see this again—never again.

On the other side of the wall with its delicate maidenhair, Inamoto is waiting for me, agitated, uneasy, saying that I have come late, that her father would be calling for her, that we had scarcely time even to see one another.

Can it be that at the bottom of her little heart there was really a little affection for me ? It must be so, one would think, for her to have come back here so often. Besides, I do not believe that affection has always need of words, of deep understanding, or even of any sensible reason whatever ; it can spring up like this from a glance, from an expression in the eyes, from some little even lesser thing, beyond the reach of analysis.

And now we must abruptly separate, absolutely, without so much as letters to recall us to each other, without any possible communication for ever. It is like the brutal slash of a sword between our two existences which for a year have been drawing together.

Some one below, in the pagoda courtyard, calls

her in authoritative tones. She replies: "Yes, father, I am coming." I have never heard her voice carry so far. It is a clear and a pretty voice. "Come, we must say good-bye." And I take her in my arms, which I have never ventured to do before; enfold her in the embrace of sorrowing friendship. She thinks she ought to return me my kiss—and gives it with such pretty *gaucherie*, like a baby that does not know how. . . . One would think she had never kissed any one in her life.

As a matter of fact, do the Japanese kiss, between themselves? I have never seen it. Even the little Japanese mothers who are so full of tenderness, have never, in my presence, dropped a kiss on the cheeks of their doll-babies.

Again she is summoned from below. She is to leave Nagasaki at this very hour. Her little luggage is ready, her pattens, and her umbrella. We may not spin this out longer. . . . And the moment of parting is lit up of a sudden by a kind of Bengal fire, like a stage effect: the setting sun low upon the horizon, suddenly appears through a rent in the huge cloud which overhangs us like the roof of a vault; and the thousand stems of the bamboos look as though they had been suddenly painted a ruddy gold. And the mousmé steals away. She will not dare, to-day, as on ordinary evenings, to venture to peep above the

enclosure to watch my flight through the tombs. And this time, as I climb the wall, I pluck a handful of maidenhair and carry it away with me.

A flaming light is reflected from the mountain of the dead, which the full sunlight now illumines; the necropolis which I so loved to visit is at its best for my last evening.

I went slowly away through the little fern-choked pathways, and, turning about almost by chance, I suddenly saw above the wall the black hair, the pretty forehead and the two eyes which were wont to watch my descent. So the mousmé had retraced her steps. . . . And the feeling which had brought her back touched me infinitely more than anything she could possibly have said to me. I want to go back again. But she makes signs to me: "No. Too late, and there is danger. . . . Farewell!"

However, I shall forget her in a few days—so much is certain. As for the maidenhair which I had plucked in some instinctive recall to the ways of the past, I shall soon have forgotten whence it came, and I shall throw it away—like so many other poor flowers, plucked thus in different parts of the world, at the leave-taking hour, in other days, with youth's illusion that I should keep those memories to the end. . . .

CHAPTER LV

Monday, October 28th.

THE clouds are still low and dark, and one of those first fogs which herald winter has come.

And for me something of the soul of this country departed yesterday evening with Inamoto the mousmé.

I have felt it better not to return alone to her old park, nor to the city of the dead about it, and my aimless stroll to-day, taken on a rather deserted hill which I had never explored before, brought me by chance upon the path along which the corpses are taken. . . . They passed by me as I sat by the side of the road, under the veranda of an isolated, miserable and evil-looking tea-house, where the people seemed very surprised to see me. Each passed me in a kind of big tub, wrapped in white linen and hung to a pole which two porters of peculiar appearance carried on their shoulders. With no attendants, lonely and under a cloud, they went off to their burning, a little higher up in the underwood, almost brushing me with their white linen as they passed—and I knew not what they were, thinking only that these wrapped tubs had something strange and disquieting about them, as they all went by the same path as though

to some rendezvous. As the fifth passed, a quick suspicion made me shiver: I had been aware of a smell of human decay.

"What are those men carrying?" I asked the poor old crone who poured me my tea.

"What? Didn't you know?"

And she replied to my question with a ghastly jest, shutting her eyes, gaping her toothless mouth and collapsing as her head rolled upon her hand. . . . Oh, but *any* words would have been better than this terrible mimicry. . . . Horrible! I was only a few steps from the funeral pyres, in the tea-house of the scavengers and the undertakers.

As I was escaping by the downward path I ran into another, going upwards with its little one beside it. Its tub was enormous and must have weighed very heavily, to judge by the suffering expression of the two sweating porters. As for its little one, which must have been a very young child, it went in a pot, wrapped too in white linen, hung from the belt of the porters. And the path was so narrow that I was forced to press into the brambles and ferns to avoid its touch. What sort of face had the thing that squatted in that tub? Did it grin in greeting to the old hag, Death?

And so I had lived long in Nagasaki, upon different occasions, and yet never discovered where they burned all the corpses, before so cheerily making procession with them through the city in

their pretty carriers, with a cortège of artificial flowers and white-robed mousmés. No, it was only to-day, in this foggy winter weather which made all things mournful, and on the very eve of parting with them for ever, that I must, by pure chance, stumble upon the secret scene of the roastings. . . .

CHAPTER LVI

Tuesday, October 29th.

ONE more of the beautiful mornings of this place; the last but one, since to-morrow at daybreak we shall go. A roseate dawn, adorably hesitant, spreads over the tall mountains which encircle the "Redoutable," and upon the rigging of the silent fisher-junks, with their sails but half filled, as they all slip away to the open sea, like fairy ships that have no weight and are softly driven over unreal waters.

It is strange that I feel more unhappy over this parting that I did over that of fifteen years ago—doubtless because all the adventure of life is no more before me, and that I am almost certain, to-day, of never returning again.

To-morrow, then, we shall have finished with Japan; the great open sea will have retaken us, the great peace-giving blue open, which brings forgetfulness. And we shall go towards the sun; in five or six days more we shall be in the land of eternal warmth, of eternal light. . . .

I have so many good-byes to say to-day, so many brilliant connections have I made in this city: Madame L'Ourse, Madame Ichihara, Madame Cloud, Madame Stork, etc.

Delightful weather: gentle sunlight of an ending year shining upon my last day. Really, there is no country prettier than this, no country in which things, like women, know how to arrange themselves to please the eye with more graceful or unexpected effect. It is the country itself that I shall regret, more, no doubt, than the poor little mousmé, Inamoto; its mountains, temples, green woods, bamboos, ferns. And a desire is upon me to see once more all the places that have charmed me.

As I go to take my leave of Madame L'Ourse, I pass before a pagoda where there is a holy day and pilgrimage; I have not seen one of these pageants for fifteen years, and I thought they had fallen into disuse. It is one of those places of worship on the flank of the mountain whither one climbs by granite stairs of colossal proportions. According to custom, the old cedar-wood sanctuary, which one glimpses far above, is wrapped for the ceremony in white vellum sheets, on which are traced large black designs, of oddest shapes, yet simple, precise, and faultless. And the open door allows one to see, even from below, the gilding of the gods or the goddesses seated at the back of the tabernacle.

Crippled beggars, and half-wits ravaged by leprosy, have taken their places in the autumn sunshine on the two sides of the stairway to receive the offerings of the pilgrims. And a poor little

mangy dirty cat has instinctively come to sit in line with these specimens of misery.

But how few there are of the faithful! Of a truth, faith is dying out in the Empire of the Rising Sun. A few worthy old men and women, growing ready to take up their eternal dwelling in this mountain, are climbing with effort, taking small steps, bent, and with umbrellas under their arms; they have a most naïve and respectable appearance; they trail babies by the hand, and the wooden clogs of these worthy creatures, children and dotards, go clipper-clapper on the granite stairs.

At the first stairhead, half-way up, a band of ravishing little mousmés, little twelve-year-olds, is grouped. They are fresh from school with their satchels on their backs. What are these little beauties of to-morrow all staring at so, with such absorbed interest? Oh, a vile thing; an old beggar with obscene leering eyes is lying there, dandling complaisantly before him an unnameable lump of swollen flesh, the size of a quarter of pork. . . . And you could find nothing more wholly Japanese than this group; these delightful little schoolgirls beside this monstrosity, who, with us, would have been straightway locked up by the police in the cause of decency.

Then I present myself at Madame Renoncule's. My farewells to my mother-in-law—and to her tiny

garden, which I am sure to see again in dreams, at such times as my liver is out of order—all very correct and proper, with just that touch of emotion the occasion demands.

Much prettier was my farewell to my little April-Shower, who prostrated herself at her threshold, with Monsieur Swong in her arms, and so waited until I disappeared at the end of the lonely road. Poor little dainty mountebank! Obliged by her profession to purr like a little cat for everyone, I believe all the same that she kept a little bit more kindness for me than for many others.

I kept Madame Prune and her probable effusions for the last. Can you believe that, since that visit last month when I found her in the hands of her doctor, I have never thought of inquiring after her?

So I begin to climb to Diou-djen-dji, up the steep laddered path which drew of old so many a sigh from Madame Chrysanthème, when we came back at night with our lanterns bought from Madame L'Heure, after some harmless treat at a tea-house. It seems to me that nothing has changed here, the little houses no more than the trees and stones.

The air is softly warm and a little playful breeze dances the dead leaves round me. Madame Prune is, I will confess it, far from my thoughts; if I am making my way to her quiet suburb, it is to say good-bye to things, places, views of the sea and

silhouettes of the mountain, where still dwell some memories of my past. I am overcome with melancholy, now that I must admit that I shall never come back—and the idea of "never more" always borrows some of its terror and its grandeur from Death.

Up there in the little garden of my old house, whose gate I open as one having a right there, an old lady with a beaming face is sitting in the evening sunshine and smoking her pipe. She wears an indoor dress of plain blue cotton. There is no more trace of coquetry in the poise of her head. No combs or make-up in her hair; only two little grey pigtails, knotted at her neck like an unpretentious old woman's. In fact, it is obvious at first glance that we are confronted with a dame who has finally abdicated, and I have no part nor lot here.

"Madame Prune," said I, "the time has come for our last good-bye."

Came a little careless gesture by way of answer. Standing behind her, with an equally full-fed air of foolish cunning, was Mademoiselle Dédé.

"Madame Prune," I insisted, thinking myself not understood, "I am going back to my own country; eternity begins between us."

A second bow of mere politeness, and, to invite me to sit down, a friendly gesture with no warmth in it.

What! Such calm in face of utter separation!

. . . Why then, it must have been but my perishable body which had the power to touch the lady's emotions, since to-day, when she is at last delivered from the tyranny of a too-romantic imagination she finds not one throb in her heart for me.

"Well, well, Madame Prune, since things are so, I will not sit down; I had thought your feelings on a higher plane. The disillusion is too cruel. I will go."

The hidden catch of the door, which I had turned again on going out, made its familiar noise, a little creaking such as it has always made, which this evening I hear for the last of all last times. When I cast a backward glance over the little house in which I spent a whole careless summer to the music of the cicalas, I still see the little old woman sitting in a shapeless heap. She is quite fat and fallow and well pleased, and raps her pipe against the edge of the box (rap, rap, rap! but I shall never hear it again) and watches my going with a very detached expression. No, there are most certainly no more thrills in that graceful organism which was sensibility's self; time has done his work! . . .

And thus abruptly ends the third youth of Madame Prune, which the Goddess of Grace has really, to my mind, prolonged a trifle more than was reasonable.

Printed in England by Wyman & Sons Ltd., London, Reading and Fakenham.