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THE  
OLD CONVENTS OF PARIS.

BY  
MADAME CHARLES REYBAUD.

AND  
THE HAUNTED MARSH.

BY  
GEORGE SAND.

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1849.



FIRST NARRATIVE.

GASTON DE COLOBRIERES;

OR,

THE YOUNGER SON.



## CHAPTER I.

UPON the high road leading from Paris to Italy, and at a short league from the frontier, near the place where the Var separates Provence from the county of Nice, may be perceived, situated in a bare and arid country, the ruins of an old château, the front wall of which, still standing, is pierced by large windows whose sashless apertures stand out clear and distinct against the deep azure of the cloudless sky. A massive tower of a style of architecture more ancient than the remainder of the edifice, overtops these ruins, and on its embattled summit, in which time has worn but few breaches, may be distinguished a slender shaft appearing in the distance scarcely larger than a needle, and presenting very much the appearance of a common lightning-conductor. It is the stump of the flag-staff from which formerly waved the signoriorial standard. The hill on which stand these ruined buildings is covered with a thick growth of stunted but highly aromatic vegetation, the sight of which would delight the eyes of a botanist; for the rare plants that distil those overpowering odours, which the breeze frequently wafts to a great distance and even carries several leagues out to sea, thrive upon this arid rock which could scarcely be supposed to nourish even a grain or wheat.

About three quarters of a century ago, the château and the lands which surround it belonged to a worthy nobleman, the Baron de Colobrières, the descendant by the female branch of an ancient Italian family, which reckoned in its genealogy twenty cardinals and a pope. The paternal stock was no less illustrious, and dated back from what might be called the fabulous times of the Provençal nobility. Despite his lofty ancestry, the Baron Mathieu de Colobrières was far from being a wealthy noble. His armorial bearings were a thistle sinople issuing from a tower embattled and erected sable, and it might be with truth affirmed that never did armorial bearings tell a truer tale; for the lands appertaining to the barony were of a degree of sterility which had become proverbial in the country, where it was a common saying, that "At Colobrières there is nothing but sheafs of thistles and fields of stones." The baron's ancestors having alienated by degrees the whole of their seigniorial rights, there remained to



him nothing but the family mansion and the adjacent lands, the revenue derived from which was of the slenderest description. Not one of the country louts who pulled off their hats as they passed beneath the family escutcheon sculptured over the gate of the château, would have cared to take a single farm belonging to the barony.

The Lord of Colobrières had espoused a young demoiselle as noble, and even poorer than himself, who had brought him as her sole dower and fortune a few rings and trinkets to the value of about a hundred crowns. Heaven blessed this union most superabundantly, and in the space of a few years there sprung from it a family of fourteen children. This numerous progeny was in truth brought up by the hand of Providence. The revenues of the fief of Colobrières scarcely furnished the daily bread; and as for the rest, it was necessary to make up the deficiency by dint of industry, prudence, and strict economy. The baroness had never purchased a single new gown since her wedding outfit; she dressed herself, as well as the children, with the old stuffs which had formerly garnished the beds of the château, and thus the little gentlemen figured in the family tapestries, while the demoiselles wore, fashioned into petticoats and gowns, the window and bed-curtains embroidered by the hands of their female ancestors.

The Chateau de Colobrières resembled a hive, from whence issued each year the swarms which the paternal dwelling could no longer either shelter or provide for. As the elder branches grew up they left their home and proceeded elsewhere to seek their livelihood. The baron was too deeply impressed with the dignity of his rank, to suffer any of his children to degrade themselves or their order; and despite the straits to which they were reduced, not one had failed in his nobility. Seven young Colobrières had become monks, or had entered the king's service, and five daughters had assumed the veil of the order of "Notre Dame de la Misericorde," into whose protecting bosoms young women of quality were received without a dower. Of all this numerous family there remained at length at the château only the two youngest, a son and a daughter, whom the baron was accustomed to call with a sigh, "The props of his old age!"

Gaston de Colobrières, or as the country people called him, the Cadet de Colobrières, was a handsome young man of some five-and-twenty years of age, an intrepid and indefatigable sportsman, and so proud and shy that he was wont to turn his head aside if he chanced to meet a country maiden on his way. This rural Hippolytus roamed daily, gun in hand, over

the domains of the barony, which were fertile only in game, a species of farming which was happily successful; for, had it not been for the game which he in general brought home with him every day to the chateau, the inhabitants of Colobrières would have frequently been obliged to eat little more than dry bread at their four repasts.

The baron's youngest daughter, Mademoiselle Anastasia, was a lovely, pensive, and delicate looking brunette. She had magnificent black hair, eyes whose large dark pupils alternately sparkled or languished beneath their long and slightly curved lashes, taper fingers and exquisitely formed hands, and a rosy mouth, which, at the slightest smile, disclosed to view a row of teeth of pearly whiteness. And yet, in the eyes of the little world by which she was surrounded, she did not appear handsome. On Sunday, when she went to mass at the neighbouring village, the country people beheld her pass without evincing the slightest sign of admiration. Her father indeed would confess that she had a certain air which marked her as a young girl of high birth and family, but her mother observed with sadness that almost gipsy-darkness of skin, which in some degree detracted from her good looks, and in place of which the good dame would have been much more gratified to see a healthy floridness of complexion. As for the young girl herself, she never dreamed of her beauty, nor even before her mirror had she ever conceived the slightest idea of pride or coquetry.

The life which this family led at the Château de Colobrières was confined and monotonous to the last degree. The neighbouring gentry had but little intercourse with the baron, who cared not to have them as witnesses of his haughty poverty, and all communication with the outer world was limited to the weekly visits of a worthy priest, who for thirty years had discharged the duties of curé of a village at a short distance from Colobrières. In former days, the lords of Colobrières had maintained a retinue of pages and equerries, and there was even an apartment in the chateau which still went by the name of the guard-room; but at this epoch of decay, the whole corps of domestics was reduced to one aged lacquey—who entirely neglected the functions of the pantry and antechamber to devote his time and talents to the culture of the kitchen garden—and a maid-servant called Madeleine Panozon, surnamed La Rousse, whose duties would in truth have been but light, if she had contented herself with merely directing the culinary department of the baron's establishment. But the hardy girl in addition to this duty filled the

office of house-maid and attendant, and also aided her mistress in patching and darning the family linen.

The architecture of the Château de Colobrières belonged to different epochs. The huge tower, which formed as it were the kernel of the edifice, was in the Roman style—square, massive, and pierced with loop-holes in the centre—while the body of the mansion which surrounded it dated from the *renaissance*. A Colobrières, captain in a company of free lances, having passed with success through the great wars of Italy, and having been present at the sacking of Rome, had returned from his campaigns laden with a large share of booty. He rebuilt the hereditary mansion, held open house in it with a crowd of gay companions, and finally died, leaving to his heirs only this fair château, filled with pictures and valuable furniture. At the period from which our story dates, the modern buildings which were grouped around the ancient donjon-keep were already in a very dilapidated condition, the furniture had become old and shabby, and had in great part disappeared in its passage through the hands of five or six generations, while of the ancient splendour of Colobrières, there remained but some fragments which had passed into the condition of reliques, such as a coffer inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory, in which the baron kept his archives, a timepiece with a ring of chimes, and six silver covers engraved with the arms of the Colobrières. For the last fifty years no repairs had been made either in the roof or on the exterior woodwork, and in consequence the windows were for the most part deprived of glass and shutters, and every shower of rain deluged the floors. The apartments on the first story were no longer habitable, and the family had established themselves in the vaulted rooms on the ground floor, which enjoyed almost the temperature of a cellar, warm in winter, and fresh and cool in the heart of summer.

The chapel had fallen into a state of complete decay, and for many years the family had gone to hear mass in the neighbouring village. This was a source of great mortification to the poor baroness, who had nourished but one ambitious dream in her entire lifetime, namely, that of seeing herself mistress of about fifty crowns, in order to repair the chapel and have mass said there on Sundays and holydays by some probationer whom she could afterwards invite to dinner; but there was no appearance of the baron's finances ever being able to furnish the means for such an outlay, and the good lady resigned herself to this hard privation. Every Sunday, whether fine or wet, the family proceeded to church on foot,

dressed in a style in which the change of season caused scarcely any variation. The baron on these occasions wore an old broad-skirted coat, still decent, but whose long and faithful services were attested by the equivocal lustre of the seams. His stockings of coarse yarn, fitting tightly to a limb which in youth had not been ill turned, were lost in a pair of vast shoes ornamented with buckles, and his almost napless three-cornered hat evidently required to be handled with the greatest caution. Madame de Colobrieres followed him, dressed in a petticoat of Tours gingham, a little faded, and a taffeta mantle which dated from her marriage. Their children were adorned only with their healthy features and erect and graceful carriage. The young boy wore, like the peasants, a coat of serge and a broad-brimmed hat, while his sister had a dress of brown printed cotton, a neck handkerchief of figured muslin, and a little *coif* set jauntily upon her hair which was combed up from her neck. The sole change which at distant intervals took place in this humble garb was confined to the ribbon of the *coif* which she was permitted occasionally to renew. Notwithstanding these straitened circumstances—a hundred times more difficult to support than naked and avowed poverty—cheerful content and harmony, and a sort of habitual serenity reigned in the family of Colobrières. The young people especially were untroubled with anxious desires or uneasy anticipations, contenting themselves with the little they possessed, and never permitting their spirits to be saddened by the fallen fortunes of their family.

One Monday, the second festival of Pentecost, after mass, while the baroness and her children were returning to the chateau, the baron lingered behind for a few moments in the village market-place where some travelling merchants had erected their stalls. It was the village festival, and great was the demand for brass rings, pinchbeck crosses, and chaplets of coloured glass. The baron purchased a yard of ribbon for his daughter, and asked with a sigh the price of a dress of silken stuff, which however, he did not purchase. The same day after dinner he appeared in no hurry to leave the table as was his usual custom, to take his siesta, but remained leaning back in his chair in an attitude of deep reflection, his eyes fixed on vacancy. Gaston and his sister had retired noiselessly, thinking that their parents had fallen asleep on each side of the table.

• In place of sleeping, the baron was engaged in whistling gently between his teeth, which was with him a certain sign of profound thought, while by turns he would tap sometimes

upon his plate, and sometimes upon his empty glass. The baroness did not long withstand the influence of this music; her eyes closed, and she fell into a doze while engaged in trying to discover what it was that could thus occupy her husband's thoughts. After about half an hour's silence, the baron sighed deeply, and said, raising his eyes to the ceiling,—

"I heard some news to-day of Agatha de Colobrières."

"What is that you say, monsieur?" exclaimed the baroness, starting up in her chair, and gazing at her husband with an air of terrified astonishment.

"I say that at the fair a travelling merchant gave me some news of Agatha de Colobrières," replied the baron, coldly.

"Holy Virgin! and what did he tell you?"

"News which I was most certainly far from expecting to hear. Agatha has been happier than she deserved. First of all, this man—her husband—this Maragnon is dead."

The old lady crossed herself.

"And," continued the baron, "he has left a considerable fortune."

"Are there any children?" inquired the baroness, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"There *were* several; but of all the fair line of the Maragnons there remains but one daughter."

"And the merchant who told you this has perhaps seen Agatha?"

"He has seen her; and she told him that if she dared she would send me her regards."

"Poor woman!" murmured Madame de Colobrières.

"She might have sent me her regards, but most certainly I should not have received them," cried the baron, striking his clenched fist upon the table. "Unhappy woman! she still dares to pronounce the name of Colobrières. She! Madame Maragnon!"

"She thought of us—she still loves us," murmured the baroness.

"What are you talking about, madam?" replied the baron, with an indignant air. "I should like to know what is there now in common between us and this woman? I am very sorry I mentioned anything about the matter."

With these words he rose from his chair and stalked out of the room, as if to cut short all further parley. The baroness remained alone, absorbed in deep reflection. For thirty years the name of Agatha de Colobrières had not once been pronounced in her presence. It was forbidden to speak of her in the château in which she was born; and Gaston, as well as

his young sister, were ignorant even of her existence. And yet she was nearly related to them; she was the sister, the only sister of the Baron de Colobrieres.

Thirty years previously, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres had lived in the paternal mansion whose walls she had now quitted. She had attained the full bloom of youthful womanhood. She was no longer one of those tender buds which shelter themselves timidly under the parent foliage, but a splendid and full-blown rose whose balmy petals the first breath of wind would disperse. This beautiful girl belonged to a family too poor, too noble, and too proud, for her even to dream of marrying in her own sphere of life. It was decided that she should enter a convent; but as she had no inclination for a life of seclusion, she temporized and remained at the château, even after the death of her parents and the marriage of her brother.

It was, however, considered a settled affair that she was to take the veil; and she had never thought of expressing her disinclination—only perhaps because she could see no means of escaping her destiny. She fell however at times into excessive lowness of spirits, and would frequently burst into tears in the presence of the baroness, though always refusing to disclose to her the cause of her grief. The family increased from year to year. The lord and master of Colobrieres had already six children, and poor Agatha felt but too plainly that she must yield and give place to these innocents. Neither the baron nor his wife, however, pressed her to fulfil her resolution, but her entrance into a convent was considered as an approaching event, and was spoken of in the family every day.

In the meanwhile, it happened that one evening a party of travelling merchants presented themselves at the gate of the château. The weather was dreadful; the rain, which fell in torrents, had flooded the roads, and these honest fellows were consequently unable to gain the village, where they would have found shelter and beds. The baron generously threw open his doors, which was indeed almost all that he could do for them. They installed themselves in an unfurnished hall, not far distant from the stables where they had put up their mules, and proceeded to make their arrangements for passing the night.

The baroness had observed their arrival from her window, and later in the evening she said to her sister-in-law:—

“I would willingly spend a six-franc piece with these merchants. The children are dressed for the season, but you and

I—it is mortifying to be obliged to go to mass with our only coifs and our old neck handkerchiefs. You especially, my dear Agatha, want a new handkerchief sadly.”

“For what purpose, sister?” replied Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, with a sigh. “It would serve me such a short time; I shall soon no longer require such things.”

“That is nothing to the purpose,” said the baroness; and stealthily glancing at her husband, who was asleep at the table, his head reclining upon an old peerage of which he read a few lines every night, she added in a lower tone:—

“I have saved a few fifteen-sou pieces, which I shall now give you. Do not let your brother know anything about it, above all things. By-and-by, when we have retired to bed, you can go to these merchants and choose among their wares, and buy whatever you fancy.”

So saying, she rose and proceeded to an old cupboard, the repository of her most precious effects, and drew from thence a little leathern purse of a very slender appearance, saying, as she placed it in the hands of Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, “There are in this purse six livres fifteen sous; act prudently with these people. Besides your handkerchief and our ribbons, endeavour to procure two yards of Italian gauze to make us some new capelines, and some green taffeta to cover our parasols with. You will perhaps have to deal with Jews, so pay strict attention. In short, I trust to you to spend this money prudently.”

“Rest satisfied, sister,” replied Agatha, taking the purse with a faint smile. “Hold! my brother has opened his eyes and turned over the leaf of his book; get to bed soon, if you wish me to make your purchases quickly.”

The baron and his wife shortly afterwards retired to their vast bedroom, the windows of which, almost destitute of glass, gave admittance to a fresh current of air which speedily extinguished the lights. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, on her side, proceeded to the little chamber in which she slept. This apartment, which opened into several very extensive rooms, had served formerly as an oratory for the *chatelaines* of Colobrieres. Heads of cherubs, enclosed in garlands, interlaced their wings at the ceiling, and everywhere the escutcheon, with the heraldic thistle issuing from the sable tower, figured proudly. A cross of precious workmanship, the delicate chasing of which time had sadly impaired, hung above a worm-eaten praying-chair, the angles of which were ornamented with a row of heads of saints, each of which was shorn of its most prominent feature. The bed, a narrow couch resting upon trestles and

covered with a large counterpane of faded silk, was placed opposite a table whose only drawer contained all the personal property which Agatha de Colobrieres possessed in the world; viz. her slender maiden's wardrobe, a few pious books, and a little enamelled gold cross, the gift of her mother. The poor girl had scarcely ever handled coined metal in the whole course of her life, and, had her very existence depended upon it, she could not have added a red liard to the sum amassed by the baroness. On entering her bedroom, she threw the purse upon the table and seated herself in a pensive attitude. She reflected upon all the things which money procures, and she meditated upon the all-powerfulness of this vile yet precious dross. Money for her was the realization of all her wishes, of all her chimeras; it was happiness, it was liberty. She lifted the purse from the table and shook it, murmuring as she did so, with a long-drawn sigh:—

"If I possessed twenty or thirty thousand of these little pieces, how happy should we be here. I would have the chateau repaired, we should all of us have new clothes every season, and the larders would be stocked with good provisions. We should never be uneasy about the morrow; we could give something to the poor, and I should not be obliged to take the veil. But I have nothing, absolutely nothing, and I cannot work to gain my livelihood—I must go where the mercy of the Almighty provides me with bread and clothing."

She opened the purse and emptied into her hand the money it contained; then, returning it into its receptacle after having for a few moments gazed on it intently, she added bitterly:—

"After all, what is this for the necessities of the family within these walls? It is like a drop of water falling upon the scorched earth. If this money were mine I would not spend it; I would cast it to the first mendicant who stopped at the castle-gate."

At this moment the clock struck nine, and Agatha judged that it was now time to descend. She was too proud and too well-bred to dream for a moment of going alone to seek the merchants, and, therefore, passing into the chamber in which the children slept, she gently awoke the eldest, who was her god-daughter and her favourite. The little girl was soon ready, her aunt took her by the hand, and both stealthily descended the grand staircase.

The apartment in which the merchants had installed themselves was a vast hall, which still preserved some traces of its original destination. It had, doubtless, formerly witnessed many a splendid and joyous feast; here and there might



still be perceived upon the panels crucifixes interlaced with garlands of roses, and satyrs' heads grinned from ear to ear at each corner of the lofty mantle-shelf, the sides of which were ornamented with the figure of Bacchus carved in gold relief amid the crowd of attributes which characterize the God of Wine. But there was no longer a trace of furniture in this banqueting-hall, abandoned as it had been for more than a century. The moss which covered the marble pavement had replaced the carpet, and the spiders had spun their impalpable curtains across the half-broken windows. The temporary hosts of this dilapidated hall had arranged themselves with the industry and care peculiar to men accustomed to undertake long and arduous journeys. They had improvised a sort of furniture with their effects. Two boxes placed together and covered with a piece of carpeting formed a table; bales served instead of chairs; and one of the heavy lanterns which the wagoners suspend at night from the shafts of their vehicles, diffused sufficient light through the apartment.

Agatha de Colobrieres knocked gently at the door, and entered, holding with one hand her young niece, while her other was hidden in the depths of her pocket, where she had deposited the savings of the baroness. Had she been obliged to present herself thus before persons of quality, she would have experienced an insurmountable embarrassment, she would have felt awkward and ill at ease; but she experienced no difficulty in confronting these inferiors, and, making a slight inclination of the head, she simply said:—

“Good evening. Can I, without disturbing you, see a few of your wares?”

The dealer rose from his seat, a little surprised at the aspect of this beautiful girl who, with an air at once proud, self-possessed, and modest, paused in the middle of the hall, waiting until he should open his packages. Although she wore only a simple and very coarse robe of drugget, she had the air and manner of a princess, and the pride of her race was imprinted as it were on her lofty and open brow. The merchant bowed respectfully, and said, as he brought forward one of his bales which had replaced the absent chairs:—

“Madam, deign to be seated for a few minutes. Had you sent for me, I should have hastened to obey your orders. In an instant I shall unpack lace, silks, the best of everything I possess.”

“Show me some handkerchiefs and ribbons,” replied Agatha, seating herself upon the bale and taking upon her knee the child who now began to gaze round her with a wondering eye.

Mademoiselle de Colobrières herself observed with some surprise all that surrounded her. The bales of merchandise formed a regular pile at the further end of the hall, and behind this species of screen a man lay asleep wrapped in his travelling mantle. His silver spurs shone in the uncertain light of the lantern, and his long-barrelled gun, leaning against the wall, was within reach of his hand. This measure of precaution seemed taken on account of the bad state of the locks and bars of the château, and the magnitude of the sum contained in a valise placed upon the table. At the moment when Agatha entered, the merchant was doubtless engaged in putting his accounts in order, as a morocco portfolio, the pages of which were covered with cyphers, lay open beside the valise, from the sides of which escaped handfuls of six-livre pieces mingled with louis-d'ors. The proprietor of this heavy purse was a man still young, and of agreeable features. He did not appear to be above his condition as to language and manners, but there was something intelligent and decided in the expression of his countenance which gave it a sort of distinction. He threw back into the valise with an indifferent hand all this fair money, the sight of which had astonished Agatha, and began to display his handkerchiefs and ribbons. Never had Mademoiselle de Colobrières seen such magnificent articles. There were kerchiefs of cambrasine from Smyrna, and of satin from the Indies, embroidered with flowers, butterflies, and birds; there were ribbons of all imaginable colours interwoven with gold and silver. The little girl uttered cries of joy at the sight of all these beautiful things. Agatha beheld them with a dazzled eye, and kept silence, as she felt a little embarrassed in declaring that all this was too beautiful for her. The merchant apparently did not divine the motive for this silence and hesitation, for he said, as he pushed aside the open boxes—

"I have perhaps something still better than these."

"Seek no further, I beg; it is not worth while," replied Agatha with a sigh, drawing, as she spoke, the little purse from her pocket; "I merely wish for a simple kerchief; something plain and cheap. All that you have shown me is too elegant."

"On the contrary, there cannot be anything too elegant for you, Madame la Baronne," replied the merchant, politely.

"I am not Madame de Colobrières," returned Agatha, blushing; "I am her sister-in-law. It would not be fitting for a demoiselle to wear such rich attire."

"Oh aunt, make yourself beautiful just for this once!"

cried the little girl, innocently; "you know you are never gaily dressed, nor we either."

"When people live all the year round in the country, they have no occasion for all these fine things," interrupted Mademoiselle de Colobrières, hastening to put a stop to the child's observations. But the obstinate little girl, excited by the sight of all the beautiful articles which the merchant continued to display before her enraptured gaze, cried out with the utmost volubility:—

"On the contrary we ought to buy all these things; then Nanon the exciseman's daughter would not look so saucy at mass, when she passes our pew with her siamoise dress, and her butterfly coif. We should then be as gaily dressed as herself, whilst now we are obliged every Saturday to mend our Sunday clothes."

A sentiment of natural yet childish pride caused the blood to mount to Agatha's forehead. She imposed silence on the child with a confused air; but overcoming this impression almost as soon as felt, she pushed aside with one hand the pasteboard boxes of silks and satins, and threw with the other her light purse upon the table, as she said with an air of melancholy dignity:—

"We are not rich; that is all that I can spend to-day."

"No matter, mademoiselle," returned the merchant, quickly; "do me the honour of choosing whatever may suit you; you can pay me another time."

Agatha shook her head with a gesture of thanks and refusal, but the merchant persisted in his offer.

"You can discharge this little debt in a year, if that suits you, mademoiselle," said he; "in a year's time I shall be returning this way."

"I shall not be here then," replied Mademoiselle de Colobrières, in a melancholy tone; "where I am going, neither trinkets nor silken kerchiefs are required; all that is necessary is a robe of black linen which lasts all the year, and a veil that is never changed."

"You are about to enter a convent then, mademoiselle?" said the merchant, with a respectful expression of surprise and interest.

"Yes, very soon; and I assure you, I have no need of all these fine things," added she in the same resigned and sad tone; "choose for me, I beg, the plainest articles you have got."

The pedlar, in order to satisfy her, proceeded to open a bale ranged along with the others at the further end of the

hall. Whilst he sought out what she required, Agatha amused herself by looking over the merchandise piled up before her. Among the various coffers, boxes, and assortments of mercery, she observed a portfolio which she began to look over with curiosity. It was a collection of very beautiful engravings. The greater portion represented graceful subjects, such as pastoral scenes, where chubby Cupids and tender deities of Olympus sported with lovely country maidens, and innocent shepherdesses adorned with pink ribbons. But amid these gallant and rustic compositions there was one of a very different kind which singularly struck Mademoiselle de Colobrieres. The artist, evidently seized with a gloomy inspiration, had depicted in all its horror a scene of conventual life. Enclosed in the dripping walls of a subterranean vault, feebly illuminated by the flickering rays of an almost exhausted lamp, lay a nun upon her straw pallet. She was expiring at the termination of the *in pace*, and her emaciated hands and glazed and lustreless eyes were raised towards heaven with an expression impossible to be described. Like the king-prophet, she seemed to be crying from the depths of this abyss and imploring hopelessly the divine mercy.

Agatha gazed upon this fearful picture with a terrified eye. Every feeling of repugnance for a monastic life, every sentiment of horror for the vows she was about to pronounce, which had hitherto slumbered in her bosom, were now violently aroused. She let the engraving fall upon her knees, and burst into tears. At this moment the merchant returned to her side. At the sight of the print he at once comprehended the motive of this sudden outburst of grief, and said in a compassionate tone.—

"You are about to take the veil, then, mademoiselle? It is a terrible resolution, if you are not called to it by a decided vocation. Pardon me if I dare to express an opinion upon what concerns you alone, but it seems to me that you commit a crime against yourself in thus burying yourself alive. What regrets you will perhaps one day experience!"

"Regrets! I experience them already!" cried Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, whose feelings, so long restrained, now burst forth impetuously. "The idea of a convent life is utterly repugnant to me; the future terrifies me; but I must submit to my lot."

"You have a father or a mother who exacts this sacrifice?"

"No; my parents are dead."

"Well, who commands you then?"

"Necessity," replied Agatha, bitterly. "For a poor and

nobly born girl there remains no other shelter upon the earth save the convent. It is there that the greater portion of the female branches of our family have buried themselves in the flower of their age. For many years the family of Colobrières, having no longer any fortune left to sustain their rank, have thus sacrificed us. Alas! why did not God, whose service we thus enter in spite of ourselves, take us from the cradle, when our innocent hearts had as yet formed no attachment to the world!"

Whilst Agatha spoke thus, raising towards heaven her lovely eyes bathed in tears, the merchant gazed on her with a singular expression. This man was really above the vulgar condition. His was one of those prompt and hardy natures whose resolutions are as sudden as their wills are powerful, and who triumph by the aid of boldness and good sense in the most critical and difficult situations. It was to these qualities that Pierre Maragnon owed already a fortune acquired in hazardous speculations. At the sight of the beautiful girl who now bent her tearful eyes to the ground before him, as if confused at the idea of having allowed a stranger to be the witness of her long pent-up agony, and the confidant of her secret anguish, Pierre Maragnon felt that this uncontrollable impulse might decide the future destiny of both. An almost insensate idea had suddenly presented itself to his mind. With that promptitude and energetic coolness which he possessed in a remarkable degree in all his enterprises, he calculated the chances of his situation. They seemed favourable to him; and he ventured to conceive no less a hope than that of carrying off with him Mademoiselle de Colobrières, and of making her his wife—the wife of Pierre Maragnon! To one who could at this moment have read the heart of Agatha, this idea would have appeared the height of presumption and folly. The poor girl never cast a thought upon the man who now fixed upon her beautiful and downcast eyes a glance so deep and penetrating. In the eyes of the indigent grand-daughter of the barons of Colobrières, a merchant, a plebeian, was not a man; and Pierre Maragnon inspired her with feelings of haughty benevolence more mortifying perhaps for the object of it than perfect indifference. It was first of all necessary to humble this instinctive pride, to destroy this long-existing prejudice, by attacking it openly and without respect. Pierre Maragnon decided to act upon this system, at the risk of incurring at the first word the displeasure of Agatha.

"Mademoiselle," he began, in a calm and respectful tone, "you will doubtless think me very bold; but after having

expressed my sentiments respecting your situation, I think it my duty to give you yet one more counsel: resign yourself entirely to the world rather than enter a convent. You cannot, you say, remain with your family; they are too poor to maintain you: well, quit them, and go and live elsewhere. Work, if you must; it is neither dishonourable nor yet a misfortune to be obliged to do so; and, after all, is not even hard and constant work, with liberty, better far than idleness between the four walls of a convent—that prison, whose gates you can never pass either living or dead?”

“What you say is perfectly true,” replied Mademoiselle de Colobrières, astonished but not revolted at such language.

“If I could but put off my nobility and renounce my name, from to-morrow, nay, from the present moment, my resolution would be taken; I would go and live anywhere, and support myself by the labour of my hands, rather than become a nun.”

“Well! what prevents you, Mademoiselle?” said Pierre Maragnon, boldly. “With a little courage and resolution you could descend from the rank which imposes upon you this awful sacrifice; you could become a *bourgeoise*. You have no other refuge open to you except the walls of a convent, because you are too poor to wed a man of your own rank; but a plebeian would esteem himself happy in marrying you without a dowry.”

“A man of low birth would never venture to ask me in marriage,” replied Agatha, with the utmost simplicity.

“The situation in which you are placed might give some one this audacity,” said the merchant, in a grave tone, gazing at Mademoiselle de Colobrières fixedly as he spoke.

She understood him. Her cheeks became crimson; a flash of pride, perhaps of indignation, sparkled in her eyes. But this hasty ebullition soon passed away: she made no reply, and remained pensive and thoughtful. When Pierre Maragnon saw her thus reflecting, he concluded that his triumph was certain. Dissembling his joy, and the lively sentiments of love and pride which already filled his soul, he began to reason anew upon the sad lot of young girls thus immured against their inclination. Although Agatha's youth and beauty could not fail to inspire him with a certain degree of confidence, he was sufficiently skilful not to attempt any common methods of persuasion. He spoke not to her of what was passing in his heart; he sought to restrain the admiration, mingled with respect and tenderness, which her beauty had

suddenly inspired him with, and began to expatiate on the possibility of an alliance between an enriched plebeian and the descendant of an illustrious but completely ruined family. He explained clearly his position; it was a prosperous one. An orphan from his infancy, he owed to his labour and assiduity a fortune which represented ten times the value of the Chateau de Colobrières and its dependencies. Agatha listened to him, confused and tempted—not, however, by her heart, but solely by the dictates of reason and common sense, which whispered to her that, after all, it would be far better for her to become the wife of this merchant than to imprison herself in a cloister for the remainder of her days.

The child had fallen asleep upon the knees of its young aunt; all was silent in the old mansion. The lord of Colobrières, far from suspecting the insult with which he was menaced, slumbered peacefully beside his wife, and dreamed that he found under his pillow a well-filled sack of crowns, with which he had been able to repair the chapel and purchase a new coat. Mademoiselle de Colobrières and Pierre Maragnon had sufficient time to themselves to speak and listen, and when the clock struck twelve they were still together. Agatha had not, however, yet decided. In proportion as this situation became prolonged she felt more and more the importance of the consent or refusal she was about to pronounce. Pale, agitated, trembling, she had relapsed into almost total silence, replying only by monosyllables, mingled with sighs, to the pressing arguments urged by Pierre Maragnon, who sought by every means in his power to determine her resolution. But during this long conference he had made immense progress: without herself perceiving it, Mademoiselle de Colobrières had begun to treat him as an equal, and more than once she had called him Monsieur. At last, still unable to make up her mind, she said to him:—

“In the agitation of mind into which your proposal has thrown me, monsieur, I can decide on nothing. I have need of being alone, of examining my heart, and of praying to God before answering you. I ask a few hours to come to a decision. The night is already far advanced, and you leave this to-morrow morning. Well, as soon as the first gleam of dawn appears behind those hills my resolution will be taken. If you do not see me return, instantly leave the chateau, for in that case I shall have resigned myself to my lot.”

She rose from her seat. Pierre Maragnon then said in a submissive and respectful tone:—

"Your safety or your ruin are in your own hands, made-moiselle; may Heaven inspire your decision, and lead you hither to-morrow morning."

Agatha raised the sleeping child in her arms, and slowly retired from the apartment. It was necessary for her to cross a portion of the château in order to regain her bedroom. The silence of the night, the pale moonlight which formed upon the disjointed flooring a series of luminous frames, imparted to these vast halls, uninhabited for such a length of time, a gloomy and deserted aspect which forcibly struck Made-moiselle de Colobrieres. She cast around her a long and melancholy glance, as if to note the decay, the utter ruin of her family, and passed onwards, reflecting upon the haughty poverty and straitened indigence which formed such a sad contrast with the high nobility, her sole and unhappy dower. On re-entering her chamber she placed the child upon the bed, and seated herself pensively before the crucifix. Her lamp, which she had left lighted upon her table, now threw only a feeble and vacillating gleam upon the blackened wainscoting, which stood out in bold relief against the tarnished background of the wall. Amid the universal silence might be heard the invisible cutworm, which gnawed indefatigably in the wainscoting, pursuing its work of slow but certain destruction on the beautiful carvings in the oak and walnut-wood. At intervals the sound of the gnawing insect was interrupted by the light rustling caused by the hungry mice scampering behind the panels, and the falling of the damp plaster from the old walls. It was the end of October. Already the coming winter caused its chilling influence to be felt, and, as the night advanced, a colder air penetrated into the chamber through the dilapidated casements and made Agatha shudder. The poor girl had thrown herself on her knees. She endeavoured to pray; but, whilst her spirit essayed to rise towards God, her mind remained plunged in the torments of reflection. Like all persons whom no passion, no lively sentiment, irresistibly impels, she stood uncertain and terrified before the two resolutions, one of which it was necessary for her to adopt; trembling at the idea, that whatever determination she should come to might be repented of on the morrow. If she had experienced more sympathy and affection from her near relations around her, family attachment would at that moment have triumphed; she would have reflected on the desolation, the shame, which such an alliance would cause her kindred. But the baron took no great interest in her lot; all the affectionate sentiments which he was possessed of were absorbed by the gentle olive branches



whose number increased from year to year. When all these pretty children would gambol around him he would become thoughtful, like the wood-cutter in the fairy tale, and would calculate that he should be able more easily to rear his young brood when disembarassed from the presence of poor Agatha. The baroness was a worthy woman, but the inconveniences consequent on their straitened circumstances had made her selfish, compelling her to shifts which in a less kindly nature than hers would have quickly degenerated into sordid calculations. Mademoiselle de Colobrières was perfectly well aware of all this, and it was this humiliating, this painful certainty, which enabled her to contemplate without fear the anger and indignation of her relations, which would be excited at the news of her unheard-of marriage. She was still wavering however when, as is very frequently the case in the most important concerns of life, a trifling incident determined her. Whilst her mind was a prey to these conflicting emotions, and while, in an agony of fear, she beheld through the shutters the first approaches of the coming day, the child, who was lying on the bed, moved uneasily and sighed, disturbed by some painful dream. Agatha stooped over her, raised her gently upon the pillow, and kissed her fresh and rosy cheeks, which she bathed with her tears. This awoke the child, who instinctively threw her arms round her aunt's neck, murmuring—

"Aunt, show me all the pretty things the merchant sold you this evening."

"I have bought nothing," replied Agatha; "come, go to sleep. Should you like me to take you into the other room where your brothers are?"

"No; I would rather remain here," said the child, gazing round her; "my mother has promised me that I shall have this room because I am the eldest."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Colobrières, "and she told you that you are to have it soon?"

"Oh, very soon; so soon as you shall be in the convent," replied the little girl, with the innocent selfishness which children display in all their arrangements.

"In the convent?—I shall never go there—and I leave you my bedroom, Euphémie!" said Mademoiselle de Colobrières, rising hastily.

The child had fallen back upon the pillow, and a minute afterwards was fast asleep. Agatha took from the drawer which contained all she possessed, her little enamelled cross and her prayer-book; then she softly opened her chamber door, crossed the château with a firm and rapid step, and

descended to the banqueting-hall. From the earliest gleam of daylight Pierre Maragnon had been awaiting her, his eyes turned towards the door leading to the interior of the château. Beyond a doubt he had feared and trembled in his soul lest she should not return, for his altered features and the paleness of his cheek attested a night of watching and anxiety. At the sight of Mademoiselle de Colobrières he became still paler, and he felt a flush of pride and joy mount from his heart to his brain; but at once suppressing this violent emotion, he advanced to meet Mademoiselle de Colobrières, and said in a calm and gentle tone, with the same respect as if he had spoken to a queen:—

“Mademoiselle, we are about to start this instant if it is your wish; in four hours you will be at Antibes. For what we are to do afterwards you will give me your orders.”

“Come, monsieur,” replied Agatha, in a broken voice and in a tone at once modest and resolute; “but in place of proceeding directly to Antibes, I wish to pass through the village of Saint Peyre and stop there one hour.”

The mules were already laden, and the two drivers who led them had ranged the animals in file outside the castle boundaries. A tall young man, the same whom Agatha had seen asleep his gun within reach of his hand, when she had entered their apartment the preceding evening, was standing respectfully a short distance off, his foot in the stirrup. His resemblance to Pierre Maragnon was a sufficient indication that he was of the same blood and bore the same name.

At a sign from the merchant the little caravan was set in motion. Agatha still remained behind in the hall; she was employed in looking over a variety of articles, symmetrically arranged upon a table placed in the embrasure of a window, and which consisted of several handkerchiefs, pieces of lace, and stuffs. Amidst all these beautiful things, and placed in a manner so as to strike the eye at first sight, lay a paper upon which was written, “From Mademoiselle de Colobrières.” The little purse containing the six livres fifteen sous, the fruit of the baroness’s savings, had been deposited under the paper.

“It is your nuptial present, mademoiselle; I have taken the liberty of offering it in your name,” said the merchant.

“These poor children will be newly clad once at least in their lives!” murmured Agatha, thanking Pierre Maragnon with a look.

• Then she added quickly—

“Let us go.”

The merchant led out his horse, a strong and active animal

capable if necessary of carrying the four sons of Aymon. He mounted boldly, taking up Mademoiselle de Colobrieres behind him, and started at a round trot. The caravan had already disappeared round an angle of the road, but the footsteps of the mules, and the tinkling of the bells which were hung to their collars, might be heard in advance.

On reaching the bottom of the hill, and before entering upon the winding road which led to the village of Colobrieres, Agatha turned, and cast one last glance upon the house of her fathers—a bitter, painful, and melancholy glance, which expressed all the inmost feelings of her soul.

“Adieu,” said she mentally; “adieu, noble dwelling, from whence poverty has driven me! Had it but been permitted me to pass sadly and solitarily my life within the shelter of your ruined walls, had I but been left a little corner at the paternal hearth and the right of seating myself at the indigent board, where perhaps I should not have found even my daily bread, I would never have abandoned my family and renounced my name!”

These thoughts, this eternal adieu, were mingled with silent tears, which Mademoiselle de Colobrieres wiped away with one hand, while with the other, which was passed round Pierre Maragnon’s arm, she instinctively held her position upon the horse. The merchant, proud and happy as a monarch, rode on his way, his head erect, his heart joyous, dreaming of the happiness and honour that awaited him. Once out of sight of the Château de Colobrieres he slackened his horse’s speed, and took the liberty of asking Agatha if she had any particular design in going to Saint Peyre.

“The design of marrying you this very day,” replied she, simply.

These words made Pierre Maragnon tremble inwardly. In his rapture he was about to carry to his lips the little hand which pressed the sleeve of his green riding-coat; but restraining the expression of his sentiments, he contented himself with replying in the most respectful tone:—

“I would not have dared to take upon myself to press you on this subject, mademoiselle, yet I must say that in your position the best course for you to pursue is not to defer the honour you deign to confer upon me, and your resolution overwhelms me with joy. If you wish, we will leave my people to proceed on their way slowly, while we hasten forward in order to arrive before them.”

“Yes,” replied Agatha, “that is a good idea; we must reach Saint Peyre before the hour of mass.”

The merchant gave the spur to his horse, and, turning off from the high road, he proceeded through the fields. By this means he soon outstripped and passed his little caravan which held on its way, slowly dosiling between two banks so steep and overhanging that a party of ill-intentioned persons might have taken advantage of the position to form a perfect ambuscade. Agatha, not a little alarmed at the increased pace of the horse, drew in her little feet under her petticoat, and, with both hands retained firm hold of her cavalier, who at this moment bore no slight resemblance to Peter of Provence carrying off the fair Maguelonne.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning when the young couple drew up before the church of Saint Peyre. Already had the sacristan rung the first summons for mass, but the inhabitants of the village were in the fields, and there were to be seen only two or three old men seated in the porch and tranquilly warming themselves in the sun. The merchant fastened his horse to the paling which surrounded the curate's garden, and followed Mademoiselle de Colobrieres into the building. Both knelt for a moment at the entrance of the deserted nave, and then Agatha, making a sign to Pierre Maragnon to await her, directed her steps to the sacristy. The curé had already, with the assistance of the little boy who was to serve the mass, arrayed himself in his robes; he was a young man of considerable learning, of exemplary and tolerant piety, and eminent virtue. Occasionally while visiting his parishioners he had proceeded as far as the Château de Colobrieres, and Agatha was well known to him. \*

"May the blessing of heaven rest upon you, mademoiselle! Has any misfortune occurred at Colobrieres?" cried he, alarmed at the appearance of Agatha, who, pale and agitated, now advanced towards him.

"No, M. le Curé," replied she; "this matter regards myself alone. I have come to beg that you will on the instant hear me confess."

The curé, much astonished, made a sign to his little clerk to retire, and seated himself, after having closed the door of the sacristy.

Mademoiselle de Colobrieres then knelt down, and after having related to him all that had passed during the preceding night, she declared to him her resolution, and the design with which she had come to seek him. The case was novel and embarrassing. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres being an orphan and of age, could marry whom she pleased; but then her family, strictly speaking, possessed the power of dis-

puting this *mésalliance*. It was necessary, besides, that the formalities exacted by the ecclesiastical laws, saving in the exceptional cases, should be first accomplished. The good priest at first refused; perhaps he was in hopes that Agatha would renounce her suddenly formed resolution, and permit herself to be taken back without scandal or report to Colobrières. At the first word which he uttered on this subject, she rose from her knees and said to him in a firm tone:—

“No, M. le Curé, I have not gone so far only now to recoil from my decision. I will follow Pierre Maragnon wherever he may desire to lead me, and he will marry me when he may so please; but it is for your conscience to decide whether you will let me go thus. Since I have resolved to go with him, is it not better that it should be as his wife, and not as his mistress? Alas! if we were to commit such a sin, it would be indeed despite ourselves.”

This species of argument alarmed the curé. He was a truly religious man, tender of conscience, but of an upright and decided mind.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, after a moment’s reflection, “I consent to marry you; may God grant you grace to live hereafter without repentance or regret. After the ceremony I will seek an interview with M. le Baron de Colobrières. At this moment your friends are doubtless in search of you, and will have supposed everything rather than have suspected what has actually taken place. I will intercede for you, but I fear that my application will be unsuccessful. For the last time I entreat you to reflect: are you fully resolved to quit all your friends thus—to separate yourself for ever from your family, who will never perhaps think of you but with anger and shame?”

“My most ardent desire is that my family may pardon me,” replied Agatha, in a tone of melancholy firmness, “but I have scarcely a hope of it, M. le Curé; and in quitting Colobrières I well knew that it was for ever.”

The cure made a sign to her to kneel down again, and after having prayed with her and fulfilled the formalities which were to precede the religious ceremony, he requested her to await his coming in the church, and to tell Pierre Maragnon to come to him in his turn. Upon the order of the priest the little clerk proceeded to seek a couple of the old men who were sunning themselves in the porch, in order that they might serve as witnesses. A quarter of an hour afterwards Pierre Maragnon and Agatha de Colobrières were man and wife.

On leaving the church the newly-married couple found the

aravan, which had just arrived, drawn up in the marketplace outside. Pierre then approached the young man who accompanied him in his journey, and said, with an indescribable expression of joy and pride, as he pointed to the beautiful Agatha—

“Jacques, go and give her your hand; she is your sister!”

In the afternoon of the same day, while the bridal party were proceeding on their journey towards Marseilles, the curé took his way to Colobrieres. The baron and his wife were still lost in conjecture; they had found Agatha's nuptial present in the embrasure of the window, but they knew not what it meant, and their minds were distracted between a host of suppositions, not one of which approached the truth. When the curé had simply related the facts as they had occurred, the baron flew into transports of rage and indignation, and the baroness burst into tears. The good dame, despite the natural sweetness and forbearance of her character, was also indignant against her sister-in-law, and exclaimed, with an air of comic anger and despair—

“Mademoiselle de Colobrieres the wife of Pierre Maragnon! I could conceive, indeed, that she might be weak enough perhaps to love him, but to marry him! never!”

The Baron de Colobrières renounced his sister Agatha, solemnly cursed her, and expressly commanded that her name should never again be mentioned in his presence. After this solemn declaration, he constructed a sort of funeral pile of brushwood in the great court-yard, and when it was thoroughly lighted he haughtily cast upon the fire Agatha's nuptial presents. The baroness sighed deeply on seeing the rich stuffs disappear in the flames. She calculated how many new dresses might have been made out of those beautiful things which would soon become but a handful of ashes, but she knew her husband too well to hazard the slightest observation. She was well aware that the worthy baron would rather have clothed his children in sheepskins, as the painters have represented the infant St. John, than have decked them in the wedding present of the abhorred Pierre Maragnon. She grasped with a stifled groan the six livres fifteen sous, which were found intact in the purse, and reflecting that all this unhappiness had arisen from the idea which had occurred to her of spending her savings, she inwardly resolved to be more cautious and prudent for the future. The example of Agatha awakened her thoughts also to the lot of her daughters, the five eldest of whom had not been allowed to see their eighteenth year dawn in the paternal château, and long before the age when their aunt preferred marrying a

plebeian to taking the veil, were securely cloistered and had taken their final vows.

Let us now resume the thread of our story.—The baroness reflected all day upon the news which her husband had brought her. She was in a flutter of astonishment and joy, for her indignation against her sister-in-law was long since appeased, and at the bottom of her heart she had pardoned her fault. She did not cherish the slightest hope of bringing her husband round to similar sentiments of indulgence, but she said to herself, and to her simple mind it seemed a vast privilege, that for the future she could at least dare to pronounce before him the name of Agatha, and might even yet hear tidings of her.

That same day after supper, when La Rousse had removed the covers and when Gaston had gone with his sister to take a stroll by moonlight upon the terrace, the baron once more commenced whistling his martial air, *mezzo voce*, beating time to the measure upon the table. This time Madame de Colobrières did not fall asleep; she quietly awaited the communication which she felt would follow this reverie, for she was persuaded that the baron's thoughts were still occupied with his sister Agatha. At the end of about a quarter of an hour he threw himself back in his chair with a deep sigh and said dejectedly, "Wife, did you not perceive last night that it rained into our bedroom as if it was the open field?"

"I have perceived that for many years past, whenever the weather has been bad," replied she, sighing also.

The baron reflected again for a few minutes, and then resumed:—

"I do not see how it is to be remedied."

"I see perfectly well," replied the baroness; "we must have the sashes freshly glazed and have good new shutters put to the windows."

"And do you know also where the money necessary to pay for all this, is to come from?" said the baron in a tone of irony, and shrugging his shoulders like a man who hears some senseless project proposed.

A sudden idea at this moment flashed across the mind of the baroness; she shook her head and replied gravely:—

"Money? without doubt I could tell you where to find it if you wished—"

The baron looked at her in his turn with an air of astonishment, and fancying that he guessed her thoughts, he said to her with a sort of indignation in his tone:—

"Ah, madam! I thought you were too proud to have re-

course to this woman's wealth, or ever to dream of contracting the slightest debt of obligation towards her."

"You have misunderstood me, sir," replied the baroness, calmly; "it is she, on the contrary, who would owe us great obligations. This is the idea that occurred to me. Agatha de Colobrières must, by this time, be heartily tired of bearing the plebeian name of Maragnon: to enable her to get rid of it, sell her the tower of Belveser. It is a noble tenure, a true *savonnette*, a *vilain*, as they term it, and Agatha can then call herself Madame de Belveser, and no one will be able to contest her right to bear our thistle sinople upon the panels of her carriage."

"Sell the tower of Belveser! alienate a property even older in our family than the Château de Colobrières!" cried the baron; "do you know, madam, that our archives prove that this tower was built by Jehan de Colobrières, called Jeannet-Courte-Jambe, from his having met with an accident to one of his limbs in the memorable expedition of the Count of Provence against the Saracens of Fraixinet?"

"I am aware of it," replied the baroness, quietly, "and it has always seemed to me that the noble seigneur made a bad choice in the site of his castle—a naked rock surrounded by land which, good year or bad year, produces nothing at all."

"Formerly it had some fiefs attached to it," murmured the baron; "there were good lands appertaining to it which have passed into other hands."

"Well, do you, in your turn, get rid of the bad," returned Madame de Colobrières, quickly—"that will put a little money in your pocket, and it will be a satisfaction to you to think that your sister no longer bears this name of Maragnon; if she should ever present herself before you, you would not at least be obliged to call her by it."

"What! suffer this woman ever to appear before my eyes!" interrupted the baron; "why, madam, of what can you possibly be dreaming with your suppositions?"

"I suppose nothing," hastened to reply Madame de Colobrières, "I retract my observation; it is true that Agatha will never dare to present herself here, nor ought we to see her again; but is that a reason for your refusing what I propose? There is no occasion for us to make overtures directly to her; we could ask the curé to write, as if this idea came from him, and he himself could conclude the affair in your name. The tower of Belveser, I should think, is well worth a thousand crowns?"

"It is worth more," replied the baron. "I must confess,



nevertheless, that no one in the country would offer me even a double louis for it."

"Centuries might pass before a purchaser would present himself!" cried the baroness. "I am almost tired of reminding you that your late grandfather, pressed by a man from whom he had purchased a horse on credit, offered to give him this property in lieu of payment, and that the latter refused to accept it."

"That does not astonish me," replied the baron, with the utmost simplicity.

"I will communicate my idea to M. le Curé," resumed Madame de Colobrières, feeling that the moment for taking the initiative had come; "he will be the only one concerned in the matter, for we cannot, I admit, have any direct communication on the subject with the widow of Pierre Maragnon."

It was to the curé of Saint-Peyre, the same who, thirty years before, had married Mademoiselle de Colobrières, that the baroness reckoned upon committing the care of this negotiation. The worthy man had grown grey in his humble curacy, without ever having aspired to a more considerable benefice. He frequently visited the Colobrières family, and had rendered some assistance in the education of the children. Thanks to his care, Gaston was able to read the Latin authors passably, and to write a letter in good French. When the baroness had opened her mind to the old man on the subject, he considered the project feasible, and promised to write to Madame Maragnon, without, however, making her any direct proposal, and especially without flattering her with the hope of a reconciliation, which he felt was impossible. Some days afterwards he received the following reply.—

"Monsieur le Curé,

"I was overwhelmed with joy on receiving the news which you sent me of my brother and my dear sister. Although I cannot flatter myself with the hope that they will ever again deign to look upon me with the eyes of friendship, I shall ever cherish for them the warmest affection, and never cease to form wishes for their happiness. If any occasion should present itself of speaking of me to them, tell them, M. le Curé, that I have never ceased to grieve for the loss of their affection, and to regret bitterly having afflicted them by my marriage, but that heaven has pardoned me this fault, since it permitted me to be happy with Pierre Maragnon.

"I thank you for having informed me that the tower of Belvueser is for sale, and I hereby send you full powers and the necessary sum to purchase it in my name. It is not with the





attention, however, of ennobling myself a second time that I purchase this old family domain—I wish to bear to the grave the name honoured by the worthy man to whom I was united.

“Of the numerous children with which God has blessed me here remains but one girl. All my desires would be fulfilled if one day my brother and sister would deign to call her their niece.

“I venture to hope, M. le Curé, that you will be kind enough to favour me with a reply, and I recommend to your prayers,

“Your humble servant,

“AGATHA MARAGNON.”

The papers which accompanied this letter were perfectly formal and correct, and the messenger who carried them handed to the old curé at the same time two heavy bags of crown-pieces, the purchase money of the domain of Belveser. Nothing further remained therefore but to conclude the affair. The notary of Saint-Peyre drew out the deed of sale, and brought it to the baron, who signed it, forbidding that the name of Maragnon, which he now for the first time saw coupled with that of Colobrières, should be again pronounced in his presence. They had not shown him Agatha's letter, fearing lest the firm resolution expressed by her not to renounce her plebeian name to assume that of the noble fief she had purchased, might cause him to regret the consent which he had given to the sale of the tower of Belveser. The baroness's heart had been softened on reading her sister-in-law's letter. The affectionate recollections of her early years were aroused within her; and when the old priest communicated to her his reply to Madame Maragnon, her eyes were moistened with tears as she replied—

“I cannot hope to see her again before I die. Do me at least the favour, M. le Curé, of telling her that I have ever thought of her with affection, and that I thanked God on learning her prosperity. Tell her also that I embrace her, as well as my dear niece, her daughter.”

The good dame, as may be supposed, forbore speaking to her husband of this sort of postscript which she had added to the curé's letter, and there was no further mention made of Agatha at the Château de Colobrières. Gaston and his sister were kept in ignorance of what had passed, their mother judging it unnecessary to reveal to them the existence of an aunt of whom they had never heard. They were merely told that the tower of Belveser no longer formed a portion of their

father's domains, and neither one nor the other thought of asking the name of the purchaser.

When the baron found himself in possession of a sum of five hundred crowns, he fancied that he should never reach the bottom of his purse. Like the greater number of those who have scarcely ever handled money, he knew not how to calculate its value, and employed it without discrimination. Having learned that some foreign artificers were at work in a chateau a few leagues from Colobrières, he determined to summon them to the castle and to confide to their care the necessary repairs in the building. They were Italian workmen, skilful artists, but idle, rapacious, impudent, and dishonest as a band of gypsies. They commenced by restoring the chapel. The mutilated sculptures, under their intelligent hands, resumed their former proportions, the carved wood-work stood out dark and polished upon the white background of the walls, and the leaden window-frames, once more filled with stained glass, permitted only a dim religious light to penetrate into the time-worn building; but the day on which the keys of the chapel, now completely restored, were placed in the hands of the baron, there remained in his last bag but twenty crowns, and he was consequently obliged to dismiss the workmen. Fortunately the baroness had procured good stout shutters for the windows, and had newly clothed the whole family. She was not astonished when her husband informed her that he had reached the bottom of his purse; the poor woman was too well accustomed to this state of things to make herself uneasy about it. As for the old gentleman, he philosophically observed that his broad-skirted coat having lasted thirty years and more, the new one which he had now purchased would suffice for the remainder of his days. It seemed to him that henceforth he would not require to spend a single crown. A long habit of self-denial had rendered this contempt of riches easily practised; and it was in actual good faith that he considered the lot of a ruined noble, needy as himself, more enviable than that of the most opulent plebeian. His children had naturally imbibed the same ideas; and indigence, far from inspiring feelings of avarice or ambition in their hearts, had rendered them high-spirited, generous, and disinterested.

About three months had elapsed since the baron had signed the deed of sale which transmitted the manor of Belveser to Madame Maragnon. During this time only one event had disturbed the peaceful life of the inhabitants of Colobrières. This was the death of the old cure. The entire family, and

especially the baroness, sincerely lamented his loss. Not only had she lost her director and her spiritual guide, but she was now deprived of the sole possible link of communication existing between herself and Madame Maragnon. The vague hope which she had cherished of one day beholding her sister-in-law again was now extinguished, and less than ever did she now dream of informing her children that they had a near relation of plebeian name.

One day the entire family were collected in front of the principal portion of the château, upon a sort of platform, supported by the old fortifications, and which still bore the name of the terrace. A few stunted mulberry-trees had taken root in the arid soil, and formed a species of alley, in which, for the last forty years, the baron was accustomed to repair every day after dinner to play a game of bowls. Until lately the good curé had always been his adversary. The old man would approach the castle at a slow and uniform pace, reading his breviary, and as soon as the baron perceived his black gown at the foot of the road, he would call to La Rousse to bring the sack of bowls; but since the death of this faithful opponent he had been reduced to a trial of skill with his son Gaston, who had too much respect for his father to beat him, and willingly abandoned to him the only stake contended for—the honour of victory. Upon this day, therefore, the baron and his youngest son were rolling the heavy bowls in the alley, while the baroness and her daughter, seated upon the ruined parapet, plied their needles while observing the progress of the game. From time to time Anastasia, forgetting the players, would cast a long and pensive glance over the vast landscape. She loved this calm picture, the only one she was acquainted with, for never had her gaze crossed the boundary which separated the spot where she was born from the rest of the world. Never had her thoughts wandered beyond this horizon, and for her this corner of earth was the entire universe. It was now towards the close of October, and the setting sun bathed with its purple light those regions whose vegetation the cold breezes of the north never entirely wither. The steep declivities which sloped away on all sides from the château formed an immense foreground, as naked and barren as the shore of the dead sea, while beyond this desolate region might be perceived the cottages of a village which formerly belonged to the fief of Colobrières. These dwellings of the peasantry and small proprietors were irregularly grouped together, and embosomed amid orchards, in which flourished, side by side, the crab apple with its acid fruit and the aromatic orange-tree.

A long fringe of poplars marked the windings of the rivulet which watered these humble domains. Beyond this line of verdure, which the autumn had tinged with tints of a pale yellow, extended a chain of grey and calcined rocks, the highest peak of which was crowned by a mass of crumbling fortifications. The walls, pierced with large breaches, formed high in air a series of gigantic festoons of the most fantastic character. This ruined eagle's nest was the tower of Belveser.

The thoughtful gaze of Anastasia still wandered over the different features of the landscape, which were now rapidly fading away in the distance, when an unaccustomed sound attracted her attention. It seemed—a strange event!—that a vehicle of some sort was slowly advancing in the direction of the château. In fact almost at the same instant she perceived a carriage which had just entered the rugged, stony, and almost impracticable avenue, hewn in a zigzag direction out of the side of the hill on which the old mansion stood.

"Look, mamma, look," cried she, "a carriage! and one would even suppose that it was coming here!"

"Holy virgin! who is it that heaven sends us?" murmured the baroness with emotion, beckoning to her husband to approach.

Gaston de Colobrières and his sister ran to the extremity of the terrace and gazed with a feeling of stupefaction at the gay equipage which slowly toiled up the ascent. The baron paused in front of his wife, who clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven with an air at the same time joyous and alarmed.

"Some visitor is approaching," said she; "it is astonishing, for we do not expect any one. You have not received any letter, have you, M. le Baron?"

"None," replied he, coldly; "I know not who it is that comes thus to pay us a visit, but I warn you if it be this woman, this widow of Maragnon's, I will not see her, and I forbid her passing the threshold of the château. You can go to meet her, and signify my pleasure to her."

At these words he turned haughtily away and entered the sitting-room where La Rousse was laying the table for supper. Madame de Colobrières proceeded in trembling eagerness to meet the carriage which was already advancing along the terrace. The coachman stopped his horses, a tall lacquey opened the door, and in place of the aged woman whom she expected to see and perhaps not to recognise, the baroness perceived a young girl who sprang lightly to the ground and cast a timid and anxious glance around her. At the sight of

Madame de Colobrières she appeared to hesitate for a moment; then drawing forth a letter hidden in the corsage of her loose morning-dress, she presented it to her with a timid gesture of mingled fear and supplication.

"My dear child!" cried the baroness, affectionately embracing her, "I do not require to read this in order to learn who you are. How much you resemble your mother!—my poor Agatha!—'tis she who has written to me?"

"Yes, my dear aunt," replied the young girl, weeping with joy and affection. "She did not dare to come, but has sent me. Oh! how happy she will be when I tell her with what kindness you have received me!"

"My poor sister!" murmured the baroness; "I should have been obliged to forbid her entrance here; but I am not forbidden to receive her child. No, I shall not close the doors of the Château de Colobrières against this child, and her uncle shall see her!"

Whilst this little scene was taking place at the entrance of the château, Anastasia and Gaston had drawn near. Both gazed on the new-comer with a curiosity full of astonishment, and the youth murmured in the ear of his sister:—

"It is some city lady. And these tall lacqueys, and that lady who is seated in the carriage are her people! What a train! what an equipage! Why what can all these people mean by coming here?"

The baroness had by this time finished the perusal of her letter; she called her children towards her and said, as she presented them to the young girl:—

"This is Mademoiselle Eleonora Maragnon, your cousin; keep her company for a few moments, whilst I go and inform your father of her arrival."

Gaston took off his hat and bowed, recoiling as he did so with a terrified air, whilst his sister on her side made an awkward and timid curtsy to this unknown relation.

The young girl, already recovered from the slight embarrassment caused by this species of presentation, held out her hand to Anastasia, saying with that grace and ease of expression which the habit of mingling with the world always imparts:—

"My dear cousin, I see plainly by your manner that I am altogether a stranger to you; no one has ever spoken to you of me, I suppose. Is it not so? Well, I, on the contrary, know you. The good curate of Saint-Peyre always spoke of you in his letters to my mother, and on coming here I well knew that I should find a charming girl of my own age, and



I felt quite disposed to love her, as well as my cousin Gaston, dearly."

"You do us a great deal of honour, cousin," stammered poor Anastasia, not knowing in what manner to reply to this compliment. As for Gaston de Colobrieres, he blushed like a maiden of fifteen when Eleonora named him, and recoiled another step.

The baroness's return cut short this embarrassing interview.

"Come, my dear niece," said she, in a triumphant tone, taking Eleonora by the hand; "come, your uncle awaits you."

The baron was seated in the drawing-room upon an old leathern arm-chair, which from time immemorial had served as a sort of throne for the head of the family. He advanced two steps forward to meet his niece, and said to her gravely:—

"Mademoiselle de Belveser, you are welcome to the Château de Colobrieres! I trust that you will do us the honour of supping and sleeping here."

The young girl could scarcely repress a smile on hearing herself saluted by this aristocratic appellation.

"M. le Baron! my dear uncle!" cried she, bending forward as if to kiss the hand he extended towards her; but the old gentleman raised her up, kissed her forehead, and made her sit down beside him. There was a momentary silence. The baron, proudly enthroned upon his high-backed arm-chair, ordered supper to be served, and did the honours of his house with the dignified and polished air of a nobleman of the old school. The baroness and her daughter contemplated the new-comer with a curious and admiring gaze. According to their ideas, Eleonora was an accomplished and perfect beauty, while in reality she was merely pretty. Her features were regular but not strongly marked, and her complexion was exquisitely delicate and blooming. She was small, but she inherited from her mother a certain air in the carriage of the head which was full of grace and distinction. These juvenile attractions were further enhanced by a toilet of the most elegant simplicity. It was composed of a morning-dress of gray and rose-coloured striped taffeta made extremely wide in the skirt, which by its full and swelling outline added fresh attractions to a waist, the slenderest and roundest that was ever imprisoned in the harsh confinement of a corset. A handkerchief of the finest lawn, modestly crossed over the bosom, scarcely permitted the contour of a neck to be seen, whose fairness was enhanced by a large black velvet buckle fastened almost beneath her chin. It would have been a difficult task to decide whether this

charming girl was a blonde or brunette, for her hair, *crêpé* in front, was covered with a thin layer of powder, which rendered it perfectly white. Her blue eyes and dark eyebrows left the question undecided, and it was only by the rosy hue of her cheek that the spectator could ascertain, and that with difficulty, that her hair was not of the same colour as that of the dark Anastasia.

Eleonora, on her side, gazed on all that surrounded her with restrained curiosity and a certain degree of astonishment. The table was already laid—that is to say, La Rousse had thrown over it a coarse cloth, and had arranged symmetrically four plates of yellow earthenware, accompanied with a saltcellar of wood and an earthen jug, which served the purpose of a water carafe. The furniture of the apartment was in strict keeping with the exterior appearance of the château, and displayed the remaining fragments of the splendour of better days. The rickety chairs were covered with rich stuffs, but so worn and patched that it would have been difficult to determine, through so many odd and disproportioned fragments, what was the original fabric. The massive tables of old and curiously carved oak, had undergone the degradation of modern repairs performed with the saw and mallet, while the famous trunk in which the Baron de Colobrieres kept his archives was placed between the windows, and, in reality, formed the handsomest piece of furniture in the room. There was not a vestige of tapestry upon the walls; but as this hall had been formerly the *salle-d'armes*, the warlike trophies which the ancient lords of Colobrieres had suspended aloft, would have formed a more appropriate decoration than hangings of leather or tapestry, had not the arms long since disappeared, and there remained now only the nails to which they had been formerly attached. From these iron hooks, which projected here and there from the walls, hung a collection of dried plants, arranged in long garlands by the baroness, who preserved in this manner her stock of mugwort, thyme, and mint. \

"My dear niece," said the baroness, recollecting at that moment the elegant equipage which had brought the young girl, "you have left your people outside; we must ask them to come in, and have the horses put up."

"No, aunt, no, I thank you—it is not worth while," replied she, quickly. "Permit me merely to go and give some orders."

Saying these words, she rose, holding out her hand to Ana-

stasia as if to request her to accompany her, and both returned to the terrace. The carriage was still before the door.

"Mademoiselle," said Eleonora, addressing the person who had accompanied her, "Comtois will take you back to Belveser. Pray tell my mother that the Baron and Baroness de Colobrieres have kept me. The carriage can return for me to-morrow afternoon."

"Holy virgin! To set out alone at such an hour! I am horribly afraid of these bad roads!" cried a little sharp piercing voice from within the carriage.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear Mademoiselle Irene, no harm will happen you," replied Eleonora; "I wish you a safe journey."

Then addressing the coachman, she said, with a slight gesture of authority—

"Go on."

Anastasia was so astonished at hearing her speak thus, that she ventured to ask her who this lady was whom she had sent back to sleep at the tower of Belveser?

"It is Mademoiselle Irene de la Roche-Lambert, my governess, and my mother's companion," replied Eleonora, quietly.

"How, cousin! your governess is a person of quality?" observed Anastasia, with naïve impertinence.

"Oh, yes," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon, laughing.

"Another time I will introduce her to you; but to-day I would rather that she should return to Belveser to my mother."

"To Belveser!" repeated Anastasia, turning her large brilliant eyes towards the horizon where the crumbling walls of the tower formed a dark tracery against the evening sky; "can it be possible that there are any inhabitants there save the bats?"

"I will take you there, I hope, some of these days, and you shall see!" replied Eleonora, passing her arm through her cousin's, and taking their way back towards the hall.

Whilst the baron conversed with his niece, after having renewed the order to serve supper, La Rousse and the old domestic held council in the kitchen with Gaston, who exclaimed, with a terrified air—

"Why, it is a perfect shame to offer this handsome lady a plate of lentils and a crust of bread and cheese for supper!"

"What a pity it is that she should have arrived here just to-day, on the eve of a feast!" said La Rousse; "Neither four-footed game nor feathered game are wanting in the larder. But a fast-day, M. le Chevalier! It would have been better

if you had brought me a dozen of eggs instead of this beautiful grouse—”

“What! are there no means of making even an omelet, or procuring us a plate of fruit?” cried Gaston.

La Rousse shook her head.

“No, M. le Chevalier,” replied she with a sigh; “our hens have been running wild through the fields laying I know not where for the last week. There is only Cocotte, Made-moiselle Anastasia’s pullet, that never leaves this; but the stupid thing is always rambling about in the upper rooms. I am sure she hides her eggs in the corner of the balcony near the part which fell lately.”

“Ah! you think she lays her eggs there?” demanded Gaston.

“Yes,” replied La Rousse; “but as the flooring is half gone, and as no one could reach the balcony without risking their neck twenty times at least, the eggs will never leave the nest except in the shape of young chickens.”

“There are some beautiful pears also on the great pear-tree at the far corner of the enclosure,” added the old domestic; “but they are hanging on the highest branches. If it were daylight, M. le Chevalier might get them down by cutting the branches with a gun-shot, but it is already dark night.”

“Very good,” said Gaston, leaving the kitchen, “we shall see about that; finish laying the cover, and do not fail to put the silver plate upon the table.”

After an interval of about a quarter of an hour, La Rousse, who had just finished placing, with a feeling of pride, the six silver covers engraved with the arms of Colobrieres beside the yellow earthenware plates, returned pale as death to the kitchen.

“M. le Chevalier has not been in the sitting-room,” said she to the old domestic; “do you know where he is, Tonin?”

The latter having replied in the negative, she exclaimed:—

“Oh, heavens! I am certain that he has gone up stairs—that he is trying to climb the balcony! Ah, unhappy wretch that I am!—and it is I! If he falls I will throw myself after him!”

She darted up the staircase, crossed several halls completely dismantled and exposed to every blast, and reached the entrance of a ruined turret, the sole window of which was a large breach in the wall from which projected a stone balcony. Gaston was standing upon the embrasure. He had already seized his booty and was endeavouring to regain the door of the turret. Madeleine Panozon knew perhaps better than he the peril which he incurred in crossing this space which might

crumble to pieces beneath his feet; she leaned forward in an agony of terror and alarm, and cried in a stifled voice,—

“Do not advance a step!—keep along by the wall—gently!”

For a few minutes all was silence, and then La Rousse heard the footsteps of Gaston de Colobrieres whose form was hidden in the gloom, and who advanced towards her, keeping near the wall.

“Here,” said he, holding out the little basket in which he had placed the eggs; “take care that you do not break them, and hasten down as quickly as you can to the kitchen. As you pass, you can take the pears which I left at the bottom of the staircase.”

“Holy virgin! And how did you ever manage to get them?” cried the young girl.

“*Parbleu!* I climbed up the pear-tree to be sure,” replied Gaston.

“And, almost at the same moment, you have twice risked your life to add two dishes to this lady’s supper!” murmured La Rousse with singular bitterness.

Then, without knowing wherefore, she burst into tears. From this moment a feeling of aversion and smothered hatred for the pretty cousin of Gaston de Colobrieres took possession of Madeleine Panozon’s bosom.

After having accomplished these perilous enterprises, Gaston noiselessly entered the family drawing-room and seated himself apart from the rest, for the presence of this young girl who conversed with so much ease and grace intimidated and embarrassed him. During supper he did not once address her directly, and it was with deep vexation that he felt the blood mount to his brow each time that, raising her eyes of an undecided blue to his face, she seemed to question or reply to him. When the clock struck nine the baron rose from his arm-chair, and making a sign to the baroness to take a light, proceeded, according to old-fashioned custom, to conduct the new-comer to the bedchamber assigned to her. This room, which was also the one in which Anastasia slept, was the same that Agatha de Colobrieres had formerly occupied. Nothing had been added to or changed in regard to the furniture; there the same arrangement was still observed, and the apartment presented the same careful and almost elegant appearance.

The baron and his wife retired after having tenderly embraced Eleonora. When they had left the room the young girl threw herself on a chair, and, leaning her forehead upon Anastasia’s shoulder, burst into a flood of tears.

"Dear cousin! what is the matter? what has happened?" demanded the latter affectionately.

"Ah!" replied she, "I did not expect so kind a greeting. The Baron de Colobrieres calls me his niece, he receives me under his roof; but my poor mother I can plainly see has not been forgiven. When I endeavoured to speak of her to him, he frowned and changed the conversation. Alas! will he never pardon her?"

## CHAPTER II.

THE day following the arrival of Mademoiselle Maragnon at the Chateau de Colobrieres, as the first beams of the rising sun were penetrating through the chinks of the badly-joined shutters, and bathing in its rosy light the apartment in which the two cousins slept, Eleonora suddenly awoke, and raising herself on her elbow, contemplated for a moment the decayed furniture, the finely chiselled sculptures, and the mouldering ceiling, at the four corners of which the cherubims covered with their interlaced wings the heraldic thistle of the Colobrieres; then turning round with an infantine gesture, she passed her hand across the still closed eyes of Anastasia as if to chase away sleep, and said as she kissed her forehead:—

"Good morning! cousin."

"Good morning!" returned the latter, embracing her. "But come, quick—quick, let us rise; the day will seem so short to us!"

They dressed themselves hastily, and then knelt down to pray together. The two cousins had passed a great portion of the night in conversation, and Anastasia had at length learned the sort of family secret which had been so long and so carefully concealed from her. The proud young girl was astonished that a daughter of the blood of Colobrieres could have thus lowered herself; but the prejudices of her education could not succeed in stifling the feeling of sympathy and friendship with which the daughter of Pierre Maragnon had already inspired her, and it was with a sort of transport that she abandoned herself to this new and charming intimacy.

Eleonora opened the window and stepped out upon the narrow balcony, where a melancholy picture was presented to her view. At her feet she perceived the principal court-yard, still in part paved with large slabs, between which sprang up

the sterile briar and useless dog-grass. At the back of this open space stretched a long suite of apartments, whose yawning windows had long since been destitute of glass or shutters, while the huge square tower, which went by the name of the *donjon*, overtopped with its solid masonry these ruined walls. The two wings which formed the sides of the court were in the same state of dilapidation; all the windows were completely open to every breeze of heaven, and the swallows now built in the ceiling of the old hall, where formerly had commenced that romantic adventure which was concluded in the church of Saint-Peyre.

"This, then, is the dwelling and domain of the Colobrieres!" murmured Eleonora with a sigh; "what ruin! what decay!"

She leaned pensively over the balcony, her eyes swimming in tears. The aspect of this dilapidated spot made a painful impression on her heart, and at this moment the rich heiress of Pierre Maragnon regretted that she did not bear the name of Colobrieres, which would have given her the right of restoring these fast crumbling ruins.

"We are poor, cousin," said Anastasia with tranquil pride; "but look you, nobility is better than riches, and our father lives here as contented and as highly respected as a king. And, after all, what does it matter if time demolishes these vast halls which we do not inhabit?—the portion of the chateau which we occupy is still solid; and if it should threaten to decay, we will establish ourselves in the donjon. The donjon tower will not fall; it will stand for ages, although it is as old as the name of Colobrieres itself."

"The tower of Belveser was still older, it is said," said Eleonora, turning her eyes towards the ruins which were visible upon the horizon.

"Yes, so my father says; but it was not time which overthrew it," replied Anastasia quickly; "it was taken by assault, sacked, and dismantled, by the Spaniards in the time of Charles the Fifth. One of their commanders, Garcilaso, a great poet and a brave captain, was mortally wounded in the assault, and the Emperor his master, by whom he was greatly beloved, gave no quarter to the besieged. A Colobrieres, who commanded the garrison, was killed in the breach. Gaston read me the whole history during the long evenings. Well, cousin! it is a pretty title that of the lady of Belveser, and the old tower is a noble edifice; only I cannot conceive how you have managed to find a spot fit to live in there."

"Live up there?" said Eleonora with a smile; "no one ever thought of such a thing, I imagine, since the passage of

the Emperor Charles the Fifth's soldiers! My mother preferred building another chateau."

"A chateau!" repeated Anastasia, casting her eyes round the plain.

"Come," continued Eleonora, "let us climb to the top of the donjon, and from thence I will show you the spot where my mother now lives. Perhaps at this very moment she is seated upon the terrace, and turning her eyes in this direction."

"I have never ascended the tower alone," replied Anastasia, whose curiosity was vividly excited; "but we will go and call Gaston."

They descended the staircase hand in hand. There was no one in the sitting-room. The baron was under the hands of the barber, who came every Sunday to shave him; Madame de Colobrieres was lecturing La Rousse in the kitchen; and Gaston had become invisible.

"Ah, the naughty fellow!" said Anastasia, after having called him repeatedly in vain; "I begin to think, cousin, that he is afraid of your pretty face."

"He must positively accustom himself to it, however," replied Eleonora, gaily.

"We can ascend the tower alone," continued Anastasia; "we shall encounter neither wood-demons, evil spirits, nor in short any one. Come, follow me!"

Beyond the court of honour, and behind the main portion of the dwelling-house, there ran a ditch or fosse whose depth was concealed by a thick growth of bramble which completely filled it. On the other side of this abyss opened the door of the tower. It had formerly been reached by a drawbridge, but this means of communication had long ceased to exist, and its place had been in a manner supplied by filling up the moat so as to form a narrow causeway strengthened by sloping banks. The timid Eleonora crossed this narrow bridge, trembling at every step, and following her cousin closely; for she heard the green lizards rustle beneath the brambles, and the frogs croak mournfully at the foot of the old tower. These sounds, to which her ear was not accustomed, caused an indefinable sensation of terror in her breast, and her uncle's chateau began to appear in her eyes a most melancholy abode. Anastasia boldly pushed open the door of the donjon, which had long remained ajar, as the key no longer revolved within the rusty lock, and mounted first the rugged staircase which wound in spiral rings up to the higher stories of the tower. The aspect of the place presented nothing terrifying; the sun



shone brightly down upon the time-worn steps, and the sparrows fluttered gaily about the window-sills. After having climbed about a hundred steps, the two young girls found themselves upon a narrow landing.

"We must now ascend to the summit," said Anastasia, pointing to another staircase still more steep and narrow than the preceding one, and which was supported on one side by the wall, and bordered on the other by a slight wooden hand-rail.

This stone ladder led straight to the summit of the donjon, and opened upon a little platform between the battlements, which formed a species of balcony of about half the height of a man's body.

"Come on!" cried Eleonora, this time distancing her cousin. They mounted the staircase nimbly and paused at the top, charmed at the aspect of the landscape which lay stretched beneath their feet. The sun had scattered the veil of mist which during the night had rested on the valley, and its conquering rays now seemed to penetrate every corner of creation. The autumn had strewn here and there its sombre tints; but the new vegetation had already begun to appear beneath the yellow vine leaves which the wind had scattered abroad, and in the fields the young wheat stems could already be seen sprouting up above the soil. Eleonora placed her hand upon her cousin's arm, and said, as she pointed out to her the rivulet with its fringe of poplars which flowed through the plain:—

"Look there, Anastasia: do you see beyond those trees a bridge thrown over the stream?"

"Yes," replied she; "and beyond that again I can distinguish something like an immense garden, and still farther off the front of a splendid edifice. Yonder house cannot have been built long, cousin?"

"It is scarcely finished yet," replied Eleonora; "when my mother purchased the tower of Belveser, about three months ago, she wished to increase her property, and bought at the same time a piece of land in the valley. In place of repairing the tower, she erected a handsome dwelling-house at the foot of the hill, and it is the new Chateau de Belveser that you see yonder."

"A beautiful new chateau!" said Anastasia, admiringly.

"We shall henceforth reside at Belveser half the year," continued Eleonora; "the situation pleases my mother, and she can almost fancy that she is still at Colobrieres. When we stroll together in the evenings on the terrace, our eyes are

constantly turned in this direction; but we can only perceive the battlements of this old tower."

"It commands all the neighbouring country," said Anastasia; "it was here that the seignorial standard formerly waved."

While thus speaking she turned her eyes towards the flag-staff, which rose like a lofty mast from the interior parapet of the platform; but scarcely had she cast her eyes upon it when she exclaimed:—

"Holy Virgin! the flag-staff is all blackened, as if it had been in the flames, and the iron escutcheon which was nailed to the foot of it has disappeared!"

She approached nearer and looked over the parapet.

"Ah, heavens!" said she, recoiling in alarm, "the floors have crumbled away and the tower is like a huge empty hive! This disaster must have occurred during the last storm: it has been struck by lightning, that is certain."

She struck the charred wood with her hand, and at the slight shock the flag-staff tottered for an instant and fell over the parapet, a fragment only of the pole remaining fixed in the stone.

"The lightning has struck it," said Anastasia, with a sort of stupor; "this forebodes some direful event—some misfortune will surely happen to the house of Colobrieres."

"Oh! cousin, let us descend," cried Eleonora; "the place we are standing on may perhaps fall also."

"No; these walls are solid," said Anastasia, stamping on the stones with which the platform was flagged; "the wood-work alone is damaged; fear nothing, cousin—I will go first—follow me."

So saying, she quickly descended the first flight of steps, and on reaching the landing-place turned round, as if by a gesture to summon Eleonora to her side. The latter, before descending the first step, placed her hand upon the balustrade to assure herself of its stability; but the electric fluid, after having struck the flag-staff, had glided along the staircase, reducing to powder the iron clamps which fastened the light wood-work to the stone steps, and the frail barrier immediately became detached and fell with a crash into the depths below. Eleonora started back with a piercing cry. She was seized with vertigo at the sight of those narrow steps, suspended as it were over an abyss; her knees trembled; it seemed to her that an invincible power impelled her towards the gulph, and she instinctively grasped the parapet, turning away at the same time her head.

"Oh, my mother!" she cried, with an indescribable accent of terror and despair; "Oh! my mother! Oh! my dear Dominick! come to my assistance."

"I will come and help you, cousin; don't be afraid," cried Anastasia.

In fact, the courageous girl did ascend a few steps, but her heart failed her when she beheld the abyss beneath her feet, and, leaning against the wall, she in her turn uttered screams of distress.

This time Gaston heard her. A moment afterwards he arrived breathless upon the landing. Seizing his sister by the hand, he made her seat herself on the ground, then with rapid bounds he ascended the perilous staircase. Eleonora was leaning against the parapet; he took her in his arms and pressed her to his bosom, saying:—

"Your head is giddy—close your eyes."

Then he descended with firm and cautious steps, and deposited her in safety beside his sister on the landing-place. The young girl remained for a moment as if senseless. She was deadly pale, and made no reply to her cousin, who called aloud her name and embraced her, shedding at the same time a flood of tears. Gaston gazed upon her with emotion, but kept silence. Arousing herself at length from her stupor, Made-moiselle Maragnon threw herself into the arms of Anastasia, and then turning quickly towards Gaston, she embraced him warmly, crying:—

"My good cousin! Oh, how my mother will love you when she hears that you have done this!"

This innocent and spontaneous burst of gratitude produced almost the same effect upon Gaston as the sight of the dark abyss of the tower had done on Eleonora; he changed countenance, turned away his eyes, and replied in a broken voice:—

"Cousin, what I have done is quite simple and very natural."

"You have risked your life to bring me from yonder terrible place," said Eleonora with animation.

Gaston recollected at this moment the perilous ascent which he had made the evening before for the acquisition of a dozen eggs, and he murmured with a sigh, and smiling faintly:—

"I have sometimes risked my life for a less matter."

He advanced again towards the staircase, and seeking at least to disguise the agitation he could not yet overcome, he affected to contemplate with attention the havoc which the last storm had caused in the donjon.

"What a disaster!" said he, looking down; "all the ceilings





have fallen in, and the woodwork is lying in a heap upon the vault of the ground-floor. All is gone; the knight's hall, that of the archives, and the treasury no longer exist."

"Fortunately they were empty," observed Anastasia, with naïve simplicity.

"It is useless to inform my father of this event," continued Gaston; "he never comes here. He will remain ignorant that the donjon possesses now only the staircase and the four walls. We shall merely show him that the flag-staff is broken."

"Yes, yes, it will be better so," said Anastasia, eagerly; "I trust at least that he may not hear of his misfortune to-day."

"In order that he may not date the occurrence as taking place the day following my arrival at the Chateau de Colobrieres," said Eleonora sighing and pressing her cousin's hand within her own; "Alas! I trust that my presence here may not be a presage of misfortune!"

Thus speaking, she rose to descend, but her knees still trembled, and in place of leaning on Anastasia's arm she took Gaston's, saying to him in an affectionate and plaintive voice:—

"My good cousin, it seems to me as if the very stones trembled beneath my feet; but with you I am not afraid."

Gaston did not reply; he also was trembling, and one would have said his arm sank beneath the pressure of the little hand that rested upon it. After having slowly descended the staircase, Eleonora paused at the foot of the tower upon the narrow causeway, and gazed around her, listening to the sounds which alone disturbed the silence of this deserted spot. The frogs continued their melancholy croak; quick sudden rustlings might be heard under the dark foliage; and the atmosphere was impregnated with a slight aromatic odour, which announced the presence of reptiles concealed in the damp recesses of the moat.

"Cousin," said Anastasia, taking the other arm of the young girl within her own, as if to completely reassure her, "confess that if you were here alone, you would be hugely afraid of those reptiles which crawl about below there?"

"The Chateau de Colobrieres must appear to you a melancholy abode," added Gaston, timidly; "you will perhaps carry with you, on leaving it, a very unfavourable impression of it?"

"Oh! no, I am sure I shall not," replied Eleonora quickly, "the aspect of this place is sad it is true, and I feel here a sort of secret fear, an inexpressible melancholy; but my soul delights in these impressions."

"You will not willingly recall to mind our expedition to the donjon," said Anastasia; "you will tremble every time you think of the staircase leading to the platform."

"I shall never think of it without a shudder," replied Eleonora; "but it is very singular, it seems to me that I shall also delight to dwell on the recollection of it. It is the first time in my life that I ever really knew what fear was, and I could not have believed that the joy of escaping so great a danger should leave so pleasurable an emotion in one's mind."

While thus speaking she involuntarily raised her lovely eyes, beaming with the softest emotion, to Gaston's face, then abandoning the young man's arm, she proceeded onwards leaning on that of his sister.

"My dear cousin," said the latter, uneasily, "you are still very pale, you are suffering?"

"A little," replied Eleonora, passing her hand across her forehead; "my poor head is swimming—the open daylight dazzles me."

She tottered forward a few steps farther, and on entering the sitting-room she fainted away.

"Oh! heavens, my dear niece, what has happened?" said the baroness, taking her in her arms, whilst Anastasia in dismay drew forward her father's arm-chair, and cried to La Rousse to bring some vinegar.

"What has happened?" repeated Madame de Colobricer, bathing the young girl's temples with cold water, and making her inhale the vinegar cruet which La Rousse had brought.

"We were walking near the moat," replied Anastasia, "and my cousin was afraid of the serpents."

"Poor girl! she has not been brought up in the country; she is not accustomed as we are to these horrid reptiles," said the baroness. "What an idea to take her to that place above all others, where I verily believe all the insects of the creation are swarming. You ought to have taken her on the terrace, where she would have seen only the pretty little green lizards and the grasshoppers."

Eleonora now sighed faintly, opened her eyes, and murmured as she pressed her aunt's hand:—

"Dear aunt! I feel better already; pardon me the uneasiness I have caused you: I felt very weak, but it has already passed away, and I am now quite myself again."

She endeavoured to rise, but the baroness gently compelled her to reseat herself.

"Yes, my child, thank heaven it is nothing," said she; "but you must remain here very quiet. The second bell has

already rung for mass, but you must not come with us. Anastasia will remain at home to take care of you and keep you company; in such a case as this, you are not obliged to attend mass and so you are both excused for to-day."

The baron had already preceded them. Madame de Colobrieres searched everywhere for Gaston; but he also had left the house without having been perceived.

"Can he have already gone down to the village? I have not seen him this morning," said the baroness, a little astonished. "Excuse him, my dear niece, he is shy and fears being troublesome."

The worthy dame took her prayer-book and her parasol of green taffeta, and called the servants. Old Tonin stood respectfully aloof, ready to follow his mistress at the first command, and La Rousse had run out and now paused before the chateau, seeking Gaston on every side with an uneasy eye. At length she perceived him.

"M. le Chevalier is already below on the road," said she, returning to the house; "he is walking as if he would be there the first."

"Come on then, I do not wish to be last at church either," said the baroness.

She kissed her niece, and proceeded on her way followed by Tonin and La Rousse, both in their Sunday garments, and walking with heads erect like the servants of a noble family in gala costume.

The two young girls, left alone in the apartment, looked at each other with a smile, and Anastasia exclaimed gaily:—

"We are now sovereign mistresses here, and command for the present the domain of Colobrieres in all its extent. Come! what shall we do? First of all, cousin, you must remain quietly in that huge arm-chair, whilst I give my birds their seed, and water my flowers; after that we will take our coffee—some very nice coffee of roasted grey peas which La Rousse makes famously, and which we will sweeten with some honey from our own hives. You will find it is excellent."

"It will be delightful!" replied Eleonora, with the same air of contentment and gentle gaiety.

And yet the tears started to her eyes, for she could not but suspect the straitened circumstances which obliged the Colobrieres family to replace the Mocha herb by an indigenous plant, and colonial sugar by the produce of their bees.

Anastasia opened the osier cage in which fluttered her green linnets and goldfinches, and made them come out one after the other, calling each by its name. The little creatures spread



themselves joyously over the embrasure of the window, and began to pick up the grain which the young girl had thrown them. A moment afterwards she recalled them, and they quietly re-entered their prison.

"They are indeed very well bred," said Eleonora; "but do you not think that they would be happier in the fields? If I were in your place I would give them their liberty. Ah! cousin, how joyously they would fly away."

"Not at all, I have tried them," replied Anastasia; "I have repeatedly allowed them to leave the cage, and once actually chased them from the place. They remained outside all day, and in the evening returned and began fluttering round their cage, endeavouring to get in again. This circumstance led me to reflect deeply, and has relieved my mind from a very painful feeling."

"You have already had cause for sorrow, then, my dear Anastasia?" said Mademoiselle Maragnon, with a degree of interest not unmixed with astonishment.

The young girl drew a chair near Eleonora's couch, and, taking her hand affectionately, she replied in a simple and unaffected, yet serious tone—

"You have been brought up in the world, my dear cousin, while I have always lived the life of a poor recluse; and yet events have passed around me which have made me reflect and weep. The tranquil and monotonous existence which we lead here has been chequered by several of those events which leave deep and lasting regrets in a family, and, young as I was, I have felt how painful it is to part for ever from those that are dear to us."

She checked herself for a moment, as if overcome by recollections which recurred the more forcibly to her mind that she was not accustomed to dwell upon them; then she resumed in an agitated voice:—

"I had six sisters, cousin; the eldest I never saw; she was already in the convent of La Misericorde when I was born. But I can recollect the others well. As I was the youngest, they lavished on me a thousand marks of affection and kindness. They did their utmost to spoil me, and in return I loved them with all my heart. Alas! I saw them depart, one after the other, for the cloister; and my great brothers, as I used to call them, left us also. At each separation we felt a new pang. Our feelings were not displayed openly, however; everything in the household appeared to go on as usual; my father's firmness never for an instant deserted him, but my mother would remain melancholy a long time, and I wept

every day on seeing another vacant place at the table. It is now five years since my last sister took the veil. The grief that I experienced on seeing her depart has become mitigated; but since I have ceased to be a child, and have begun to reflect, I have felt serious uneasiness and fear. I have no inclination for a conventual life. I feel that a convent is only another name for a prison, and I have fancied that my sisters must be very unhappy. Sometimes I have thought that if it should be my father's will to doom me to a like fate, I could not accustom myself to the cloister, and should for ever regret my liberty. And yet when I saw my birds accustom themselves to their cage so well that they had no longer any wish to leave it, I thought that my sisters had perhaps also ended by growing reconciled to their convent, which is a tranquil and easy prison; then I felt in a measure consoled, and our eternal separation appeared to me depicted in milder colours."

Whilst Anastasia was speaking, Mademoiselle Maragnon had clasped her in her arms.

"My sweet cousin," cried she, pressing her to her bosom, "all these sorrows are past and gone; your sisters, doubtless, live contented and happy, and you will never enter a convent, will you?"

"I believe that it is my father's wish to keep me with him," replied the young girl; "yes, I hope to remain here always."

"And we shall often see each other, and we will love each other like two sisters, shall we not?" resumed Eleanora.

"Oh, yes indeed! I wish for nothing so much," cried Anastasia. "I fancy I love you already almost as well as my last sister, my poor Sidonia, who is now called sister Anne of the Trinity."

They remained for a few moments silent and melancholy; then, with the quick transition of feeling so natural to their age, they began to speak of the incident which had so seriously alarmed Eleonora.

"Cousin," said Anastasia all at once, "when you were leaning against the parapet calling for help, you called your mother, and then afterwards another person."

"Yes, my cousin Dominick," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon; "oh yes, I remember; I thought of him then, and called him."

"Ah! you have a cousin then whom you love dearly also?" said Anastasia, in a tone of regret.

• "Yes, my sweet Anastasia; I will introduce him to you, and you will I hope love him also a little. He is the son of

my uncle Jacques Maragnon, a very honest man, and one of the richest merchants of Marseilles."

"I should like with all my heart to know all your family," said Anastasia, with some embarrassment; "but my father has peculiar ideas. Who knows, dear cousin, if he will permit me to return your visit?"

"Yes, it is indeed doubtful," murmured Eleonora, saddened by this observation; "he has not pardoned my mother, and yet I have found favour in his eyes. Although I bear the name of Maragnon, he called me his niece."

"Yes, his niece, Mademoiselle de Belveser," replied Anastasia, shaking her head. "However, we shall see what his will is. And tell me, cousin, is M. Dominick a young man of Gaston's age?"

"Yes, very nearly," replied Eleonora; "and if you only knew how amiable, how lively, and how handsome he is!"

"As handsome as Gaston?" asked Anastasia, ingenuously.

"Oh! no, cousin," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon, without hesitation.

During this conversation Mademoiselle de Colobrieres had drawn forward the table, on which La Rousse had previously arranged two large yellow cups, the pot of honey which served in place of sugar, and a large loaf of household bread, in the composition of which more rye than wheat had certainly been employed.

"Cousin," said she, placing on the table an old earthenware vessel, containing the bitter decoction which the inhabitants of Colobrieres called their coffee, "we shall now go to breakfast if you please."

As soon as the coffee was served, a large brindled greyhound, which had been sleeping under the table, rose from his lair and placed his long serpent-like head upon Anastasia's knee.

"This is Lambin, my brother's dog," said the young girl, patting him; "an animal of the very worst character, I warn you, cousin."

And as Eleonora put out her hand to caress him, she added quickly:—

"Do not touch him! he would bite you even if you were to offer him something to eat. He is a *charnaigre*, one of the most ferocious species of dogs."

"He has not in fact a very prepossessing appearance," said Eleonora, drawing back: "what a ferocious eye! Oh, the horrid animal! See, cousin, he knows I am speaking ill of him—look how his hair is rising on his back!"

"He hears some noise outside," said Anastasia, turning her head towards the window.

"He would bark if it were a stranger?"

"No, he is what is called a treacherous dog; he does not bark, but merely bites. Something annoys him at this moment—see how uneasy he is."

Whilst his young mistress spoke, the dog, without moving his head, turned his glaring eye towards the door, and threw back his slender and pointed ears.

"Most probably some traveller is passing along the road below the château," continued Anastasia; "or perhaps there is some one outside."

"All the doors are open and we are alone," observed Eleonora, uneasily.

"Do not be alarmed, cousin; Lambin guards us," replied Anastasia, with a smile; "he is wicked, it is true, but then he is brave and faithful."

At this moment the dog rose, his hair bristling, and his eye glaring; he had heard a hoarse voice murmuring under the window:—

"Charity in the name of the Saviour, good souls of the Lord! Charity, if you please!"

"It is some poor man," said Anastasia, cutting off a lump of bread. "Here, Lambin! here! Don't bite the poor man; go and lie down!"

The dog obeyed, growling, and Anastasia went up to the window to hand the piece of bread to the mendicant, who, far from thanking her, said insolently:—

"It is not bread I want, I must have money."

"Go away, I have no money," replied the young girl, coldly.

And as the beggar insisted in an almost threatening tone, she repeated haughtily:—

"I have no money to give you—begone."

"I have some!" said Eleonora in alarm, and searching in her pockets. "Here, cousin, send away that horrid man as quickly as you can."

The imprudent girl had scarcely uttered these words when the mendicant entered the gate of the chateau, and advanced boldly into the grand court-yard. He was a man still in the prime of life. His long uncombed beard descended upon his naked breast; he carried a wallet like a mendicant friar; and one would have said that the squalid rags with which he was clothed had formerly been some military uniform.

"O, Heavens!" said Eleonora, more dead than alive, "the wretch is coming in here. Who knows with what design? I am dreadfully frightened, cousin!"

The mendicant advanced to the door of the room.

"Begone!" cried Anastasia aloud, "leave this instantly, or I will let loose my dog upon you!"

The mendicant raised his knotted cudgel with a sneering laugh, and advanced another step.

"At him, Lambin!—guard the door!" cried Anastasia. "Seize that man! Tear him!"

The greyhound darted forward open-mouthed, his long tail trailing on the ground like that of a panther, sprang at the throat of the beggar, pulled him to the ground, and began silently to throttle him.

"Call off your dog! Mercy! I am a dead man!" cried the wretch in a stifled voice.

Anastasia recalled the dog, who, animated by the combat, had fallen furiously upon his prey, and seemed in no hurry to obey her commands. At length however he loosened his hold. The beggar arose uttering fearful curses, regained the terrace, and instantly disappeared at a turning of the road.

"He would have killed us," said Eleonora, with an air of conviction.

"No, I do not think so," replied Anastasia, calmly; "he would have taken your money, and that pretty watch he saw glittering at your belt. He would have perhaps amused himself with exciting our fears, but I do not think that he would have offered us any violence."

"No matter," said Eleonora, advancing her pretty little hand towards the dog—"no matter, even at the risk of being bitten, I must pat the pointed muzzle of brave Lambin, who so courageously defended us."

"These are agreeable incidents, however, in your expedition to the Chateau de Colobrieres," said Anastasia, with melancholy gaiety; "twice in the same morning you have been almost frightened to death."

"The first time, I confess, I was very much alarmed," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon, "but I have already quite recovered. A few more encounters like these, and I shall be able to cross an abyss without shuddering, and no longer fear the most determined bandit, not to speak of serpents, green lizards, or anything else, animate or inanimate."

About noon the baron and his lady were descried ascending the road leading to the Chateau de Colobrieres. They found

the two cousins awaiting their approach, strolling up and down the piece of waste land bordered by mulberry-trees, which the old gentleman called the grand alley.

"My lord," said Eleonora, advancing with an air of winning respect, "I was not able to pay my duty to you this morning. Permit me now to wish you good morning, and to enquire after your health."

"I am quite well, my dear niece," replied the baron, gallantly kissing the mitten which half-covered Eleonora's hand, "and how are you? Madame de Colobrieres informed me that you were rather unwell this morning, and I was truly sorry to hear it."

"I feel most grateful for the interest you are kind enough to express, my dear uncle," replied she; "I am quite recovered again, and I only regret that my indisposition has deprived me of the pleasure of accompanying you. I am so happy to be with you and with my dear aunt, that I should not wish to lose a single one of the moments I am permitted to pass in your society."

"She is charming," murmured the baron, elevating his great bushy eyebrows, and turning towards his wife, who responded by a gesture of assent, accompanied with a deep sigh.

"But where is my brother Gaston?" demanded Anastasia, perceiving that only old Tonin and La Rousse accompanied her father and mother.

"Has he not yet arrived? That is astonishing," said the baroness. "This morning he left the castle without waiting for us, and I fancied that he had gone on to church before us; but not at all; he did not arrive until after the lessons. As soon as service was over he left church before us, and strode off through the fields at the rate of three leagues an hour; why, I wonder, since he has not yet arrived here."

"I would lay a wager that M. le Chevalier will re-appear at dinner hour with some dish of his own providing," whispered Tonin in La Rousse's ear.

"A dish for dessert, which he has most probably gathered from some precipice!" murmured the latter, bitterly.

Monsieur and Madame de Colobrieres entered the chateau. Since their marriage they had never once omitted on Sunday, after mass, playing a game of cards before dinner. On these occasions, in order to render it interesting, the baron would draw from his pocket a few sous, which figured as the stake, the half of which sum he would lend to the baroness, who never by any chance paid him when she lost, but never failed to keep all when she won.

In place of following the old people, Eleonora and her cousin continued their stroll upon the terrace. Their hands clasped, their heads gently inclined, they paced up and down in silence, crushing with an absent air the little red flowers of the aromatic geranium which carpeted the soil. Each time that they reached the parapet they paused for a moment, and cast a glance along the road.

After walking thus for about half an hour in profound silence, broken only by a few unconnected observations, Mademoiselle Maragnon seated herself, as if fatigued, at the door of the château, and said, shaking her head with an air of conviction—

“I really believe, cousin, that I frighten your brother.”

“It is very probable,” replied Anastasia, gaily; “but, as you said just now, he must accustom himself to your features!”

The Baron de Colobrieres religiously preserved certain old customs, in obedience to which Tonin always rang at dinner hour the only bell the chateau could boast of. Its loud and prolonged tones resounded afar off in the silence of the surrounding country, startling for a moment the tribe of magpies, bold as they were, who were accustomed to hop up even to the terrace.

“We are going to dine without your brother!” said Eleonora, rising. “Good heavens! can anything have happened to him? Does not his absence cause you uneasiness?”

“He will soon be here,” replied Anastasia; “his dog which was following us has disappeared, and since Lambin is no longer here, Gaston is not far off.”

In fact, a moment afterwards Gaston de Colobrieres arrived, holding in his hand an enormous bouquet of flowers intermingled with fruit. His dog followed him, fawning on him with a gruff air, and sweeping the ground with his long tail.

“I am sure he has been to the Goatherd’s Valley!” cried Anastasia; “it is a good league from this even through the fields, and I cannot conceive how he has had time to be there and back.”

So saying she ran to meet her brother, and took the bouquet in her apron, not being able to hold it in her little hands.

“I have arrived in time, have I not?—you have not been waiting for me, have you?” said Gaston, drawing the arm of his sister under his own, whilst Eleonora walked on alone and a little in advance with a satisfied and pensive air.

On entering the family sitting-room, Gaston bowed to his father as if to excuse himself.

“Hola! M. le Chevalier, you choose your time badly for

your walks, said the old gentleman, with a frown; "it is not fitting to be absent in this way when there are guests at the chateau, for it is part of your duty also to do the honours. I hope you will not leave us any more during the day."

Gaston de Colobrieres bowed a second time with a gesture of respect and submission, without even endeavouring to explain and justify the act which had drawn on him the paternal admonition; but Eleonora, hastily taking the bundle of flowers and fruits which Anastasia held in her apron, placed them before the baron, and said with her most graceful smile:—

"It was to have the pleasure of presenting you with this lovely bouquet that my cousin took so long a walk; if he had offered it to me, most certainly instead of scolding him I should have thanked him with all my heart."

"How! my pretty niece, has he not hastened to pay that homage to you?" cried the baron; "in my time the young gentlemen were more attentive to the ladies, more ardent, more gallant. In good truth I was much more amiable formerly when I paid my court to Madame de Colobrieres. Permit me, mademoiselle, to teach monsieur my son how he ought to act in such a case."

At these words the baron rose, made a profound salutation, presented the bouquet, and kissed one after the other the two fair hands which were extended to receive his offering.

At this last stroke Gaston altogether lost countenance, and, instead of taking his place at the dinner-table, he felt more inclined to rush out of the room and hide himself in some obscure corner of the chateau. It seemed to him that his charming cousin was inwardly laughing at his awkwardness and timidity, and this thought was so painful to him that he felt his heart swell with mortification and self-reproach. Although he well knew how to restrain himself, and although the sort of lesson he had just received appeared not to have left the slightest traces of anger or irritation on his features, Eleonora felt that he was secretly annoyed and suffering, and she endeavoured to efface this disagreeable impression.

"Cousin," said she, "where have you been able to procure these beautiful flowers, and these fruits already rare for the season? Here is a branch of lemon-tree covered with buds, and jujubes upon the stalk, and ripe pomegranates, and Alpine strawberries with their beautiful glossy foliage, and jessamines, and wild carnations! Where is the garden that yields such beautiful products?"

"It is a little valley, sheltered by the rocks, which goes by the name of the Goatherd's Valley," replied Gaston: "all



the year round you will find there verdure and flowers, and even in the depth of winter I have sometimes gathered rose-buds in it."

"And the owner of this little terrestrial paradise permits you to glean in this manner?" demanded Eleonora.

"The owner is the Almighty," replied Gaston, with a smile; "and few people care to take the trouble of scaling this paradise, which is reached only with extreme difficulty by creeping along the pointed rocks."

"There is no danger, I hope?" demanded the baroness, turning quickly towards her son.

Then, by a second movement, she cast a rapid glance over her son's new coat, and examined it with some anxiety, fearing to discover some irremediable rent; but she perceived not the slightest damage, nor the least alteration in the colour of the stuff.

"Proceed, my son," said she with an air of satisfaction; "you were speaking to us of the sharp rocks which you have, in truth, scaled very safely."

"And you have not told us why this spot is called the Goatherd's Valley," added Eleonora; "do you know, cousin?"

"Yes, but not so well as my father; for it is not an affair of our time," replied Gaston, turning to the old gentleman with an air of deference.

"That is well spoken, my son," replied the latter, gravely; "I certainly am better acquainted than you with the origin of the name which has been given to this spot. The story is a simple one, but it has always appeared to me interesting.—About sixty years ago, a man, a stranger to this part of the country, came and settled below there among the rocks. My father, who had the right of chase and pasture over all the chain of hills which extends from the tower of Belvèser to Saint-Peyre, sold him the valley for forty crowns. It was a good price, seeing that the spot was almost inaccessible, and that it was a mere mass of stones. The stranger set to work. He had the strength of an ox and the patience of an ant. After having for two years carted soil upon his rocks, he planted trees, and afterwards constructed several cisterns which served to irrigate his garden. In short, he cultivated this corner of land so well, that, by-and-by, he procured his subsistence from it. As he had a little flock of goats, they called him the goatherd. He never invited any one to his dwelling, but all those who scaled his domain were well received. I remember going there once in my youth. The place was like a garden, and the little cabin which he had constructed for

himself looked neat and comfortable. He offered me some oranges, which I brought to Madame de Colobrieres, and his manners appeared to me polished and well-bred. I fancied that he was a sort of misanthrope, who, deceived either by wife or mistress, had broken off all connexion with the world; or, perhaps, some gentleman ruined at play, who, no longer able to liquidate his debts of honour, had voluntarily buried himself in this solitude. Our good friend, the late curate of Saint-Peyre, inclined towards this latter supposition. At last the mystery was cleared up: the goatherd, having attained to an extreme old age, was one day found dead in his cabin upon his straw pallet, a crucifix in his hands, like a hermit. On raising the body to inter it, they saw that he had the *fleur-de-lis* upon his shoulder, and perceived that he was a convict, who, after having navigated in the royal galleys, had come to terminate his career in peace in this desert spot."

"The cabin has now become a ruin," added Gaston; "the trees interlace their branches at random, the fruits have become wild, and it is the wind which sows the flowers between the rocks, where scarcely any one ever gathers them."

"I should like some day to visit this wild paradise," said Eleonora, plucking off one by one, with a thoughtful air, the sprigs of jessamine she held in her hand, and which she was about to make into a bouquet.

"The enterprise is difficult," observed Anastasia. "The Goatherd's Valley is an almost inaccessible spot; and you would be very much alarmed, cousin, when you found yourself on the sloping brink of a rock almost as perpendicular as a wall."

"If I were alone, I doubtless should; but, leaning on some one's arm, I should not be in the least afraid," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon, glancing at her cousin Gaston with an ingenuous air.

The family dinner was not a splendid one: a lean fowl, which had that very morning been seeking its living through the fields, and the grouse shot by Gaston, figured alone by the side of a species of *aperçue* which Anastasia had prepared for the occasion with the bunches of fruits and flowers placed in a wicker basket; but the old gentleman did the honours of his table with a cordiality which supplied all deficiencies. Old Tonin, erect behind his master's chair, a napkin over his arm, waited according to the best traditions of the family, and poured out for the guests to drink the beautiful clear water furnished by the well of the chateau, in the same manner and with the same air as he would have offered Tokay in Bohe-

mian glasses, or presented hydromel in a silver flagon. At the conclusion of the repast, the baron politely offered his hand to Mademoiselle Maragnon, and invited her to adjourn to the terrace to witness the game of bowls. Before commencing, he requested her to place the mark; and when she had, with her own fair hands, adjusted the little bowl at the extremity of the alley, he reconducted her ceremoniously to the parapet where the baroness and Anastasia had already taken their places. It was easy to see that the worthy gentleman wished to pay all the honour possible to Mademoiselle Maragnon, and to procure her all the amusements that could be enjoyed at the Chateau de Colobrieres.

Eleonora became really interested in this rather monotonous spectacle, of two men, during an entire afternoon, going through all the motions incidental to the game of bowls. Anastasia held her cousin's hand clasped in her own, and observed with a sigh the shadows lengthening in the valley and the sun which was now rapidly descending on the horizon. At length the sound of carriage wheels was heard on the road beneath.

"Alas! the moment is come to bid farewell!" said Eleonora, rising.

"A sad moment," murmured the baroness, turning towards her daughter; "now I would give all the world that this child had never come here."

"Why, mother?" asked Anastasia, quickly.

"You will soon know, my child," replied the good dame, with a sigh.

The baron approached. At the moment when Eleonora was bidding him farewell, and was about perhaps to hazard another appeal in behalf of her mother, he said to her in a serious and dignified tone:—

"Mademoiselle de Belveser, I thank you for having come to visit us. The baroness, my children, and myself, will ever remember you with affection, and from our retreat here will ever offer up prayers for your happiness. May you be as happy, dear niece, as you are good and beautiful! and in all important circumstances of your life, ever remember that you have the blood of the Colobrieres flowing in your veins."

So saying, the old gentleman embraced Eleonora with visible emotion; and after having signed to his wife and children to accompany her to her carriage, he saluted her once more, and re-entered the chateau.

"Dear aunt," said the young girl, her heart oppressed

with melancholy forebodings, "my uncle addressed me as if he were never going to see me again!"

"Alas! my child, such is his will," replied the baroness; "he already loves you—he is happy in possessing so charming a niece—but he will never pardon his sister."

"My father forbids us, then, ever to see my cousin again!" ejaculated Anastasia, sorrowfully.

"No, my child, happily he did not speak of that," replied Madame de Colobrieres. "This is his will, such as he made it known to me on returning from mass: I repeat his own words—'I have recognised Mademoiselle de Belveser as my niece, and I have thought it proper that she should come and make acquaintance with our children; but her place is not amongst us, for never shall her mother enter this chateau again. It must not be said that the Baron de Colobrieres, after having renounced his sister because she married a plebeian, pardoned her because she became enriched by her marriage. I forbid you, as well as our children, ever to see Madame Maragnon; and I declare to you, that you will incur my deepest indignation if, unknown to me, you visit the Chateau de Belveser, under pretext of returning this visit.'"

"Ah!" murmured Eleonora, "this is, indeed, cruel! Dear Anastasia, I should have been so happy to have received you in our house—in my mother's house!"

The two young girls threw themselves, sobbing, into each other's arms; the baroness also put her handkerchief to her eyes: Gaston alone did not weep, but he drooped his head with a mournful air, and inwardly stifled his grief, the cause of which he was unable to comprehend.

At length the baroness recovered a little, and after a few moments' reflection she said to the two distressed cousins:—

"My children, I have thought of a means of obeying the baron's orders, without your ceasing to see each other. My niece will not return to the chateau, nor can we return her visit at Belveser, but it is not forbidden us to meet somewhere half-way."

"Oh, mother, what a good idea!" interrupted Anastasia.

"Dear, good mother, how well you know how to advise in all things!" said Gaston with animation.

"Ah, aunt, how frequently I shall come and walk in this neighbourhood, if I may hope to meet you sometimes!" cried Eleonora, pressing the old lady's hands to her heart.

"I scarcely ever leave the chateau," returned Madame de Colobrieres; "I am obliged to keep the baron company; but

Gaston and his sister take long walks, and they will often meet you at the limits of the domain of Belveser."

"There is a place in the valley below, just under the hill, where Anastasia and I used frequently to go last winter," added Gaston: "it is called the Capuchin's Rock."

"Because the good people of the neighbourhood fancy they can discern on the rock the impress of a sandal," said Eleonora; "I also have often strolled that way, and am well acquainted, both with the Capuchin's Rock and all the neighbourhood round it."

"It is there then that we will meet," said Anastasia; "I will come there with Gaston, and you can join us."

"Yes," replied Eleonora; "Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert will accompany me; the distance is not great and we can easily accomplish it on foot."

"What, both alone through the fields?" interrupted Anastasia; "do not be so venturous, cousin; the valley is very lonely and you might meet ill-disposed people."

"If I had my cousin's dog with me I should not fear; he would be quite sufficient escort," said Mademoiselle Maragnon with a smile; "but in default of brave Lambin, I will endeavour to find some one to protect us."

The carriage had now reached the entrance of the terrace, and at a sign from Eleonora the coachman stopped his horses. Tender adieus were mutually exchanged; the baroness pressed Mademoiselle Maragnon to her heart calling her her beloved niece, and whispered in her ear:—

"My dear child, assure your poor mother of my continued love, and embrace her for me—for *me* you understand?"

"Come, mademoiselle! come, your mother is impatient to see you again," cried Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert from the interior of the carriage.

Eleonora embraced Mademoiselle de Colobrieres once more and then turning towards Gaston who stood aloof, she held out her hand to him with a timid gesture, and said in a trembling voice:—"Farewell, cousin."

In another moment the carriage was rolling rapidly on its way towards Belveser, and the Colobrieres family had entered their dwelling pensive and melancholy. This visit had been a great event for the entire family. Anastasia's thoughts as well as her mother's dwelt constantly on it, but it seemed as though a tacit convention had been entered into never to speak of it in the baron's presence, and at supper the name of Eleonora was not once pronounced.

The evenings were already long, and they spent this one seated around the table. The baron once more commenced his game of cards with his wife, Anastasia leaned pensively on the table as if watching the game, and Gaston strolled out to muse on the terrace. For the first time in his life he comprehended certain ideas which he had found in books, and which the old curé of Saint-Peyre had but imperfectly explained to him. Faculties hitherto unknown were aroused within him, new chords vibrated in his heart, and he abandoned himself to these impressions with a sort of astonishment. But he was too inexperienced, too simple-minded to unravel the conflicting sensations which were passing within him, or to take alarm at this vague tenderness, this indescribable sadness which had taken possession of him. Whilst Gaston, erect against the parapet, his gaze lost in the depths of the darkening landscape, mused over the incidents of the day, recalling one by one to his recollection every incident that had marked its progress, La Rousse glided along the platform, and silently seated herself a few paces distant from him. La Rousse was a tolerably pretty girl, tall, slender, and of an equivocal fairness of complexion, which had procured for her the surname of the Red-haired. Her light grey eyes were bordered by long pale eyelashes, and her complexion was that dull white tint which braves the sun's most ardent caresses.

It was now about five years since Madeleine had first entered the baroress's service, in which she might reasonably look forward to remaining all her life; for in the old families of that day great regard was paid to good service, and to the attachment of their inferiors, and in reality these were looked upon as forming a portion of the family. The result on their part was, a feeling of profound respect mingled with a certain degree of confidence, and the most devoted attachment to their masters. La Rousse would have laid down her life for all the Colobrieres, but the affection with which Gaston inspired her was an extreme tenderness, the true name of which she was in her innocence ignorant. The poor girl believed with the best faith in the world that it was a perfectly natural and proper sentiment; she gloried in it, and openly said that she would give her life and salvation for her young master. She obeyed him with even blinder submission than did his dog Lambin, and was certainly not so well recompensed; for Gaston spoke much more frequently to the great brindled greyhound which followed him every day to the chase. And yet Madeleine sought these short interviews, at the conclusion of which she would often weep without suspecting the cause

of her tears. Gaston had never suspected in the remotest degree the existence of this secret passion, which, we may add, he would not by any means have been flattered at having inspired. Upon this evening, Madeleine, who felt dejected and melancholy, endeavoured instinctively to contend with her feelings, and shake off certain images which beset her; but her rebellious imagination constantly represented them to her in the most vivid colours.

"Monsieur le Chevalier, what a day!" said she all at once to Gaston; "how changed everything is in a house when there are strangers present!"

"Yes, the hours seem to pass more quickly," replied he without turning his head.

La Rousse sighed deeply and continued:—

"If we had known of this visit we could have made some preparations. In the first place, Monsieur le Chevalier, I would have saved you the trouble of going yourself to seek the dessert at the Goatherd's Valley—"

"By no means," interrupted he, "I should not have permitted it. Do you imagine that you would have been able to choose and carry home without breaking them those pretty bunches of grapes and those branches laden with flowers, which my cousin admired so much?"

"And yesterday evening, Monsieur le Chevalier," continued La Rousse, sadly, "you climbed the balcony without saying a word about it, whereas I ought to have gone myself. Is it not my duty to fetch the provisions for the kitchen?"

"Your duty is to do what you are commanded," interrupted Gaston, "and I certainly would not have commanded you to do that."

"This young lady is very pretty, and she appears very rich," continued La Rousse; "she must be amiable too, for she has made every one love her all at once. Madame the Baroness and Mademoiselle Anastasia have overwhelmed her with kindnesses, as well as Monsieur the Baron also. Even Lambin was taken with her, for when she patted him he did not bite her."

Then after a moment's hesitation La Rousse added:—

"Will this young lady return, Monsieur le Chevalier?"

"No," replied Gaston, in an abrupt tone, at the same time moving away a few steps, as if to break off an interview which began to appear to him already too long.

"Ah! she will return no more," murmured La Rousse, with a tone of extreme satisfaction; "so much the better! These visits disturb every one. This evening Mademoiselle Anas

tasia is sad. Madame plays without looking at her cards, and yonder is Monsieur le Chevalier pacing up and down alone with a pensive air, in place of reading as he usually does at the end of the table. Ah! most certainly our happiness would be destroyed if strangers and city ladies were to come often!"

At the extremity of the chain of barren hills which commanded the Tower of Belveser, there was a narrow valley sheltered by a rampart of rocks which had but one opening towards the south. Even in the winter season the temperature was mild in this enclosure which the sun bathed all day long in his genial rays, while in it the chilling influence of the northern blasts was never felt. A little spring bubbled up in the hollow of the valley and formed a tranquil basin at the foot of the granite mass which was called the Capuchin's Rock. On leaving the lake the waters entered the bed of a ravine which they had gradually hollowed out for themselves, and the gravelled banks of which formed two rural paths intersected here and there by clumps of willow-trees. Not a trace of cultivation was to be discovered in this spot, and although the eager peasant came sometimes by stealth to cut the dense foliage which was claimed by none, the luxuriant vegetation everywhere clothed the steep rocks with masses of verdure.

One morning Gaston and his sister descended the barren slopes on the summit of which stood the Chateau de Colobrieres, and took their way towards the valley. They intended thus, without infringing their father's orders, to return the visit which Mademoiselle Maragnon had paid them eight days before. Anastasia bounded forward with a light and buoyant step, her heart filled with joyous anticipations. Her brother Gaston on the contrary seemed in no hurry to reach his destination, and turned aside every moment from the road to beat the bushes with his huge greyhound Lambin. As he drew near to the place of meeting he slackened his pace, and one might have supposed that he really dreaded attaining the goal of his expedition. And yet he had looked forward all the week to this rendezvous, and would have dared any danger sooner than have failed in it. Notwithstanding this violent and secret attraction he let Anastasia advance alone to meet Mademoiselle Maragnon, who was already awaiting her and watching her approach from the pathway which led to the Capuchin's Rock. The two cousins embraced affectionately as if after a long absence, and Eleonora began to caress Lambin, who having recognised her snuffed the air around her and growled gently in token of friendship. The lovely young girl advanced towards Gaston and said to him in a tone of gentle reproach:—



"Cousin, you arrive the last, and Anastasia tells me that if she had left you alone you would have probably remained on the road until evening."

Poor Gaston stammered forth some excuses with downcast eyes, fearing to meet Eleonora's gaze, and called Lambin to afford him countenance.

"And now," resumed Eleonora, "let us go and find Mademoiselle Irene, who is awaiting us under the Capuchin's Rock with another person."

"Another person?" repeated Anastasia with an air of timid curiosity.

"My cousin Dominick Maragnon," whispered Eleonora in her ear; "you know I wished to introduce him to you as well as to your brother."

Dominick Maragnon was a young man of good figure and pleasing features, and possessed moreover that easy grace which the habit of mingling with the world alone supplies. Whilst Anastasia made a curtsy, blushing as she did so, and Gaston de Colobrieres returned his salutation with constrained and rather awkward politeness, he exclaimed with a tone of good humour and frank cordiality —

"How heartily I thank my cousin for having permitted me to accompany her! She has spoken so much of her visit to the Chateau de Colobrieres, and of the kind reception she met with there that I ventured to hope for some small share of this affection for myself."

Happily for poor Anastasia, to whom this remark seemed particularly addressed, Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert now took her share in the conversation. She was an old maid who painted, adorned herself with patches, and put on high-heeled shoes to take excursions in the country.

"Young ladies," said she, drawing a book from her pocket, and arranging her pocket-handkerchief, her snuff-box, her fan, and her *cassolette* of aromatic vinegar upon her knees, "I presume that in place of remaining quietly here you are going to search for violets in the grass and chase butterflies; but for my part I shall stay here and await your return while I amuse myself reading '*The Proofs of Sentiment*,' unless indeed these gentlemen will do me the honour of keeping me company."

Dominick Maragnon bowed his thanks, and discreetly followed the Cadet of Colobrieres, whilst the two cousins descended the pathway holding each other by the hand. This time Eleonora had avoided with delicate attention any appearance of luxury in her toilet; she had abandoned the lace, the rich silks,

and all the charming trinkets with which her mother loved to deck her. An undress robe of Persian cotton of vivid colours scarcely compressed her slender waist, and a little Marli hat trimmed with ribbon was placed on one side of her head, while the light sprinkling of powder which covered her hair did not entirely conceal its tints of golden auburn. She resembled in this costume one of those pretty shepherdesses which Watteau introduces into his landscapes, and which we still find on the fans bequeathed to us by our grandmothers. Yet the dark Anastasia was still more beautiful with her faded petticoat, her scanty frock, and her dark hair simply drawn up under her lawn coiffe, than Eleonora in her fresh country costume. It was the first time that Mademoiselle de Colobrieres had ever seen any young man resembling this cousin Dominick, whose wit and good manners Eleonora had so highly lauded. The name of Maragnon had, it is true, shocked her a little at first; but she had already become accustomed to it, and had drawn a comparison between the young plebeian and the descendant of the Colobrieres which was not entirely to the advantage of the latter. She thought that Dominick Maragnon had quite a polished air with his elegant *Polonaise* and his round hat with its steel buckle; whilst Gaston walked as it were all of a piece in his Sunday coat, and seemed with his broad-brimmed grey beaver rather like some miller than a gentleman.

On his side Gaston de Colobrieres secretly observed young Maragnon. He had experienced a painful impression at the sight of this handsome youth who had the right of accompanying Eleonora. He had a vague sort of impression that Dominick must be in love with his cousin, and that his affection was perhaps reciprocated, and the thought of this love turned into gall all the happiness he had that day promised himself. He replied coldly to the young man's advances, and was twenty times on the point of leaving him alone with the two cousins, and of returning to Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert. At times he felt indignant with himself at the feeling of vexation which filled his heart, and he endeavoured to overcome it; but almost immediately afterwards suspicion would dart its envenomed fangs, and he was jealous before he understood that he was in love. He paused, sad and pensive, near an old willow-tree which had fallen across the rivulet, whilst the two cousins, assisted by Dominick, were gathering the last flowers of autumn in the thickets, or pausing to listen to the gentle murmurs of the foliage and the waters. At the end of about an hour the shrill voice of Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert aroused the

echoes of the valley: the governess was calling the young girls who ran to obey her summons. A little surprise awaited them. Madame Maragnon had sent a slight repast to the banks of the little lake, and the covers were laid on the grass. The opulent merchant's widow had recollected that there were no services of plate at the Chateau de Colobrieres, and had consequently refrained on this occasion from displaying the sumptuous luxury of her establishment. The simple viands were accordingly served in common dishes, and rush baskets replaced those of silver. The two tall lacqueys who had brought this rural feast having been dismissed, Mademoiselle Maragnon prepared to do the honours of the table.

"Anastasia, come here next to me, on my right," said she, seating herself on the grass; "cousin, will you take the other place beside me?" she added, inviting Gaston with a sweet smile to approach. She then turned towards young Maragnon, and said to him laughingly:—

"As for you, Dominick, follow our example and endeavour to get a seat near Mademoiselle Irene."

This was the first time that Gaston had heard Eleonora address her cousin. This familiar and unconstrained manner of speaking was far from confirming the suspicions which tormented him. He had sufficient penetration to comprehend that sisterly friendship alone would employ such a formula, and he felt that, brought up as they were together, the young couple could not fail to cherish for each other the same pure and calm affection that united Anastasia and himself. This certainty restored to his mind the joy and peace he had for a moment lost. He felt his pride all at once vanish, and it was with his entire heart and with the most cordial friendship, that when about to set out for Colobrieres he offered his hand to Dominick Maragnon.

The two cousins did not separate without promising to see each other again; and, dating from their first meeting at the Capuchin's Rock, they often found themselves together in this rural valley, which seemed as it were a neutral ground on the confines of the Barony of Colobrieres and the domain of Madame Maragnon. The cold season did not interrupt these promenades. Whether a gentle winter's sun shed its beams over the landscape, or the sky was covered with misty clouds distilling a cold and humid air, Gaston and his sister would descend the rocky hills on the summit of which stood the seignorial manor-house, while Mademoiselle Maragnon and her companion would also leave the new Chateau de Belveser, escorted by young Maragnon, and the two parties would meet

in the valley and frequently stroll about until towards evening. These almost daily meetings quickly led to a pleasing and innocent familiarity. Gaston de Colobrieres and Dominick Maragnon became close friends. The very contrast in their education and their positions in the world still more strongly cemented this friendship. The citizen's son felt a sort of respect for the proud poverty of the young noble, and he found in Anastasia a natural dignity and a degree of modest pride which at once awe and charmed him. The two young girls abandoned themselves to the pleasures of this intimacy without for a moment suspecting to what extent their hearts were implicated; and, in the innocence and purity of their minds, they took for the emotions of fraternal affection these sweet and secret transports. Sometimes Eleonora would say to her cousin:—

"How happy I feel! I had no sister, and Heaven has given me one in you, dear Anastasia! I have now two brothers also whom I love with all my heart. Can one help loving when bound in the ties of such close relationship?"

One day, while she spoke thus, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres replied ingenuously:—

"Dear Eleonora, I also love you like a sister, and would willingly love your cousin Dominick as well as my brother; yet we have not in our veins a drop of the same blood!"

One beautiful December morning the two young girls declared their intention of making an excursion to the Goatherd's Valley, and they set off gaily on their expedition, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Mademoiselle Irene who exclaimed aloud that she could not go alone on foot so far. Now it was impossible to take a carriage along the rocky roads which led up the steep ascent of the hill.

In passing near a peasant's cottage situated about a gunshot distant from the village where the Colobrieres family went every Sunday to hear mass, Dominick Maragnon spied two long shaggy cars protruding between the bars of a wooden gate.

"Make yourself easy, Mademoiselle Irene," cried he; "you shall travel commodiously without any fatigue."

"I can perceive neither a sedan nor a carriage, however," observed the governess with a sigh.

"No; but there is in yonder stable an animal of most peaceable gait, firm upon his legs, and who will ask nothing better than to carry you gently to the top of the hill."

"I have ridden on horseback in my time," replied Mademoiselle Irene, casting a disdainful glance upon the ass, which

rubbed its grey muzzle against the bars; "but one must indeed be either the wife or daughter of a miller to travel upon this animal."

"What say you, mademoiselle," interrupted Dominick Maragnon, "of the flight into Egypt? I could show you, in addition, twenty different pictures where the most venerable personages have had no other conveyance."

"At any rate it is better than going on foot," muttered Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert between her teeth.

Dominick Maragnon entered the peasant's cottage, and throwing a crown piece on the table, he requested that they would lead out the ass saddled and bridled on to the road. The two cousins and Gaston had stopped at about twenty paces from the cottage. Whilst the peasant hastened to get his ass out of the shed, and his wife brought out the saddle and bridle, a woman who all this time had been seated in the sort of barn which served at once for sitting-room and kitchen, stealthily approached the window which was kept constantly closed with an oaken shutter, and looked through the chinks. She had thus a full view of the persons whom she had only caught a glimpse of when Dominick opened the door, and she immediately recognised Anastasia, Mademoiselle Maragnon, and Gaston de Colobrieres. A moment afterwards the peasant entered with his wife, and both exclaimed:—

"What is the matter with you, La Rousse? how pale you are!"

"Nothing is the matter—I am cold," replied she, drawing nearer to the hearth, on which blazed and crackled a handful of olive branches; "I am so cold that I am all trembling. But tell me, Master Tiste," added she turning her eyes towards the road, "I fancy I saw my young master and Mademoiselle Anastasia out there, in company with some other persons."

"You were not mistaken, god-daughter," replied the peasant; "I have often met them thus. It would appear that M. le Baron is reconciled again to his sister, since their children roam about together. They even talk in the country of a marriage. You ought to know that already, La Rousse."

"I know nothing at all about it—all that is not true—we shall soon see that," replied she, sharply. "A Colobrieres marry a Maragnon indeed!"

"Pooh!" said the peasant, "why not? we all know well enough that a Maragnon has already married a Colobrieres; and this time I think we might very well see a double wedding."

"Yes, god-father, when you get ass his chest and his nap-the wedding," replied La Rousse, with the hearth, his feet disdain.

"I only repeat to you what people say," pass entire hours peasant, phlegmatically; "the talk of the next silence save that the Colobrieres are going to marry their title! Christmas crown pieces of the Maragnons, and, after all, it was the best affair the old baron ever concluded in his life."

While returning to the chateau, La Rousse recalled to mind a crowd of circumstances which seemed evidently to prove that Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister attached great value to these meetings, which they carefully concealed from their father. She divined, with all the quick-sightedness of a love-sick girl and a peasant, that the baroness was the confidant and accomplice of her children; the instinct of her own passion revealed to her that of Gaston, and jealous, despairing, furious, she resolved to inform the baron of what was passing in his family.

Whilst La Rousse, almost beside herself, took her way to the chateau, and in her preoccupation repeated aloud what she was about to disclose to the baron, the young people were joyously climbing the belt of rocks which surrounded the Goatherd's Valley. The day was perhaps the happiest and most serene of all those they had passed together. They had reached the loveliest and fairest page of the book of human life—that charming page on which are inscribed the transports of a heart which as yet aspires not to reality—the chaste emotions of a soul which desires without suffering, and which still dreams of the love it feels.

It had been found necessary to leave Mademoiselle Irene at the foot of the rock in company with her steed and Lambin, who on a sign from his master had placed himself as sentinel over her. The two cousins, after having resolutely climbed the almost impassable steps hewn out of the rock, began to explore the wild domain of the man with the fleur-de-lis.

"This, then, was the dwelling of the poor convict!" murmured Eleonora, seating herself upon a block of stone which had been detached from the rustic wall of the cabin. "It was here that he died."

"And was doubtless interred," said Anastasia, pointing out to her cousin a rude wooden cross half hidden in the grass.

Both rose, and remained for a moment erect and silent, before the humble tomb. Gaston de Colobrieres and Do-

rubbed its grey muzzle soft without interrupting them; they indeed be either the wife praying for the dead.  
this animal."

"What say ye shelter of which the spring-flowers had Maragnon, "of to blow, the bees were humming in the sun-addition, two birds carolled amid the branches, between the personages which, although still green, the new blossoms were  
"At which, although still green, the new blossoms were Made to peep forth.

"How happily could one live here!" said Anastasia, gazing round the narrow precinct. "I could almost envy the lot of the poor man who found a retreat among these rocks."

"I also should like to pass my life here like him; but not alone," said Dominick Maragnon, glancing involuntarily at Mademoiselle de Colobrieres.

In the evening, at the moment when Gaston and his sister were about to retrace their steps to Colobrieres, Eleonora embraced her cousin more tenderly than usual, and said to her in a low voice, sighing deeply:—

"My uncle Maragnon arrives to-morrow, and his coming will perhaps interrupt our walks for a few days. He is bringing some visitors with him to the chateau. Ah! cousin, how sad I shall be during our separation!"

### CHAPTER III.

AFTER this long and delightful expedition to the Goatherd's Valley, Gaston and his sister passed nearly a week without descending into the plain, as, independently of the temporary obstacle which the arrival of the uncle Maragnon had placed to the interviews of the two cousins, all the elements seemed combined to prevent their meeting. The gentle winter's sun had hidden himself behind a sombre veil of mist, through which his radiant disk shed but a cold and cheerless light. Piles of clouds, heavily charged with rain, bounded the horizon, discharging immense sheets of water as they traversed the sky. The entire plain was inundated, and even upon the barren height of Colobrieres might be heard the roars of the mountain torrents as they rushed with a sound like thunder down the ravines below.

The baron's family, who met every day in the general sitting-room, formed a melancholy picture. The old gentle-

man, his antique coat buttoned across his chest and his napless beaver pulled over his eyes, sat near the hearth, his feet resting upon the fender, and his hands buried in the profound depths of his capacious pockets. He would pass entire hours thus, in an immovable attitude, never breaking silence save to whistle between his teeth the air of some old Christmas carol or some equally ancient war-song.

The ladies of the house, seated in the embrasure of a window, plied their needle diligently, exchanging at intervals a few words in a low voice. The baroness was engaged in mending an old silk waistcoat which the baron had worn on his wedding-day, and the fabric of which she might almost have been said to create for the second time, since the various threads which she crossed and recrossed with her needle formed a species of network almost entirely concealing the original material. Anastasia was repairing in the same manner the taffeta mantle which her mother had worn every Sunday for the last thirty years. Though apparently calm and occupied with her work, her heart was oppressed with a sensation of indescribable sadness, and she communed inwardly with her recollections. Sometimes she would raise her head and with a sigh would watch the huge dark clouds, which, driven forward by a furious wind, swept along the crests of the mountains and poured forth their watery contents upon the already deluged plain. Gaston had in some sort isolated himself in the embrasure of the other window, where, his form bent forward and his elbows leaning upon the little table which served him as a sort of desk, he appeared to be absorbed in the study of his Horace; but his eyes, in place of following the inspired pages of the Latin poet, wandered over the plain, and seemed to seek those much loved sites now partly concealed from his view by the opaque and watery mist. Laubin who lay crouched at his master's feet seemed also to feel the influence of the bad weather; he moaned in a low tone, and his blood-shot eye, turned towards the heavens, expressed a sensation of mournful weariness. From time to time La Rousse half opened the door of the apartment and observed with an uneasy glance the attitudes of these different personages; sometimes she entered under the slightest possible pretext and hovered around Gaston, who, annoyed at being thus disturbed in his reveries, gave her some order without thinking or caring what it might be, and dismissed her again to the kitchen.

- Both the baroness and her children had remarked the sombre mood which had all at once taken possession of the old gentleman; but far from suspecting the revelations of La



lousse or the true motive of the gloomy reverie to which the baron was a prey, they attributed it to the protracted tempest which desolated the country and completed the ruin of the chateau.

"Holy Virgin!" said the baroness to her daughter, "I dare no longer cast my eyes toward the court of honour; who knows if the roofs have not entirely fallen in?"

"Patience, my dear mother," replied the young girl with resignation; "we are still in shelter here; before the rain succeeds in penetrating these vaults, let us trust that Providence will dissipate the storm."

"We must hope so, my child, but we shall feel its effects all the rest of the year," murmured the baroness with a sigh; "your father is anxious, and not without reason; our best lands have been sown, and perhaps at this moment the waters have carried off all, both grain and soil."

"Providence will surely not permit so great a misfortune to happen to us!" said Anastasia, with a pious sentiment of confidence and hope.

Yet even at this moment the formidable voice of the storm was heard on every side; torrents of rain beat violently against the windows, driving in the squares of parchment which here and there replaced the glass, and, penetrating the frail barrier, poured down in an icy stream upon the drooping head of Anastasia.

"Good Heavens! the storm redoubles in fury!" cried the baroness; "come nearer me, my child."

Mademoiselle de Colobrieres seated herself at her mother's feet, and murmured, as she wrung the damp from her glossy hair—

"I wonder if my dear Eleonora is thinking of us at this moment!"

The baroness was not deceived in her foreboding. Towards evening the storm having lulled for a moment, the baron left the castle in order to ascertain the amount of damage which the rains had caused in his domain. The destruction was complete. Upon the slopes, where there had been previously a scanty portion of soil capable of cultivation, only the naked rock was now visible. Even the spot which was called the orchard, and in which a few vine plants and stunted almond-trees languished, had been laid waste by the floods. After such an event, it seemed natural that the baron should be anxious and thoughtful. His children did not attempt to rouse him from his gloomy reverie, and contented themselves with testifying the sympathy they felt in the common

misfortune by redoubling their deference and respect towards their father. The baroness herself made no effort to penetrate what was passing in her husband's mind, and, attentive, gentle, and submissive as ever, she sought to console him less by words than by silent marks of attachment.

At length one evening towards sunset the clouds which were piled upon the horizon burst asunder, the heavens were dyed in a blaze of purple, while the blue firmament appeared beyond this luminous zone. At this presage of returning fine weather the brother and sister pressed each other's hands in silence, the same hope beating in both their breasts. They then proceeded to the terrace, where, leaning over the parapet, they remained for a length of time, their eyes wandering over the landscape now faintly tinged with the last rays of the setting sun.

"It is over—the bad weather has passed away," said Gaston, with an indescribable feeling of joy; "we will go to-morrow to the Capuchin's Rock."

"Who knows if the roads are passable on the Belveser side?" observed Anastasia, uneasily. "For us the passage will be easy, as the pathway skirts a slope where the rain never lodges, but on the plain below the land is perhaps inundated, and Eleonora I fear will not dare to venture on so unsafe a journey."

"Will not her cousin Dominick be there to assist her over the difficult places?" replied Gaston de Colobrieres. "I am certain she will come."

On the following day the sun rose resplendent in the heavens, the azure expanse of which was of a pure transparent hue. Large pools of water glanced here and there in the hollows, but the torrents had already subsided, and the roads, washed by the rains, formed in the plain long lines of a pale yellow colour, bordered by the tender green of the budding vegetation. Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister escaped joyfully from the castle after dinner, and proceeded to descend into the valley. Gaston, his fowling-piece over his shoulder and his game-bag on his back, marched along with a heart more at ease and a step more light and joyous than that of his noble ancestor when returning from the sack of Rome laden with glory and booty. Anastasia followed him with a more composed step; she too was happy with a happiness she could not define, but which filled her whole being. Lambin careered before them, bounding and barking in a paroxysm of mad delight. In this manner they gained the entrance of the valley, when Anastasia said to her brother:—

"I am sure that we are first; it is early yet; but no matter, we will wait."

"No, my cousin is already here!" interrupted Gaston, his heart beating with emotion, and in an agitated voice, pointing as he spoke to the recent impress of a little foot upon the moist sand.

In fact at that moment Eleonora was seen descending the road leading to the valley and advancing to meet them. She walked quickly, but, on perceiving them from a distance, she slackened her pace, and at last stopped altogether and waited their approach.

"Ah! my dear cousin, how I longed to see you again!" cried Anastasia, clasping her in her arms.

Mademoiselle Maragnon embraced her in return, holding her for a moment pressed against her heart, then turning towards Gaston without raising her eyes to his face, she said with an altered voice, while a deep blush overspread her cheek and forehead:—

"Good-day, cousin."

Gaston de Colobrieres remarked that she did not hold out her hand to him as usual, and a feeling of bitterness was already mingled with the joy which filled his heart.

"How sorry I am that we did not arrive first!" exclaimed he, with a lively sensation of regret. "You have waited perhaps, cousin—but where is Dominick?" added he, perceiving Mademoiselle Irene seated alone at the foot of the Capuchin's Rock.

"He is gone," replied Eleonora; "he has returned to Marseilles with my uncle."

On hearing these words Anastasia felt the calm and gentle emotions of content which had hitherto animated her, change all at once into deep sadness. A sensation of painful astonishment darted through her breast, and for a moment she ceased to breathe; but no change of countenance betrayed this secret agony, and she merely said with a sigh:—

"Eight days ago when we were rambling so gaily in the Goatherd's Valley we little dreamed of this sudden separation."

"Dominick has been gone these four days," resumed Eleonora in an altered voice, "and my mother and I shall soon quit Belveser also."

"Soon!" cried Gaston de Colobrieres, turning pale, "soon did you say? And you have come here to-day to bid us farewell?"

"Alas! we leave this to-morrow!" said Mademoiselle

Maragnon, endeavouring to restrain conversation. I felt relieved, wished to take us with him; but new music, left the room consented to go without returning here ever been alone again.

"You are going to leave us, perhaps void each other.—" said Mademoiselle de Colobrieres. "Oh, my King, Dominick how far was I from expecting this cruel blow."

"You did not think of this departure eight months in a moment," he added Gaston, with an accent of the deepest sadness; "days ago we were forming plans for the remainder of the winter."

"Alas! how could I foresee what has occurred?" replied Mademoiselle de Maragnon with a sigh. "Everything is changed for me."

She seated herself upon the fallen trunk of an old willow-tree which lay across the pathway, and taking Anastasia by the hand drew her gently towards her, while Gaston remained standing in front of the two girls.

"My sweet cousin," continued Eleonora, in a tone of dejection and melancholy which contrasted singularly with her words, "my sweet cousin, I was unwilling to leave this without coming to inform you of the most important event of my life, and to make you a sharer in my happiness: my mother and uncle have resolved that I shall be married, and in a few days I am to wed my cousin Dominick."

"Is it possible!" murmured Anastasia with a sort of stupor.

Gaston did not utter a word, nor let a single gesture escape him; he merely closed his eyes and leaned upon the barrel of his fowling-piece, as if he felt the ground tremble beneath his feet, and the earth opening to engulf him.

The violent shock which the news of this marriage caused Mademoiselle de Colobrieres pierced her heart like a pointed steel, and tore aside the veil which had hitherto hid from her her own feelings. The intensity of her sufferings all at once revealed to her her passion, and she began to comprehend with a feeling of painful fear that she loved Dominick Maragnon. Pale, dejected, with downcast eyes, she pressed the cold hands of Eleonora within hers, and forced herself to surmount the secret despair which was busy with her heart. There was a moment of painful silence, and then Anastasia, making a violent effort, said in a calm voice:—

"Doubtless, my dear Eleonora, your mother and uncle have long since planned this marriage?"

"Yes," replied she, still in the same melancholy and dejected tone, "but they never spoke of it to us. It is true that while I was yet quite a child, and when Dominick was at school,

they talked to us of some such projects. My cousin used to say to me, seriously, that if I was a very steady little girl he would one day marry me, and I used to call him beforehand my little husband ; but as we grew up we forgot all that. Who would have imagined that our parents remembered it, and that they had all along planned our marriage? Alas ! we had not the least suspicion of such a thing eight days ago ; we were so happy, so gay, during that ramble which was to be our last !”

At this recollection, her tears overcame her, and she hid her face in her handkerchief with so natural and vivid a movement of grief, that Gaston's heart bounded with a bitter joy.

“It is singular,” resumed Mademoiselle Maragnon drying her tears, “for the last eight days they have spoken to me of nothing but my happiness ; they never cease repeating to me that I shall be the happiest of women, and yet I have never wept so much during my entire life.”

“My dear Eleonora, these feelings of inquietude will pass away,” said Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, making a violent effort to command her feelings. “They were right in predicting a happy destiny for you ; he to whom your mother unites you well merits the treasure confided to him—he is worthy of his happiness.”

“Alas ! he feels this happiness as little as myself,” replied Mademoiselle Maragnon ingenuously. “If you only knew how sad and embarrassed we both were when our marriage was resolved on. First of all, they spoke to each of us separately, and then when all had been decided, Dominick and his father came into the drawing-room where I was sitting with my mother and Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert. My heart felt so full that I could not have uttered a word without bursting into tears ; I went to the window and pretended to look at the sky. My cousin approached my mother and spoke to her for a moment ; then he came towards me and pressed my hand—it was all he could do apparently to express his satisfaction. A moment afterwards, my mother rose and left the room, taking Mademoiselle Irene with her ; my uncle followed them, and I remained alone with Dominick. Before it had been settled that he was to be my husband, we used to chat gaily together, and were the very best friends in the world ; but after what had passed we had no longer a word to say to each other. My cousin began to pace up and down the room, and I on my side continued looking out of the window. Happily Mademoiselle Irene shortly afterwards returned. She sat down at the harpsichord as if to give us

an opportunity of continuing our conversation. I felt relieved, for my cousin, who cannot endure her music, left the room immediately. Since that day we have never been alone again—I really believe because we mutually avoid each other.—Three days ago, however, at the moment of parting, Dominick approached as if to bid me farewell, and said to me in a melancholy tone, without using the familiar terms in which he had been accustomed to address me:—

“‘My dear Eleonora, before quitting Belveser you will see your cousin Gaston again; tell him that I leave this with regret in not being able once more to press his hand.’”

“‘And Anastasia,’ said I—‘am I to say nothing to her?’”

“‘Assure Mademoiselle de Colobrieres of my respect,’ replied he, ‘and entreat her to recall sometimes our ramble to the Goatherd’s Valley;—tell her, besides, that all the marks of kindness with which, out of friendship for you, she has honoured me, have left an undying remembrance in my heart.’”

These words diffused a secret glow of consolation through Anastasia’s bosom; she comprehended vaguely the regrets which Dominick Maragnon had carried with him, and she suddenly felt within herself the courage to endure, and the strength to support for a length of time, the sad and solitary life that awaited her. She feebly pressed Eleonora’s hand, but dared not reply.

“I promised Dominick to tell you all this,” continued Mademoiselle Maragnon, “and I added that I would at the same time pledge myself to return in the spring to commence once more those pleasant rambles which he regretted as much as I did myself; but he shook his head, and replied with a sigh:—

“‘We shall not return to Belveser this year: my father has decided that after our marriage we are to make a long tour in a foreign country.’”

The young girl here interrupted herself, and remained for a length of time absorbed in bitter reflections.

“The idea of this departure afflicted you,” said Anastasia; “you inwardly rebelled against your uncle’s will?”

“No, it was not that which made so painful an impression on me,” replied Eleonora; “it was the word which Dominick had uttered——”

She hesitated for a moment before completing the sentence; then she continued, in a melancholy tone:—

• “It was the first time that my cousin had made any direct allusion to our approaching marriage. I know not what passed through my mind—it was a strange and mingled impression

of fear, of grief—almost of anger. I hastily withdrew my hand, which Dominick had hitherto held within his own, and turned away with a sort of shudder. Doubtless he perceived this movement and was struck with it, for although my eyes were cast down I felt that he was gazing intently on me, and I heard him murmur to himself:—

“ ‘Alas! poor child.’ ”

“An instant afterwards he entered the carriage with his father. I feared that I had grieved him—I felt a sort of remorseful sensation, and I approached the carriage door to bid him once more adieu; but he did not see me, his eyes were turned towards Colobrieres, and most probably in his heart he was bidding you farewell.”

“Most certainly he was not angry with you,” said Anastasia with a sigh, “and the recollection of the slight wrong you did him need not afflict you. Take courage, therefore, dearest Eleonora—the courage necessary to become the happiest of women.”

During this conversation, Gaston de Colobrieres had thrown his fowling-piece upon the grass, and had seated himself a little behind Eleonora, his elbow supported on his knee and his brow leaning on his hand.

Several times the young girl had turned half round towards him, as if expecting a word or a look; but one might have supposed that, in place of thinking of her, he was occupied in counting the nails in the collar of his dog Lambin, who lay at his feet. Eleonora at length turned round altogether, and said to him in a tone of plaintive sweetness:—

“Cousin, we have but a few moments longer to pass together—come nearer us.”

He rose silently and seated himself beside her. The two young girls, absorbed in their thoughts, spoke no more. Mademoiselle Maragnon had let one of her hands remain clasped in those of Anastasia, while with the other she plucked absently the long tufts of grass that had sprung up around the fallen trunk on which she was seated. As she threw away these frail stalks, Gaston gathered them up one by one and kept them. A moment afterwards, Lambin having placed his shaggy head upon his master's knees, Eleonora ceased plucking the long and delicate grasses and began to caress the greyhound. Then Gaston de Colobrieres took this soft, cold hand, pressed it to his lips, and retained it within his own.

There was another long silence. Already the shadows of evening began to fall on the valley, a light mist rose from the surface of the water, and the atmosphere became suddenly

chilly under the humid breath of the easterly wind which now commenced to murmur between the willows. Mademoiselle Irene, who had been sitting reading for the last two hours on the banks of the little lake, now hastened to close her volume, crossed her mantilla on her chest, and rose from her seat, crying in her harsh, shrill voice—

“Come! mademoiselle—come! you will catch cold: the air is quite chilly already.”

At this moment they heard at the entrance of the valley the wheels of the carriage which Madame Maragnon had sent for her daughter. Gaston relinquished the hand which he was holding, and the two cousins rose,

“Farewell! my dearest Eleonora,” said Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, in a tone of the deepest grief and resignation: “farewell!—do not forget us—live happily!”

Eleonora smiled sadly, and said, raising to heaven her lovely eyes filled with tears:—

“I know not the lot that awaits me, I am ignorant of the happiness which the future may have in store for me; but what I do know is, that my happiest days in this world are already passed—that the fairest moments of my life have been spent here. May God, who hears me, pardon me, but it seems to me as if I should now be content to die, since I have nothing better to expect upon earth!”

At these words she threw herself once more into Anastasia's arms, made a gesture of adieu to Gaston, and with rapid steps left the valley, followed by Mademoiselle Irene.

Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister slowly ascended the road leading to the chateau, almost in silence. The wound which both had received was too deep and too recent to be touched with impunity. Without making any interchange of confidences, they mutually understood each other, and did not require to explain the state of their hearts. On reaching home, however, it became necessary to inform the baroness of the news they had heard.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the good dame, in a tone of alarm, “then my niece will always bear the name of Maragnon? It is like a new *mesalliance*. The child has the blood of the Colobrieres in her veins; she is immensely rich; she is handsome as an angel; her mother might have chosen a husband for her out of the lower ranks of the nobility, might have even married her to a lawyer, whose name would have sounded better in the ears of the world than the plebeian one of Maragnon! What will your father say when he hears of this marriage?”



"We will leave him in ignorance of it," said Anastasia, hastily; "we ourselves, mother, will speak of it no more; there are certain things which ought not to be recalled to mind."

"You are right, my child," replied the baroness, sighing; "we ought not to speak of our afflictions if we desire to live in peace."

The projected marriage of Eleonora with her cousin remained a secret known only to the baroness and her children. La Rousse herself, who observed them continually, watched all their movements, and listened to all their conversations, knew nothing of this event. The unhappy girl perceived the profound sadness of Gaston de Colobrieres, without divining the cause, and witnessed, but without guessing its motive, the melancholy which had taken possession of her young mistress. The conduct of the baron seemed also altogether inexplicable. The very day on which she had discovered the relations subsisting between the families of Colobrieres and Maragnon, La Rousse had related the whole affair to the old nobleman, adding to it all the details and commentaries which the imagination of a jealous and love-sick girl could furnish. The baron listened to her with the greatest calmness, enjoined her to observe the strictest silence, and then, in place of playing his game of bowls according to custom, he proceeded to take a solitary walk in the fields. The same day he wrote a letter which La Rousse secretly conveyed to the messenger who performed each week the journey from the village to the neighbouring town, in order to put into the post the correspondence of the entire country. After this affairs had proceeded in their accustomed order; there was nothing new save the bad weather which had destroyed their harvest, and a certain sadness depicted upon every face in the chateau. Gaston and his sister left home almost every day according to their usual custom, but, in place of turning their steps in the direction of the valley, they chose the more unfrequented paths, and gained the heights where they were sure of meeting no one. There they seated themselves under the shelter of a rock, and remained for a length of time, exchanging a few words at rare and unfrequent intervals, while keeping their eyes fixed on the distant lines of the horizon. However when they once more entered the chateau they resumed mechanically the monotonous habits of their in-door life, and nothing betrayed the secret sufferings, the mournful weariness in which they were plunged. The baron still retained the same severe and anxious countenance; he no longer played his game of bowls, but passed entire

days in pacing up and down the orchard with his hands behind his back, apparently inspecting the labours of old Tonin, who had courageously undertaken to repair the disasters caused by the recent rains. During meals he was silent, and after supper he pored over the same old volume of the peerage which he had been accustomed to peruse every evening. The baroness alone preserved that serenity of mind, that placid and equable temper which had so well assisted her in supporting all the troubles of life. Certain things however struck her, and rendered her uneasy. She remarked that Gaston hunted no more of late, and that he returned every day with an empty game-bag, and that Anastasia no longer chatted with her as she used to do while sewing in the evenings round the table. It seemed to her also that the young girl was contending against some secret oppression—some feeling of dejection that at the slightest cause filled her eyes with tears which she endeavoured to conceal and secretly wipe away; but the baroness was too simple-minded, and had lived too long in a state of utter ignorance of the passions, to suspect what was passing in the minds of her children, and not knowing what grief or pain it was necessary to solace, she confined her efforts to testifying towards them a greater degree of affection and tenderness.

One afternoon, whilst Gaston and his sister were taking their accustomed walk, and whilst the baron was pacing up and down the orchard, his head drooped upon his chest and whistling more vehemently than usual, the baroness, who was working near one of the drawing-room windows, perceived to her great astonishment the village messenger, who was at that moment crossing the court of honour with a letter in his hand.

"Heavens!" cried she, rising from her seat in alarm, "a message for us!—one of our children has written to us."

She received the letter with a trembling hand, and first of all glanced at the seal: it was in red wax, and bore, in place of a cypher or armorial bearings, the anagram of the Saviour.

"Heaven be praised!" murmured the baroness, sighing as if relieved from a great fear, "it is not a black seal; all my children are living. This letter bears the Paris post-mark—if I am not mistaken it is from my eldest daughter."

La Rousse, who was ever on the watch, ran to inform the baron. The latter came forthwith and broke open the missive, the seal of which his wife had respected. He read it in a low voice entirely through, then refolded it coldly, placed it in his pocket, and turned towards the door.

"Monsieur, you do not tell me anything—you do not speak

to me of the contents of this letter?" cried the baroness, detaining him.

And as he did not reply, she added with a sort of terror:—

"It is a letter from Euphemia, from our eldest daughter, who is now *La Mere Angelique de la Charité*, Superior of the convent of *Notre Dame de la Misericorde* at Paris. Heavens! what has she written that you fear to tell me?"

"What she wrote to me formerly when she was in the convent of Aix, and when I had sent her word that one of her sisters was prepared to join her," replied the baron.

Madame de Colobrieres remained for an instant stunned and motionless under the shock she had received. Never for an instant had it entered her imagination that Anastasia, her dearly loved and youngest child, would be torn from her arms like her sisters and buried in a cloister. This unexpected blow was the most cruel that her mother's heart had ever experienced, and she was unable to resign herself to it. Her despair inspired her with sudden energy, and, for the first time in her life, she dared to rebel against the authority of her husband. This woman hitherto so submissive and feeble raised her head and said with the firmness inspired by grief:—

"No, sir, I will not abandon my daughter to you; I will not suffer all the objects of my tenderness to be torn from me, one after the other, even to the last. God alone knows what I have already suffered! God alone knows what tears I have shed when I beheld all those dear creatures, whom I had brought up with so much love, depart from me for ever! Would to heaven I had then rebelled against your will! There is no necessity so pressing as to oblige a mother thus to drive away her children. There was bread enough here for all, and if that had failed I could have worked with my own hands to procure it. Yes, my lord, in place of sending away those innocents who wept to leave us, in place of imprisoning some within the grating of a convent and abandoning others to the dangers of a worldly life, it would have been far better to have kept them in the house in which they were born, and, trampling all pride under foot, to have tilled along with them the baronial lands——"

"Enough, madam!" interrupted the baron, indignantly; "degrade not further the name you bear. Your children have the honour of being born noble, and I swear that while I live they shall not disgrace their origin!"

"None have disgraced it, my lord," replied the baroness, whose energy already began to give way, and who felt her resistance melting away in tears. "Our elder children

adopted the mode of life that you commanded, and, if it please God, they are satisfied with their lot; but the necessity which forced us to part from them in no way constrains us to place Anastasia in a convent. She is a child of a gentle and submissive temper, though at times low-spirited, and her docility, her respect, her love for her parents, are boundless: she is the ornament and joy of our house. I confess the weakness of my heart; when she is by my side I no longer regret my other daughters—she replaces them all. Heaven has bestowed her upon us to watch over and comfort our old age, and she ought to remain with us and close our eyes. Sometimes when I consider her meek deportment, her sweet voice, her angelic features, a hope darts through my mind——”

“A chimerical hope,” interrupted the baron, hastily; “a girl of noble birth, without a dowry, will find no husband save a nameless man——”

“I was poor, M. le Baron, and yet a gentleman did me the honour of espousing me!” replied Madame de Colobrieres, proudly.

“A similar piece of good fortune is too rare, for you to hope that it may also happen to your daughter,” replied the baron, with most superb *naivete*.

“Well, then, she need not marry,” hastily rejoined the worthy dame; “she can live here with us, and when we shall be no more she will still have her brother, our Gaston——”

“I have not yet made known to you my designs relative to the Chevalier de Colobrieres,” resumed the old gentleman, in a tone of decision; “the moment has arrived when it becomes necessary for him also to take some decisive step.”

“What! my son about to quit us also!” cried the baroness, beside herself with indignation; “you wish then to make me curse the day when I married in order to bring into the world children whom I was to lose one after the other, and that not by the hand of the Almighty? But I have still one hope left, sir! Your son, your daughter, will not obey you, and I, their mother, will support them in their disobedience. I dare to say it to your face!”

At these words she fell exhausted and almost senseless upon her chair. Whilst La Rousse hastened to her assistance, the baron left the room and reached the door of the chateau. At that moment Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister were returning from their walk, and slowly ascending the rocky path leading to the terrace. The old gentleman had fully made up his mind to carry out, in spite of all resistance, the resolution he had formed. The disclosures of La Rousse had wounded

him in the most sensitive point—namely, his feeling of authority and his pride of birth. All that he had learned respecting the relations subsisting between his children and those of the Maragnon family had aroused feelings of the deepest indignation in his breast, and he had now firmly resolved to render impossible this double alliance, which the gossips of the neighbourhood had had the impertinence to consider as a good affair for the Colobrieres family.

The baron paused gravely at the entrance of the terrace, and when his children advanced to salute him he ordered Gaston by a gesture of his hand to join Tonin in the orchard, and said to his daughter in a severe tone:—

“Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, I desire a moment’s conversation with you.”

“I am ready to attend you, father,” replied she, a little astonished at this formula, which was only employed by the baron on the gravest occasions.

He conducted her to the extremity of the terrace, and making her sit down on the parapet he took his place by her side; then drawing from his pocket the letter of La Mere Angélique de la Charite he placed it in her hands, saying:—

“Read;—this will sufficiently make known to you my will. Read aloud.”

Anastasia opened the letter and read it slowly, without agitation, surprise, or alteration of voice:—

*Paris, 10th January, 17—.*

“Sir, and most honoured Father,—I experienced a lively degree of gratification and joy on the receipt of the letter, in which you declared your intention of placing in the convent of Notre Dame de la Misericorde your youngest daughter, my dear sister Anastasia. The cloister is the gate of salvation for those who, like the elder branches of your family, are called thither by a true vocation. I shall receive this new spouse of the Lord into our house with feelings of real satisfaction, and our entire community, to whose prayers I have already recommended her, partake the impatience that I feel to behold her amongst us.

“Our very dear sisters of the convent of Aix, to whom I have written begging that they will seek a confidential person to accompany our young novice on her journey, are employing all the zeal imaginable in the matter. They inform me that they have discovered in their city a lady of quality, who is on the point of setting out for Paris, and who will willingly take Mademoiselle de Colobrieres in her carriage. I give you

timely notice of this, in order that you may make arrangements for her departure without further delay.

"Assure my mother of my attachment and respect. I commend myself to her prayers, as I would to those of a saint.

"I await whatsoever orders you may be pleased to give me for the good of religion and the interest of our family, begging you to believe, Monsieur and most honoured father, in the inviolable affection and profound respect of your daughter and most humble servant."

The baron narrowly watched the countenance of Anastasia during the perusal of this letter. He had expected weeping and resistance—but she shed not a tear; and when she had finished she returned him the letter, saying in a voice which betrayed not the slightest inward struggle—

"I am ready to obey you, father."

This submission touched the old gentleman. The anger which he had nursed at the bottom of his heart suddenly vanished, and he was obliged to exert a great effort over his feelings to say to Anastasia—

"Well, my child, you will start the day after to-morrow for Aix. You see time presses. Besides it is better that this separation should take place at once, instead of preparing for it by painful leave-takings. You will thus spare your mother many tears."

"My mother!" murmured the young girl, hiding her face in her hands, as if this single word had overturned all her firmness of mind; but, resuming almost immediately the calm resolution she had at first manifested, she again assured her father of her obedience, and begged of him to permit her to remain alone for a few moments to collect her thoughts before entering the chateau.

The baron left the terrace without farther addressing her, and proceeded to seek Gaston. He anticipated on the part of his son a warm and lively opposition to his wishes, for he had no difficulty in conceiving all that La Rousse had told him respecting the passion of Gaston de Colobrieres for Mademoiselle Maragnon. It was only by separating him from the object of his love that he could hope to stifle this attachment in the bud, and the baron was so well convinced of this that he had determined to remove him for a length of time, and even if necessary for ever. He proceeded straight towards Gaston, and leading him through the alleys of the now waste and desolate orchard, he said to him with the most cold and imperious air—

"Have you never thought, M. le Chevalier, that a day

might arrive when it would be necessary for you to follow the example of your brothers?"

"Pardon me, sir," replied Gaston, in a tone of dignified submission; "no later than to-day I was thinking of the different careers which my elder brothers have embraced, and before following their example I had resolved to open my mind to you, in order that you might direct my choice according to your wishes."

"I have never constrained the inclinations of my sons," resumed the baron, in a milder tone; "the elder branches have adopted the profession of the church, the younger ones that of arms; but I have never said to one, 'you shall be a monk,' or to another, 'you shall serve your king.' You can therefore choose. It is not as in your sister's case; for her there is but one door open, that of the convent."

"Then you have decided, sir, that my sister shall enter a convent?" said Gaston de Colobrières, with emotion; "she is about to join her elder sister?"

And, as the baron made a sign in the affirmative, he added—

"For my part I feel that a worldly life has no attractions for me, and perhaps I ought in place of endeavouring to obtain a footing in it at once to join your eldest son, Father Cyril, at the great convent of the Capuchins of Aix."

"That requires reflection," said the baron, hastily; "I have already four sons in the mendicant orders; that is sufficient I think for the edification of the world. However, act according to your inclination."

"My inclination would be, if the king should declare war, to enter the army that I might be killed," murmured poor Gaston; "but since I cannot die at once, I must needs bury myself in a monk's frock."

"Did you speak? What say you, my son?" demanded the baron, who had heard him imperfectly.

"I said, sir, that I am ready to obey you in all that you may command," replied Gaston de Colobrières, with a sigh.

"Very well, my son; I will explain myself further another time," said the baron, touched, and above all astonished at this absolute submission, which accorded so little with what La Rousse had told him. It was not likely that his son would be thinking of taking the frock if his marriage with the heiress of Pierre Maragnon had been arranged. The baron ended by supposing that these projects which had so vividly roused his indignation were not quite so far advanced as he had at first supposed, and that in place of a marriage being fixed upon, it

was merely a budding inclination that was in question. This certainty suddenly modified his plans, and without altogether renouncing his determination, he regretted having so imperatively manifested it.

The worthy man returned pensively to the chateau, and while awaiting the supper hour he ascended to a sort of garret which he called his library, under pretext of seeking the second volume of his peerage, but in reality to recover from the feelings of grief and commiseration which the words of his children had aroused within him. Whilst he turned over with a careless hand the mouldy papers and the dilapidated and rat-eaten volumes which lay upon the old and rotten planks, the baroness left the sitting-room in order to seek Anastasia. She found her seated in the same place where her father had left her, her hands upon her knees, her head bent down, and her eyes turned towards the plain where the paths she had so often traversed on her way to the Capuchin's Rock disappeared in the distance. At the sound of her mother's voice Anastasia started, and passed her hand across her face to conceal her tears. The baroness seated herself beside her child, and said in a tone of protection, tenderness, and trembling firmness, impossible to be described—

"Be calm, my dearest child, your mother will never permit you to be sacrificed thus; she will have sufficient courage to defend you. Weep no more, you shall not enter the convent."

"Oh! mother, I request on the contrary your permission to enter it," cried the young girl, sobbing bitterly, and laying her burning cheek on her mother's hands; "yes, I long for that retreat where one thinks only of God, where one forgets the world. Yes, I will joyfully obey my father, and I have only one wish, that of speedily accomplishing my sacrifice."

Madame de Colobrieres remained for a moment mute with surprise and dismay. Anastasia had never to her eyes manifested any disposition for a conventual life, and this sudden inclination seemed to conceal things she trembled to think of.

"My child," said she, hesitatingly, "then you are not happy here?"

The young girl shook her head with a gesture of despair, and murmured gently:—

"I die a thousand times every day of regret and sorrow."

"Time will remove this grief, my dear child," resumed the baroness in a lower tone of voice, as if she were afraid of hearing her own words; "you will forget the cause of your sorrow. Absence takes away the remembrance of all things,



my child—you will once more find contentment and peace of mind—in a few months you will be happy again."

"And when they shall return!" said Anastasia, pointing with an energetic gesture to the hill, behind which the new Chateau de Belveser lay hid. "They will return," continued she, with an accent of bitter grief, "but I shall then be no longer here."

Then she added:—

"Oh, mother, I must be very unhappy—my torture must be very great—to give me strength to leave you!"

The baroness was utterly overcome; her heart bled, wounded in the most vital part; and like all weak-minded and timid persons, she accused herself of being the cause of the evil which she had not known, and reproached herself for faults she had been unable to foresee.

"Alas! my child, your brother also has appeared sad for some time back," said she, still hesitating to confirm her suspicions, and to probe this new wound; "I have perceived his grief—he suffers."

"As I do, mother," replied Anastasia, raising to heaven a look which expressed at the same time the burning pain of a loving heart and the exalted spirit of a martyr.

Madame de Colobrieres remained for a few moments as if completely prostrated by the blow of this double disclosure, but she did not sink into the moody despair of violent natures. With her moreover resignation soon sprang up from the utter abnegation of all selfish feelings, and she supported this last trial with the passive devotion of a mother who counts her own happiness as nothing when that of her children is at stake. She once more assumed an appearance of firmness, and raising Anastasia, who had sunk sobbing on her knees, she said to her in a calm and gentle voice:—

"My child, you must conquer your grief, and hide your tears. Let us both be courageous in these our last moments together. Come, we will go and seek your father. Let the subject not be mentioned again, for this evening at least; we are affected now, and perhaps our hearts would fail us. Women ought to weep only when they are alone."

In fact, the baroness entered the sitting-room with a tranquil countenance, and, as on the evening before, took her needle and began to work until supper should be ready. Shortly afterwards the baron descended, his arms full of mouldy volumes, and his hat covered with cobwebs. He called to Gaston to assist him in his work, and began to arrange and collate his

old torn and dusty volumes as if he had taken the greatest interest in their preservation. The baroness, on seeing the trouble her husband was giving himself, said in a low voice to her daughter:—

“Your father is very unhappy.”

That evening and the following day passed off as usual; neither the separation nor the departure was spoken of. Tonin merely received orders to bring out from a sort of cellar which served as coach-house, a species of machine on four wheels which the baron called his carriage, and upon which the fowls were accustomed to roost in bad weather. This chariot, whose origin certainly dated from the first years of the reign of *Louis le Grand*, and in which the Colobrieres family had in all probability made the journey to court, was lined with a yellowish brown fabric which had formerly been crimson velvet, and the doors were hung with leather curtains on which might still be distinguished traces of armorial bearings. It was in this vehicle that the baron had successively carried away all his daughters, each time performing a journey of six days in order to place them in their convents.

The old domestic sorrowfully shook off the layer of dust which covered the antique chariot, brushed the seats, and put a little sack of oats into the provision box.

“Is anybody going away?” inquired La Rousse, uneasy at the sight of these preparations.

“I know nothing about it,” replied Tonin, a tear trembling in his eye; “but I fear this forebodes that to-morrow there will not be four covers on the table.”

“Good heavens!” ejaculated La Rousse, turning pale, “who can be going then?”—the baron perhaps, on account of the letter he received? No one else can have any business abroad, eh, Tonin?”

“I know nothing about it,” repeated the old domestic.

“When shall we know?” cried the young waiting-maid, more and more uneasy and alarmed; “at the risk of failing in my respect to them, I will go and question Mademoiselle and M. le Chevalier.”

“Do not attempt it,” replied Tonin, holding her back; “perhaps M. le Baron has not informed them. At any rate, we shall soon know what it is all about, for I have orders to go to-morrow morning to Master Tiste, your godfather, for his mare, the baron having borrowed it for some days.”

The same day the baroness with her own hands prepared some provisions which she caused to be placed in the carriage, and when the night had come, instead of waiting in the sitting-

room for supper, she proceeded to her bedchamber, where Anastasia and Gaston soon joined her. This chamber was a vast and almost dismantled apartment, in which a fire had never been lighted during the memory of man. An antique bed, half hidden beneath its heavy curtains of a sombre hue, a wardrobe of curiously carved walnut-wood, a table, and a few dilapidated chairs, were arranged at equal distances, so as to occupy as much space as possible; but even by this arrangement they were far from being sufficient to furnish the chamber, which at the first glance appeared completely bare. It was now the end of January, and the wind which whistled between the ill-joined panels, diffused a dry cold atmosphere through the room, and on every side were felt icy gusts of wind which made the furniture creak, and almost extinguished the little lamp whose vacillating flame flickered amid the shadows of the vast apartment. Madame de Colobrieres, after searching for a long time in the deepest drawer of the wardrobe, placed upon the table a coffer and a little leather purse, the same which, many years before, she had confided one eventful evening to the beautiful Agatha. Then she bade her children approach.

The casket contained the rings and trinkets she had brought as her dower to the Baron de Colobrieres. They consisted of antique rings ornamented with precious stones, a gold watch which had not gone for the last half century, and a few other ornaments of a similar kind.

"My son," said she, addressing herself to Gaston, "this belonged to me, and I give it to you, not that you may preserve it as I have done, but that you may sell it and apply the proceeds according to your wants. Take this purse also; it contains the savings of many years, and the first crown I put into it was the cause of many misfortunes in our family. I have left it there, adding to it all that I could spare, in hopes that a happy day might arrive when I should make it a present to my last daughter. Alas! it is her wedding present that I give you."

She was silent; the fast flowing tears checked her utterance, but as she saw that her two children were also weeping, she made a violent effort to subdue her grief, and resumed in a tranquil, and almost cheerful tone.—

"All this together makes up a sum sufficiently large to enable you not only to accompany your sister to Aix as your father wishes, but also to Paris."

"Ah, mother!" cried Anastasia, "this is the greatest consolation that your tenderness could have offered me! I would

not have asked it,—I would not have even dared to hope for it."

"Poor child! she would have seen,—I would have followed her on foot," murmured Gaston de Colobrieres.

Shortly afterwards the baron entered the room and seated himself beside his wife. Already the clock had struck nine, and the covers had been long since laid in the sitting-room; but on this evening no supper was eaten. After having waited for a length of time, the old domestic proceeded to seek La Rousse and said to her with an air of consternation:—

"No one has sat down to table; most certainly our young master and mistress are going away."

"Are you quite certain of that?" said La Rousse, grasping her yellow locks with a sudden gesture of despair. Then she added, consoled apparently by a sudden idea:—

"They will not refuse to take me with them!"

Not a word, not a sound could be heard in the baroness's apartment; Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister sat in silence beside their mother, who seemed to pray mentally. The baron, erect upon his chair, mute and motionless as a statue, was lost in deep and sad reflections on the duties which a lofty descent and the duties of a true nobleman imposed upon him. When the clock had struck the half hour after nine, Madame Colobrieres pressed the hand of her daughter with an almost imperceptible shudder; then Anastasia rose, and in place of making a reverence to her father according to custom before retiring for the night, she knelt before him and asked his blessing. The old nobleman stretched out his hand over the beautiful head that was bent down before him, and then, carried away by the emotions of his heart, he embraced her closely, whispering in her ear as he pressed her to his heart:—

"My child, I release you from your obedience. Do you wish to remain with us?"

She shook her head with a gesture of refusal, and pressing her father's hands with transport to her lips, she rose suddenly and darted out of the room without bidding adieu to her mother who was kneeling at the foot of the bed, her face hidden in her handkerchief.

At daybreak on the following morning Tonin harnessed Master Tiste's mare to the antique equipage, whilst La Rousse secured the light baggage of the travellers to the board behind. Lambin, who had been previously chained up, howled in the court-yard, and Anastasia's birds chirped mournfully in their cage, which had remained all night at the window. Shortly afterwards the brother and sister descended the stairs together.

La Rousse, who had disappeared for a moment, now returned in her Sunday clothes, her large flat hat upon her head, and a packet under her arm.

"Where are you going, Madeleine, that you are so gay?" inquired Gaston, with an air of surprise.

"I am going with you if it is your good pleasure," replied she, in a half supplicating half resolute tone. "If I incommode you in the carriage I will make the journey on foot—it is not so far to the city of Aix."

"But it is not to Aix alone, it is to Paris that we are going," interrupted the young man, at once embarrassed and touched with this mark of devotion. "It is so far, so very far, that we cannot take you with us."

"It is a good month's journey," added the old domestic.

"Return to your kitchen, my child," continued Gaston de Colobrieres. "I recommend poor Lambin to your care—he knows that we are going, and is howling piteously. Come, good-bye."

At these words he held out his hand which she touched mechanically. Anastasia then approached and said to her in a broken voice:—

"Good-bye, La Rousse. I have left out for you in my bedroom a little bundle of my old clothes; they are all that I can give you. Take great care of my mother, and speak to her often of us."

She entered the carriage, and Gaston took his place by her side. A little peasant boy, who was to drive them to Aix and afterwards bring back Master Tiste's mare, jumped upon the driving seat, making his long-lashed whip whistle round the ears of the animal.

"Farewell, mother!" cried Anastasia, casting a last glance towards the closed shutters of the baroness's chamber; farewell—I shall see you no more. Alas! could I have experienced a more severe trial than this separation?"

At this moment the vehicle having turned, she perceived through the morning mist the summit of the Capuchin's Rock bathed in the golden light of the rising sun. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres cast a long and lingering glance upon the plain before her and the tranquil valley, and repeated in her heart:—

"Farewell!"

Then she closed her eyes and threw herself back in the carriage which rolled swiftly on, the little animal that drew it starting off at a round trot. La Rousse, motionless on the terrace, followed for an instant with her eyes the progress of

the vehicle, which, jolting along, soon reached the foot of the hill. She then began to run madly forward down the road, while Lambin, who had managed to break his chain, passed her like an arrow, and bounded forward on the traces of his master.

The young waiting-maid and the dog ran behind the carriage for about a quarter of a league, but the travellers perceived only Lambin, who barked and jumped against the wheels, whilst La Rousse, pale and breathless, cried out in a voice which was lost in the distance:—

“Monsieur le Chevalier!—Mademoiselle!—I want to go with you—take me!”

She lost ground, however, whilst Lambin still kept ahead of the carriage, despite all the lashes of the little driver's whip. At length the intelligent animal paused for an instant, made a sudden spring, and fell upon the front seat on which Gaston was seated. The latter was about to drive him back, but Anastasia held him by the collar, and said as she patted his shaggy coat:—

“Let us take him with us, brother.”

La Rousse had fallen exhausted and breathless on the roadside. For another moment she gazed after the carriage which was proceeding onwards surrounded with a cloud of dust, and when it had disappeared, she murmured:—

“To Paris! Good Heavens!—to Paris!—oh! I will go there too!”

#### CHAPTER IV.

At the period when the events of the simple tale we have undertaken to relate happened, there stood in the centre of Paris, in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, a building of unpretending architecture and of a sombre and forbidding aspect. The constant mists which rise from the waters of the Seine had imparted to the walls that mouldy tint which is always seen on buildings whose exteriors have for several centuries been neglected. The door was as massive as that of a prison, and the few windows which opened towards the street were furnished with double bars. It was at the entrance of this building that a travelling carriage stopped one morning in the month of February, and Mademoiselle de Colobrieres alighted. As for Gaston he had repaired to a neighbouring hstelry, until the hour should arrive when he could present himself at the parlour of the convent of Notre Dame de la Misericorde.

Anastasia, conducted by a lay sister, traversed the damp and gloomy court-yard which separated the street from the cloistral buildings. She then entered a species of vestibule at the further end of which was a door painted black and surmounted with a cross. The lay sister rang gently. Immediately afterwards the wicket opened, and a wrinkled face appeared behind the grating; then a cracked and trembling voice and the clash of a large bunch of keys were heard simultaneously.

"Jesus be praised!" ejaculated the voice, while the keys grated in the heavy and rusty locks, "it is Mademoiselle de Colobrieres that has arrived! what a happy event!—what joy for the community!"

The massive door at length swung open, and the old nun to whom was confided the functions of portress, took Anastasia by the hand, exclaiming:—

"Enter—enter, mademoiselle. Sweet Saviour, how glad I am to see you!—Permit me, my child, to be the first to embrace you."

With these words she touched with her lips the rosy cheeks of Anastasia, who, grateful for this warm reception, murmured a few words of thanks, while she felt that sort of sinking at the heart which she had experienced on hearing the cloister door shut behind her, gradually vanish. She allowed herself to be led through a long corridor, and, guided by the portress, entered a little cold, bare, and ill-lighted room; this apartment was the superior's parlour. The walls, which were simply white-washed, were adorned, instead of pictures, with pious inscriptions enclosed in blue and yellow foliage of a most primitive taste. A table and a few straw-bottomed chairs composed the entire furniture. At the further end of the room was a large grated opening through which visitors were allowed to converse with the inmates of the convent.

"Be seated for a moment, mademoiselle," said the lay sister with an affectionate air; "I will go and inform our mother that you are here. What joy for her to present to the community so charming a person, and one also so nearly related to herself! What a blessed day for our house!"

So saying, with a light step she turned from the parlour, the bunch of keys, which were suspended from her girdle, jingling as she went. Anastasia sank almost exhausted upon a chair. The first sight of the convent had appeared to her very gloomy, and in fact the dilapidated chateau of her father was a palace of delight in comparison with this edifice surrounded with its blackened walls, and in which everything

announced the renunciation of worldly pleasure, and the hard and pinching poverty of the monastic life. But she was not left long to her reflections; the parlour door opened and a nun slowly entered, her arms crossed upon her breast and her hands concealed beneath the ample sleeves of her robe.

"My dear child, you are welcome!" said she, kissing Anastasia's forehead, while at the same time she gazed upon her with a melancholy and satisfied air.

"You are my sister—my sister Euphemia!" cried the latter, taking her sister's hands and pressing them to her heart.

"I am Mother Angelique de la Charité," replied the superior with a smile; "here, my child, spiritual relationship replaces the ties of blood. I am no longer your sister, for I am your mother in Christ. You are then one of us, my daughter?" added she, fixing upon Anastasia her clear and penetrating gaze; "I long thought that you would not rejoin the elder branches of your family, and that the will of our parents was to retain you by their side to watch over their declining years."

"It is not alone my father's will that has led me hither," replied Anastasia, "it is my vocation."

"A sudden vocation?" demanded the nun.

"Yes, my mother," replied Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, lowering her eyes, as if she feared that the penetrating gaze of La Mère Angelique would have read her inmost thoughts; "yes, I have taken a sudden disgust for a worldly life, and although the Chateau de Colobrieres is a very tranquil abode—a solitude which bears some resemblance to those retreats which holy persons inhabit in the deserts—I longed for a yet closer retirement; I wished to take refuge here."

"And when you entered here, your soul, having at length attained the summit of its desires, leaped with joy?" said La Mère Angelique; "and you exclaimed, like Saint Bridget—'This place is the garden of delight which leads to life eternal!'"

Anastasia sighed deeply and remained silent.

"My child," continued the nun, with a slight smile, "these were not altogether, I can see, the feelings you experienced on passing the door of the cloister; this first proof has somewhat depressed you. But that ought neither to repel nor astonish you: there are some hearts which the Lord does not wish to receive at once."

"If he is merciful, if he is just, he will take mine: I can bestow it with good-will!" cried the poor child, weeping bitterly.

"Be not moved, my child; dry your tears," said La Mère Angelique, gently. "Come! recover yourself, and think no



more of all this. Take this book, my child, and read, whilst I write to the Chevalier de Colobrieres to request him to come and sup with us this evening."

"What! my brother?—in this convent?" exclaimed Anastasia in astonishment; "is it then permitted to open the door of the cloister to men?"

"By no means," replied La Mere Angelique, hastily; "our ecclesiastical superiors, and the princes of the royal blood, have alone the right of penetrating into the cloistral buildings; but with my permission all can present themselves at the grating, and it is in this parlour that your brother will sup with us to-night."

So saying she approached the table, opened a little desk, and began to write, having first placed in the hands of Anastasia a work entitled the "Perfect Nun."

While reading the pious volume of Father Maltagne, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres cast now and then a furtive glance towards the imposing personage whom she had not yet dared to examine openly, and towards whom her heart was already attracted by a sort of timid tenderness.

La Mere Angelique de la Charité had already attained the middle age; but a slight degree of *embonpoint*, and the pale freshness of her complexion, gave her still a youthful appearance. Her features were large and regular, and her finely-formed mouth was often partly opened by a gentle smile. She inherited from her mother that soft limpid expression peculiar to eyes of an undecided tint between blue and greyish green. Yet the slightly-arched line of the eyebrows, and the large and open forehead, recalled the severe countenance of the Baron de Colobrieres; and the *ensemble* of the features expressed decision, firmness of mind, and austere kindness. The costume she wore displayed to advantage the regular beauty of her features. It was a robe of a Moorish grey, with a scapulary of white serge which descended to her feet. The hood, arranged in such a manner as to cover a portion of the cheek, entirely concealed her hair, and an ample black veil floated over her shoulders. A black crucifix attached to a ribbon of the same colour hung from her neck, and seemed like the insignium of her religious profession.

"The Chevalier de Colobrieres scarcely expects my invitation, I presume," said La Mere Angelique, closing the note she had been writing. "The poor boy knows not a living soul in this Babylon, and the time must appear to him very long. He is alone, I suppose?"

"Alone with his dog Lambin," replied Anastasia, *ndively*.

"Not knowing where to take counsel," murmured La Mere Angelique, "without a single protecting hand, and perhaps scant of money! What a situation!"

"It is Gaston's intention, I believe, to follow the example of his elder brothers, and retire also from the world," said Anastasia.

"Now may Providence aid us!" interrupted La Mere Angelique; "this must not be. I am but a poor recluse, shut up from my youth in a cloister, yet I can give perhaps some good advice to those living in the world. This evening I will speak to your brother. In the mean time, my daughter, let me present you to the community: come with me."

The convent of Notre Dame de la Misericorde was not one of those pious retreats founded by royal personages and enriched by their gifts. A devout lady and a pious priest had commenced the building about the middle of the seventeenth century, and at length, with the assistance of Providence and the alms of the faithful, were enabled to complete it. It was in truth Anne of Austria who had laid the first stone of the church, but her munificence was confined to the gift of some altar ornaments, and the *Maison de Paris* was almost as ill endowed as the other houses of the order, which, although it was not a mendicant order, was one of the poorest in Christendom. The property of the monastery had scarcely increased with time, and the humble flock presided over by La Mere Angelique did not live in the well-fed indolence of the Benedictines, the Visitandines, and other communities endowed by opulent benefactors. The nuns of La Misericorde spent less of their time in the choir than in the workroom; they accomplished perfect marvels of needlework, and created in that material *chefs-d'œuvre* by the side of which those of the Lydian Arachne would have appeared but abortive attempts. Their lives were spent in creating those delicate embroideries and magnificent pieces of lacework with which the court ladies loved to deck their persons, and which the *grand seigneurs* wore in the shape of frills and ruffles. Many a furbelow at which these cloistered workwomen had laboured for a year, left their pious hands to adorn the short petticoat of a *danseuse*; many a pair of ruffles, the almost impalpable threads of which the young novices had barely completed, were forgotten by some *petit-maitre* upon the toilet-table of a marquise, or torn to pieces in a drunken brawl.

On leaving the parlour, La Mere Angelique led Mademoiselle de Colobrieres through a long dark gallery, on one side of which opened about twenty little doors. These were the dor-

mitories of the sisterhood. In the centre was a large clock surmounted by a cross. A few unframed sheets of canvass, daubed with horrible pictures, decorated the walls, the saints whom they represented seeming to mount sentinel at each door, and to lend an ear to the ticking of the clock, the hand of which marked the seconds of their eternity. An icy chill seemed to exude, as it were, from these tattered canvasses, penetrating soul and body. Poor Anastasia again felt the impression she had experienced on passing the cloister door: she paused, shuddering, and said in a faint voice:—

“What darkness!—what silence! One might suppose that there was not a creature in the house.”

The superior smiled and raised her finger towards the clock, which almost at the same instant struck twelve. The stroke of the hammer was still echoing, when a joyous hum of many voices was heard in the interior of the convent; children's voices were mingled with those of more mature age, and their animated prattle reached even the dormitory gallery.

“These are our boarders, whose play-hour has arrived,” said *La Mere Angelique*. “My dear little lambs are playing in the court-yard, and their gaiety spreads through the whole house. You will scarcely ever meet them except in church, my dear daughter; but you will be able to see them laugh and play through the windows of the novices' dormitory; it is an amusement that I will occasionally permit you.”

“Thanks, my dear mother,” replied Anastasia, who began to perceive that in a convent the most trifling amusements are not to be despised.

It was also the hour at which the nuns took their recreation. They had assembled in a room which was called the winter promenade, and which opened upon the garden. This apartment was even more simply decorated than the superior's parlour; the furniture, which had already served several generations of nuns, was composed of a long massive table, and a few oaken benches disposed along the walls. A species of chair marked the place reserved for the superior; but this peculiar seat was neither softer nor more commodious than the benches appropriated to the nuns, and its occupant could not hope to repose very luxuriously upon this solid stool, which nevertheless represented a throne—the throne of an absolute sovereign over her circumscribed empire. The windows were hung with curtains of linen, through which might be perceived the convent garden. Neither was the prospect on this side more cheerful; the walls, whose height surpassed that of the neighbouring houses, formed a regular enclosure,

in the centre of which a basin of stagnant water held the place of a fountain. Two alleys, bordered by stunted and distorted lime-trees, which presented much the appearance of two rows of inverted brooms, extended in parallel lines to the end of the garden, and not a blade of grass could be perceived in the huge square which was dignified by the title of the *parterre*. At equal distances against the cloistral wall were formed niches of pebbles, ornamented with plaster statuettes and garlands of shells; these were oratories erected by the nuns, who in spring decked them with the languishing flowers which budded in their garden.

When La Mere Angelique appeared at the entrance of the winter promenade followed by Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, all conversation ceased—every eye was turned towards the new-comer with curious interest, and the community, erect and motionless, awaited in respectful silence the words of their superior. The latter advanced slowly to her place, her handsome features wearing an expression of gentle severity, of austere calm, the power of which was irresistible. It might easily be seen that she was conscious of the absolute dominion she exercised over all these minds, whether timid or resolute, depressed or exalted, satisfied or suffering, over all these natures brought into subjection, at least in appearance, by the power of religion.

"My dear sisters," said she in a grave and gentle voice, "behold the new lamb which the Lord has joined to our flock. As my sister by the ties of relationship, as my spiritual daughter, I recommend her to your affection and your prayers."

In an instant Anastasia was surrounded by the entire sisterhood. There was something singularly ingenuous in the testimonies of their friendship; and the formula of compliments which they employed bore but slight resemblance made use of in the world.

"Sweet Saviour! how glad I am!" said one of the nuns; "your place will be near me in the refectory, my dear sister. Do you like fruit?"

"Yes, sister," replied Anastasia, astonished at the question.

"That is delightful!" replied the nun, quickly. "With our mother's permission I every day retrench my dessert, in order by this little mortification to correct myself of the sin of gluttony to which I am subject; it is you, my dear sister, who shall eat my apples."

"What a joyful day for us, my child, will that be on which you take the veil!" said an old nun, touching with her long yellow fingers the printed cotton dress of

Colobrières ; “but as long as you wear the livery of the world I dare not rejoice—you will not be altogether ours.”

“How long the time of your probation will appear to us!” added another nun. “There are two doors to the novitiate, as La Mère Perpétue, our former prioress, used always to say: the one is the great door of salvation which leads into the convent, the other the door which the tempter holds half open, and through which he invites us to return to the world. My dear sister, I will recite every day the Psalm ‘*Deus noster refugium*,’ in order that Providence may grant you grace to persevere in your vocation.”

“Come this way, my dear sister; we will show you how to make the agnus,” cried a group of novices, drawing Anastasia towards the table where they had spread out the images, which they amused themselves by cutting out and framing in gold and silken embroideries.

The various groups which the arrival of Mademoiselle de Colobrières had disturbed were formed anew, and the nuns recommenced chattering away with that eagerness peculiar to persons condemned every day to several hours of silence. Their innocent and childish conversation, and little discreet bursts of laughter might be heard from one end of the hall to the other. Anastasia observed with a certain degree of interest this picture which a painter would have taken pleasure in sketching, for it contained those striking types which are to be met with only in the cloister. A few venerable sisters, seated together upon the same bench, were deploring the sudden disappearance of a huge black cat, an inmate of the house, who for the last three days had not been seen in the refectory. They spoke of him as a prodigal son, and were gravely indignant at his misconduct. Behind these discreet personages, two young nuns were conversing together in a low voice. The poor girls added perhaps an additional pleasure to this recreation by conversing upon forbidden topics. Further off, the novices were busily engaged in cutting out their agnuses, while relating to Anastasia some one of those histories which are handed down by tradition in all convents. One of them, a fair pale-cheeked girl, was seated apart near the window. A large volume lay open upon her knees, while her eyes followed with a melancholy expression the sparrows, who, after having for a moment alighted in the garden would again wing their flight over the wall.

At a quarter to one the bell rang, its shrill chimes calling the nuns into the workroom.

“What can you do, my child?” inquired the superior of

Anastasia, whilst the mistress of the novices was distributing the afternoon tasks.

"Not much, my mother," replied the young girl; "I have only been taught how to mend worn things and to repair skilfully clothes of which the stuff is threadbare."

"I was taught that also, formerly," said La Mère Angelique with a sigh; "the Demoiselles de Colobrieres never had a new dress, and the baroness, our good mother, is clothed like the blessed Madeleine de Saint Joseph who wore the same petticoat for thirty-five years."

"Divine goodness! she had then made profession in a house whose treasury was no richer than our own?" observed Anastasia, with ingenuous simplicity.

"She was superior of the convent of the Augustines at Madrid," replied La Mère Angelique; "it is a house of royal foundation, enjoying a revenue of a hundred thousand livres a year, and in which the queens of Spain often go to hear vespers and take supper."

The nuns had now begun to work, a dead silence being observed by all. Anastasia seated herself before an embroidery frame and began tracing a few light garlands upon an Indian muslin collar. This occupation left free scope for her mind, which wandered away among a thousand uneasy thoughts, ever returning to her dearly cherished but painful recollections. From time to time the poor child would lean over her work and secretly dry her eyes, blinded with tears; then she would resume her task more actively, and would endeavour forcibly to drive away the image which she carried with her in the recesses of her heart, and which obstinately remained in spite of her resolutions, her scruples, and her remorse.

At lunch hour, a lay sister went round with a basket, offering to each nun a slice of dry bread. Anastasia took hers mechanically, placed it at one corner of her embroidery frame, and continued her employment.

"Eat, my dear sister," whispered a nun, who was seated by her side, "it will do you good. The first day that I passed in this house, like you my heart was heavy; when they distributed the luncheon, I said to myself that it was the bread of penitence, a bitter morsel which I was to moisten with my tears, and I could not take a single mouthful; the following day, I had more appetite, I ate it, and I can assure you, I found it very good and very nice. However, the rules do not forbid us treating ourselves with a few little delicacies, and if you will be good enough to accept my chocolate lozenges——"

With these words, she drew from her ample pocket a species of comfit-box, and presented it open to Anastasia.

"Thank you heartily, my dear sister," replied Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, touched with this mark of attention; "I am not accustomed to these delicacies, and I can content myself very well with this good white bread."

She broke her bread and endeavoured to eat a little; but her tears flowed again: she recalled to mind with regret the meagre dinners which were served on her father's table, and the rye bread manufactured by La Rousse.

"This is nothing, my child; do not be astonished," continued the nun, who had observed her. "The first meal one eats in a convent is always thus; one weeps, but that does not prevent the vocation."

It was almost night when the bell called the nuns into the choir. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres followed them thither, and at a sign from the superior took her place near the grating on the novices' side. It was the first act of her religious life, and she felt herself impressed with a strange feeling of sadness and fear while kneeling for the first time in the sanctuary, at the foot of that altar where she was to pronounce her vows. Never had the thought of this dreaded engagement struck her as it did at this moment; never had she so clearly perceived the entire extent of her sacrifice. In vain she endeavoured to join in the prayers of the nuns; her lips alone murmured the psalms of the Virgin's office; she could not attain that degree of *inward* prayer which comes from the heart alone, and despite all her efforts to the contrary, her eyes wandered over surrounding objects with a sort of painful curiosity.

Daylight was now gone, and the twilight which struggled through the windows scarcely permitted the enclosure of the choir to be visible. The nuns, erect in their stalls, their eyes half closed, their formularies in their hands, chanted from memory the service which their rule obliged them to recite each day. Through the grating which separated the choir from the church might be distinguished a portion of the nave, faintly illumined by the lamp which burned before the high altar. A few devout women, kneeling at the foot of the holy table and shivering with cold, were saying their prayers and repeating the responses after the nuns. At one corner of the choir and near the grating, stood a little altar surrounded by funereal symbols, upon which burned a taper whose pale ray disclosed the miniature effigy of a confined figure enveloped in a winding-sheet, the brow en-

circled with palm leaves, and the hands grasping a crucifix. When Anastasia perceived this gloomy figure she no longer turned away her eyes; it was an enigma the solution of which she sought in vain to divine. One of the novices perceiving her absence of mind, said in a low voice, touching her elbow as she spoke:—

“Pay attention, my dear sister; they are about to rise for the *Vexilla Regis*.”

And as Anastasia pointed towards the lugubrious figure, looking at her at the same time inquiringly, she added:—

“It is the effigy of our holy founder, Father Ivan, whose relics we are fortunate enough to possess. He is interred there in the hollow of the wall.”

“Oh, heavens! it is a tomb,” murmured Anastasia, struck with a vague emotion of fear, and saddened by this gloomy neighbourhood; but almost at the same instant her attention was diverted from this painful impression by some one who had entered and whose figure she could perceive through the grating: it was Gaston de Colobrieres. After having wandered all day through the streets of the great city, with the melancholy weariness of a poor stranger who knows not what is to become of him in the midst of this splendid and muddy labyrinth, he had come, harassed with fatigue and shivering with cold, to repose himself in the house of God until the hour should arrive when he could present himself at the parlour of the convent of La Misericorde. Anastasia felt immediately consoled on perceiving her brother; she began to experience the compensations which there are in a monastic life, and to feel the infinite value which the constant suppression of all our desires, all our wishes, all our inclinations, gives to the slightest gratification of them. A gentle emotion caused her heart to beat; her eyes, which during this day had been so frequently moistened with tears, now overflowed with joy, and she murmured to herself with indescribable tenderness:—

“My dear Gaston! it is he!”

Perhaps Mademoiselle de Colobrieres was not the only person conscious of the presence of this handsome young man. He had advanced modestly among the devout women who were repeating their paternosters before the high altar, and after having prayed in an erect position for an instant, had seated himself, hat in hand, and his head slightly drooping upon his breast, in an attitude of pensive meditation. Gaston de Colobrieres was truly a charming cavalier and was remarkable for his good mien and carriage, despite the slightly antiquated taste of his costume. He wore the new coat which his mother



had had made for him at the memorable epoch when the baron received the five hundred crowns arising from the sale of Belveser. The village tailor, who had been called in to fashion this garment, had conscientiously employed all the stuff purchased by the baroness, and consequently the skirts floated halfway down the leg, and the lapels could at need have crossed from one shoulder to another. But the slight and gracefully moulded figure of the young man gave a sort of distinction to this species of sack; and although he did not wear powder like the youths of the day, and although his glossy black hair was confined at the neck by a simple ribbon, his features and general appearance were not the less noble and distinguished.

After the service and while the nuns were withdrawing from the choir, Anastasia approached La Mere Angelique, and said to her in a low voice, turning her eyes as she spoke towards the nave:—

“That young man yonder is our brother Gaston.”

“Oh! my child, how much he resembles our dear mother! I recognised him at once!” replied the superior, in a tone of affectionate regret.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Gaston presented himself at the parlour grating.

“My brother, my dear brother, at length we meet again!” cried Anastasia, as if she had found him after a long absence.

La Mere Angelique silently held out her hand to him through the bars, gazing on him as she did so with a sigh. The idea that this fine young man thought of becoming a monk, astonished and saddened her. She felt convinced that this vocation must have other motives than those of exalted piety, and that human passions had a greater share in his decision than divine love. Gaston, on his side, gazed on her with inexpressible sadness; he recollected this elder sister, although he was still a child when she was in the first flower of her youth. He could recall to mind however the fresh beauty, the dimpled graces of those features which he now beheld again so pale and serious under the black veil. A tear started to his eye, and he pressed the cold white hand of the nun to his lips as he said:—

“Alas! sister, it is the destiny of the female branches of our family to bury themselves in a cloister. Anastasia also has come to join you.”

La Mere Angelique made a slight movement of the head, and simply replied:—

“She will perform her probation; then the will of God will decide. But you, brother, you, chevalier, are you certain of

your vocation for a monastic life? have you come to the firm resolution of taking the vows of the order of St. Francis?"

"I know not if it is my vocation," replied Gaston; "I feel only in my heart an extreme desire to renounce the world, to bury myself, as it were, beforehand in the tomb, in order to flee from the afflictions and pains which are found upon this earth—Alas, I wish to die!"

"Not yet, my brother; you must wait," said La Mere Angelique, gravely; "you must not commence your novitiate until you have tried for some time the life of the world. A poor girl cannot attempt this species of probation, but a man ought in the first place to contend against ill-fortune, against himself. When one is twenty-five years of age, and has a face and figure like yours, and bears the name of Colobrieres, he does not go straight to the convent of the Capuchins without knocking at some other doors first."

"Oh! brother, I did not venture to say all that to you, but I thought it," added Anastasia. "You must reflect yet a little before assuming the frock." ●

"And in the mean time, Monsieur le Chevalier," continued La Mere Angelique in an almost playful tone, "be kind enough to take a seat. I thought you would be good enough to accept the supper that our poor convent offered you."

A lay sister completed the arrangement of the table, and without violating the sanctity of the cloister Gaston was really about to sup with the superior of the convent of La Misericorde. A large wicket constructed in the grating, and which on such occasions as this could be opened, permitted of a portion of the table being placed in the exterior part of the parlour; by this arrangement the nuns were separated from their guests only by the dark grating which divided this species of neutral ground placed between the cloister and the world. The covers were laid with that careful and scrupulous neatness which is the luxury of religious houses, and Gaston de Colobrieres was treated according to the traditions of monastic hospitality. The lay sister placed before him a bottle of old wine, a savoury fowl, and several plates of delicacies; then she arranged symmetrically at the other end of the table bread, water, a plate of apples, and a box of dried fruits.

"Sup, chevalier; we too are going to partake of a collation," said La Mere Angelique gaily, placing herself at the table after having recited aloud the *Benedicite*. A fourth guest now approached familiarly to take his share of the repast; this was Lambin, who placed his pointed muzzle on the table, turning with a sigh his dragon-like eye towards Anastasia whilst the

young girl extended her hand and patted him through the bars of the grating.

There was neither stove nor fireplace in the parlour; but the exterior cold did not penetrate through the massive walls of this room, the temperature of which was heightened also by a species of brazier which the lay sister had placed under the table. Thick curtains were drawn before the windows, and the atmosphere was impregnated with a slight aroma, like that of the incense which is burned in churches. The first view of this monastic interior was severe and forbidding, but the eye soon became accustomed to it, and the calm, the silence of the place, acting upon the senses threw the mind into a not displeasing state of melancholy. Gaston felt this influence; the anxieties of his mind became appeased, the most poignant feelings of his heart became in some sort blunted, and for the first time for many a day he felt himself living without effort and without suffering. After supper he leaned pensively against the grating which separated him from his sisters, and said to them seriously:—

“Why are we not still living in the times of the blessed Robert d’Arbrissel! If now like then, the monks and nuns of the same institution could live in spiritual and temporal communion, praying in the same church, inhabiting the same house, I would not hesitate, I would immure myself along with you, my sisters: you are happy here—”

“Yes, when we have no other thought than our salvation,” replied La Mere Angelique, “when we follow the ways of the Lord without ever casting a glance backward, and are entirely detached from worldly things; but he who is not without hatred as well as without love for the world ought not to come to us. Monsieur le Chevalier, we will speak no more of your vocation; let us think rather on the means of establishing you for some months in this modern Babylon, which I know not it is true, but whose perilous ways and whose frightful precipices I can fancy. And first of all we must calculate your little resources.”

“I am rich, madam,” replied Gaston with a smile, drawing from his pocket the purse and sort of casket which the baroness had given him. “As the locks of the hostelry where I put up did not appear to me very solid, I took the precaution of carrying my fortune about my person.”

“We will keep it here; that is still safer,” said La Mere Angelique. “I will lock up both money and jewels for you in the convent treasury.”

So saying she rose and opened with a key which she drew from her pocket the double locks of an iron safe let in to the

wall. Anastasia having turned her head mechanically in that direction, experienced almost the same astonishment as Agatha de Colobrieres had done when she beheld the six-franc pieces and the louis-d'ors which rolled in waves from Pierre Maragon's half open valise.

"Ah, heavens!" cried she, "what riches!"

"It is the treasure of our poor convent," replied La Mere Angelique with a satisfied smile; "it is the money which we amass to divide with those houses of the order in which they know not how to work as we do. The family of Notre Dame de la Misericorde is numerous and necessitous. Those who are admitted into it engage themselves to work all their lives for their fellow-creatures. Besides the three religious vows, they make a fourth, that of receiving all young women of quality who, unable to establish themselves in the world and not even possessing dower sufficient to enter another convent, seek a refuge in La Misericorde. Many come, my child, and this innocent flock must be fed. Almighty Providence, and the labour of our dear sisters, provide their subsistence. According to the spirit of the rules, their lives are divided between action and contemplation; they pass each day an hour in the choir, and the remainder of their time they employ in fabricating those mundane adornments the value of which you see here. The intention sanctifies the work, and the demon rejoices not when the vanity of the age furnishes daily bread for the children of God."

"But, my dear mother," said Anastasia, "why do they not work thus in all houses of the order?"

"Because there are certain monasteries where a life of contemplation is led in preference to one of action," replied La Mere Angelique simply; "there are several roads leading to salvation: Saint Martha and Saint Mary equally went to heaven."

Eight o'clock struck at this moment. The superior rose.

"The evening recreation is over," said she; "our sisters are going to prayer. My daughter, bid your brother good-night."

"Alas! already?" murmured Gaston de Colobrieres.

"Good-night, brother!—good-night, Lambin!" said Anastasia, extending her two little hands through the grating.—

"Adieu until to-morrow, Gaston; my dear mother gives you permission to return."

"Yes, every day," added La Mere Angelique. "May God keep you, my dear child!"

## CHAPTER V.

THE presence of Gaston de Colobrieres had for the moment consoled Anastasia ; but so soon as he was gone, so soon as she found herself once more in that long, sombre corridor, peopled with its figures of saints which seemed to rise before her in dim array, and point to the symbols of their martyrdom—she relapsed into a state of nervous terror.

The evening prayers lasted scarcely a quarter of an hour, and as soon as they were over the nuns retired in silence to their several cells. Anastasia ascended to the novices' quarter, and entered with them into their dormitory. A lay sister opened the door of the last cell, lighted the iron lamp which hung against the wall, saluted Mademoiselle de Colobrieres with an *ave, Maria*, and left her alone in her narrow chamber.

The cells were furnished in the same simple style as the rest of the house ; a *prie-Dieu*, a table, a chair, a curtainless bed, and a few prints attached to the walls, composed the entire furniture, which in a certain degree recalled to her mind the little chamber she had occupied at her father's chateau, and which she had shared for one night with Mademoiselle Maragnon. Saddened by the recollection, the young girl mechanically raised her eyes to search for the heraldic thistle, and the cherubs with their outspread wings which had formerly smiled upon her each morning on awaking from the slumbers of the night ; but perceiving only the blackened beams which crossed the ceiling, and the hideous images which seemed to grin at her from the wall, she began to weep bitterly as she recalled to mind with transports of grief the dilapidated roof of her old and cherished home. It seemed as if an immeasurable distance separated Colobrieres from the spot where she now was, and as if she lived in another hemisphere, upon a quarter of the globe not lighted by the same stars. Prompted by a sudden impulse she ran to the window and gazed upwards at the heavens. The breeze had scattered the clouds, the atmosphere was pure, and the stars sparkled in the firmament like diamonds of a sombre hue, while, brilliant above all, shone the constellation of Orion amidst the dark azure of infinite space. Anastasia recognised with a feeling bordering on transport the radiant sign towards which she had so often raised her eyes during her evening walks upon the terrace of the chateau. It seemed to her as though a ray from those tranquil orbs descended upon her, imparting peace and

comfort to her afflicted mind. She closed her window gently, and slowly made the circuit of her chamber, lamp in hand, as if to familiarise herself with the objects it contained. She first examined the *prie-Dieu*: it was empty, save that upon the little desk had been placed an hour-glass and the form of prayer used by the community. The table was as naked as the *prie-Dieu*, and the narrow couch with its white coverlet recalled to her mind the funereal bed on which reposed the holy founder of the house. While pursuing her investigations, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres raised her lamp towards the prints upon the wall, and she then perceived upon the white-washed surface certain characters traced with some sharp instrument. It was no easy task to decipher the sense of these uneven and half-effaced letters; however Anastasia succeeded in reading a name—the profane name of Hector—and a little further on the following extract from the book of Job:—"My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust."

Anastasia placed the lamp upon the *prie-Dieu* and seated herself at the foot of her bed, her eyes fixed upon the lines which some novice, perhaps the last occupant of the cell, had traced upon the damp plaster. Nothing was left to complete the sense of this inscription; no other trace remained of her whose hand had written these gloomy words. She had passed by like a traveller in an inn, who disappears from the scene to give place to another inmate, without even leaving behind a name in the abode common to all. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres reflected long on the fate of this unknown, who had bequeathed to her as a remembrance these thoughts of death; but at length, exhausted with fatigue and half frozen with cold, she stretched herself with a shudder upon her pallet, and fell into a heavy slumber.

Daylight had not yet appeared when a feeble light shining on Anastasia's face awoke her. It was the superior who had gently entered her cell. In one hand she held her lamp, and in the other she carried the robe and scapulary of the order. The white flame of the lamp shone full upon her countenance, the gentle gravity of which was mingled with a shade of sadness. Seen by this light she was so beautiful that the young girl, suddenly roused from a deep sleep, fancied at first that

she beheld an apparition, and that the figure of one of the blessed was approaching her bed.

"My dear child," said the nun, showing her the grey stuff dress, "here is your new garment. I do not think it right that you should solemnly take the veil. That ceremony is a first engagement for which you are not yet prepared. In simply exchanging your secular habiliments for the dress of the order you are but a postulant, and remain in the same condition as those persons of the world whom we permit to share our spiritual retreat."

"Alas! mother," replied Anastasia with a sigh, "can I ever return to the world?"

"After a year's probation we shall see, my child," answered La Mere Angelique; "until then you will not assume a religious name; you shall still be Mademoiselle de Colobrieres."

"Mother, you are aware that no daughter of our house has retained this name until her death," observed Anastasia in a melancholy tone.

"Not even our aunt Agatha," said the superior with a sigh. "We have seen what vocation was hers! What would have become of that poor soul, had not Providence watched over her safety?"

"Oh! my dear mother," cried Anastasia, with extreme astonishment, "then you approve of the marriage of our aunt Agatha with Pierre Maragnon?"

"Yes, my daughter, I do approve of it," replied La Mere Angelique; "it was better, a thousand times better, that she should remain in the world by becoming the wife of a plebeian, than have entered the cloister to make a bad nun."

"Can there possibly be bad nuns?" murmured Anastasia, involuntarily raising her eyes towards the lugubrious verses traced upon the wall.

"Yes, my daughter, there are such," replied the superior; "and I have had the grief to behold, even in this house, nuns who inwardly detested their vows, incurring by this secret rebellion condign punishment. Consequently, it is not until after a long proof that I admit novices to make their profession. After the vesture I watch more attentively than ever for symptoms of their vocation, and if I perceive the slightest lukewarmness I postpone their final vows. The Lord has blessed my intentions; there are now no longer amongst us any of those despairing souls, and all our sisters advance without effort in the path of salvation."

"Sometimes, my dear mother, novices are found who do

not persevere in their religious vocation," said Anastasia, hesitatingly; "there are some who do not obtain here the consolations and repose they expected?"

"It is true, my daughter. To these latter I point out the door of the cloister still open for their retreat; they must return to the world which they regret. Alas! when they cannot—"

"When they cannot?" repeated Anastasia.

"They die!" replied La Mere Angelique, sadly.

"And the novice who occupied this cell before me—is she dead, mother?" continued Mademoiselle de Colobrieres

"Who told you that, my child?" demanded the superior in astonishment; "who has spoken to you of that poor girl?"

Anastasia pointed with her finger to the wall, and made a sign to La Mere Angelique to read what was written beside the print of Notre Dame des Douleurs. The superior slowly deciphered the ill-formed characters, and as she by degrees comprehended the meaning of the inscription, her eyes filled with tears. When she had finished the perusal of the lines, she returned to Anastasia and simply remarked:—

"She was called in the world Mademoiselle de Lansac;—she was an orphan and without fortune. A young and wealthy cavalier of good birth loved her and wished to marry her, but his father threatened to disinherit him if he persisted in this project; their union thus became in fact impossible, for Mademoiselle de Lansac was herself of too good a family to pass over the affront of such a refusal. Like all young ladies of birth who have no dowry wherewith to enter a convent, she came here. Unhappily this house, where she was received and welcomed in her distress, could not afford her a refuge against the inward pangs she brought hither. For two years she languished in alternate paroxysms of fervour and disgust, despair and tranquillity; then she died."

This simple narrative deeply affected Anastasia. There existed a painful similarity between Mademoiselle de Lansac's destiny and her own. She raised her drooping face, bathed in tears, and repeated in her heart the words of Job:—"The tomb will be my dwelling, and I will repose in eternal darkness."

At this moment the parlour clock struck five, and almost at the same moment the bell began to ring.

"It is the first bell for mass," said La Mere Angelique; "dress yourself, my daughter; we must descend to the choir."

Thus admonished, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres put on the robe of grey cloth and the white scapulary, twisted up her long



and silky tresses and concealed them under the *beguin*, and assumed the *guimpe* and the veil. This grave and severe costume imparted to her features an indescribable beauty, and one might have imagined her a St. Theresa in the melancholy fervour of her first vocation, when, still retained by the world but already aspiring to Heaven, she prayed, prostrated in her oratory, and closing her ears to the nocturnal serenades of the young cavaliers of Avila. La Mere Angelique with her own hands attached the crucifix to the breast of the young novice, after which she said to her:—

“My dear child, you are about to recommence to-day all you did yesterday; here one day exactly resembles another, and you may know beforehand the employment of your life to its very last hour.”

Gaston de Colobrieres passed an hour every evening in the parlour of the Convent of La Misericorde; the remainder of his time he spent in a very de-ultory manner, not knowing how to employ the long and dreary days. At first he had endeavoured to distract his thoughts from their accustomed channel, and even to amuse himself a little; but he knew not in truth in what consisted the pleasures of the great city, and he confined himself to strolling through the streets and gazing into the shop-windows like a poor provincial as he was. Everything concurred to increase his weariness; it was still the depth of winter, and the heavens, obscured from morning until night by motionless leaden-coloured clouds, distilled a continual drizzling rain amid the foggy atmosphere. Gaston took many a melancholy walk through the busy crowds, by whom he was elbowed on all sides, and amongst which he in vain sought for one friendly countenance. Lambin also trotted after his master with drooping tail and downcast visage through this labyrinth of streets, and more than once the ill-advised passengers who chanced to tread on his toes experienced the effect of his ill-humour.

Gaston however soon became tired of these endless and aimless rambles, and no longer quitted the house during the day, but awaited in his apartment the hour when he could repair to the convent. The day following his arrival in Paris, he had, upon the recommendation of La Mère Angelique, removed his effects to the dwelling of a devout woman who kept a sort of furnished lodging-house in the Rue de la Parcheminerie. A few students in law and medicine, young men of regular habits and good morals, overflowing with science but very light of cash, were his fellow inmates; but Gaston was too timid and too shy to make acquaintance with them,

and all the intimacy existing between them was confined to a passing salutation when they chanced to meet on the staircase.

The young cavalier's lodging consisted of a single chamber on the fourth floor, the furniture of which was at least as dilapidated as that of the apartment he occupied in his father's chateau. But although worn out, it presented a very different appearance from that at Colobrieres. There the remains of the old furniture still displayed some traces of past splendour; and it was apparent that time alone with its unsparing hand had tarnished the gilded wainscoting, and torn in fragments the rich hangings. In the house of the Rue de la Parcheminerie, on the contrary, there were only worn out articles of modern furniture, and it was evidently the careless hands of three or four generations of students which had marbled them with stains and disfigured them with rents innumerable. The bedstead of painted wood was garnished with curtains too short by half a yard, and repaired throughout their entire length with a multitude of patches. A rickety arm-chair, through the tattered covering of which protruded handfuls of cow-hair, was placed in front of a table covered with a cloth which was formerly black, but had long since assumed a dull rusty hue, spotted, tiger fashion, with large stains of ink. Two straw-bottomed chairs, on which it was necessary to sit down with the greatest caution, accompanied the arm-chair. Above the chimney-piece was a mirror of considerable dimensions, but of so green a shade that those who looked at themselves in it recoiled at first in terror at the aspect of their own faces, which appeared to them as livid as that of a corpse. In compensation, however, the mantel-shelf was adorned with a timepiece of copper gilt; but as this latter was unfortunately out of order, the works had been removed and the framework only left standing. The mistress of the house had certainly warned Gaston of this accident, assuring him at the same time that it would be repaired with as little delay as possible; but as she had made the same speech to every new lodger for the last fifteen years there existed not the slightest chance of young Colobrieres ever hearing the hour strike in his apartment. A wardrobe, the drawers of which had not closed from time immemorial, and a mat which served as a bed for Lambin, completed the furniture.

The gay room-papers which now-a-days decorate the humblest garrets were still at this period a species of luxury, and the walls of this bachelor apartment had been originally plastered with a coating of the most brilliant yellow ochre, the lively tone of which had gradually softened down to pale nankeen. The students who had succeeded other in the chamber had embel-

lished this uniform groundwork with a crowd of arabesques traced with charcoal, innumerable sentences and devices of their own composition, and French or Latin rhymes, the fruits of their poetic leisure. During rainy days poor Gaston, immured in his chamber, read as a sort of pastime these flowers of rhetoric, freshly culled from the imaginations of his predecessors. They consisted for the most part of amorous ditties, madrigals to adorable unknowns, and frequently elegies to faithless mistresses. Amidst all this nonsense there were here and there sentences full of deep thought, bursts of passion, reflections pregnant with painful truths, which found an echo in Gaston's heart—that pining and sorrowing heart which time was unable to cure.

It is not impossible to live in solitude when we are surrounded with the mighty spectacles of nature, when we see stretched before us the vast expanse of ocean or the boundless firmament of Heaven. Human voices are then hushed, but we hear other voices speaking to our souls. These sounds which spring up on every side around us people the most desert regions: we are no longer alone upon the shore on which the tide dashes with melancholy murmur, nor upon the lone mountain crest round which the storm howls and rages, nor in the sombre forest amid the singing of the birds, nor on the arid sands whose silence is broken only by the vague harmonies floating through the air. But solitude amid a crowd saddens and terrifies the heart; we wander blindly through this frightful desert where the incessant hum of unknown voices sounds in our ears, where living walls on all sides arrest our gaze. Gaston de Colobrières soon experienced this painful solitude. As soon as he had satisfied the first feelings of curiosity which had urged him to gaze around in order to see the place in which he was about to sojourn, he turned away his eyes and sunk still deeper into that state of mournful gloom which was slowly wasting him away. His days were now spent in alternate fits of violent resolution and abject despair. At one time he longed for an active life, for the perils of a profession in which he should expose his life every day, and he wished to become a soldier: at another time he would turn his thoughts towards the cloister, and ask himself if it were not better to immure himself at once in a living tomb where he might drag on his weary existence until death should relieve him from his sufferings. There was but one hour out of the twenty-four that did not hang heavy on his hands: it was that which he spent in the evening at the convent of La Miséricorde with his sisters. The one was happy in her severe

profession, the other appeared resigned. La Mere Angelique was moreover gifted with a strong mind and a gentle and serene temper which communicated itself to all who approached her. Its cheering influence restored calmness and courage to Gaston's heart; in her presence he no longer felt so unhappy, and, notwithstanding her penetration, she fancied that like most young men of his age he allowed himself to float down the stream of life, indifferent as to the end of his voyage. She never however left him alone in the parlour with his sister Anastasia, dreading perhaps for both those bursts of affection and those mutual confidences by which their hearts might become unduly excited. Without exactly knowing the state of their hearts, she suspected that certain fondly-cherished and painful recollections were ever present to them, and she sought to remove from their reach the dangerous consolation of abandoning themselves to their mutual grief. It was besides all that she could foresee.

Anastasia frequently spoke of her mother, and recalled to mind those she had left behind her in the world, but she never once pronounced the name of Eleonora, and Gaston imitated her reserve: there was never any mention made of the Maragnon family in the presence of La Mere Angelique. Sometimes the young novice would describe to her brother the life, at once calm and monotonous, which they led in the convent.

"It is surprising," she would say to him, "we perform the same tasks every day, we take the same recreations, we recite the same prayers—in short, commence over again every morning the occupations of the preceding day—and yet the time flies swiftly on in this monotonous round. Here to live long or to die soon appears a matter of perfect indifference."

Once, however, the superior having for a moment left the parlour, Gaston approached the grating beside which Mademoiselle de Colobrieres was seated, and leaning his head against the bars he said to her in a low voice:—

"Alas! my dear Anastasia, is it indeed true that those who inhabit this holy dwelling no longer remember the world—no longer experience either sorrows or regrets?"

"I should have been dead long ago," murmured the young girl in reply, "had not the piety, the affection, the angelic virtue of my dear mother sustained me."

"Just heaven! my poor sister, what do I hear!" cried Gaston.

"And yet I do not desire to return to the world," continued Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, in a tone of nervous excitement; "when I find myself too unhappy here, I think of what is passing yonder—brother! they are married now!"

"Yes, we must remain!" murmured Gaston in a stifled voice; "we must remain here, for they will return to Bel-vezer!"

La Mere Angelique at this moment entered the parlour, and resumed the conversation where it had been broken off, without appearing to perceive that the tears still trembled in the downcast eyes of Anastasia, and that Gaston de Colobrieres was deadly pale.

Easter approached, and during the holy week no one was admitted to the superior's parlour. The community of La Misericorde observed the strictest retirement, and embraced a life of contemplation; the workroom was closed, and pious exercises occupied every hour of the day. This temporary separation nearly overwhelmed Gaston's remaining strength, and he pined away with weariness and grief. No one around him could perceive his sufferings, and he supported them with the apathetic resignation of despair. Every morning the servant who put his room in order found him up and seated at his window, his eyes mechanically turned towards the opposite house, which with its six stories overtopped that in which he lived, intercepting from him at the same time both air and sunshine. The clumsy wench, in her coarse cotton petticoat, would hastily arrange his bed, rake up the logs of wood which burned slowly upon the handful of ashes, and would then cast a sidelong glance upon the poor young man, whose sallow habits she observed with disdain, and exclaim in her rough, harsh voice:—

"Will monsieur take his cup of milk this morning, and shall I bring up also a penny loaf?"

"Yes, I shall be much obliged to you," Gaston would reply without turning his head.

A moment afterwards the frightful Hebe would return with the breakfast, and before placing it on the table would stretch out her rapacious hands to grasp the sou pieces which Gaston had previously left for her on the mantelpiece. Then she would cast a glance at Lambin, whose rough hide bristled up at the mere sight of her, salute Gaston with the usual empty, formal sentence, "Can I do anything more for you, sir?" and without waiting for his reply, would retire, grumbling to herself; "I wonder which of the two eats this grand breakfast? Upon my faith, I believe it is the dog."

And she was not mistaken. The mistress of the house, who was a devotee, strict in the performance of her duties and exquisitely polite, ascended once to inquire after the health of her lodger, and as he assured her he was quite well she was

perfectly satisfied to believe him and proceeded to church to repeat her paternoster.

The holy week passed away in this manner. On Easter-day Gaston rose from his bed a little revived at the thought that in the evening he should once more go to the convent of La Misericorde and see Anastasia and La Mère Angelique in the parlour. He feared, however, lest his strength should fail him and he should be unable to reach the convent; the slow mental fever had blanched his cheek, and he supported himself with difficulty on his tottering limbs. When the servant had finished arranging his room, he dragged his arm-chair to the open window, and leaning his elbow on the balcony, raised his eyes to the small scrap of blue sky which could just be perceived between the lofty houses of the Rue de la Parcheminerie. A warm breath of wind fanned his face, rustling the leaves of a sickly looking plant which vegetated on the balcony of a neighbouring window. He felt that the glad spring was returning once more, and that the sun, whose radiant disk he was unable to perceive, shone down upon the black roofs of the modern Babylon. Then in imagination he visited that lovely clime where the roses flourish all the year, he recalled to mind the green hedges, under whose sheltering boughs the delicate anemones and pale primroses were already opening their petals to the gentle airs of heaven, he once more roamed through the wild glades of the Goatherd's Valley. In imagination, he followed through this bright and laughing scene a fair young girl, who sometimes crossed with agile step the rugged rocks, sometimes seated herself pensively by the path side on the trunk of some fallen willow, and anon, ascended towards the Capuchin's Rock, and bent her lovely face over the sleeping waters of the little lake.

A gentle tap at the door dispersed the images of this delightful day-dream. Lambin raised his head and cocked his ears with a frightened air, while Gaston de Colobrieres said, without turning round:—

"What is that? Who's there?"

"'Tis I," replied La Rousse, entering the room, her black felt bonnet upon her head, her little bundle in her hand, and her thick-soled leather shoes splashed to the ankle.

"What! is that you?" said Gaston, stupified with amazement.

The poor girl was pale with emotion and joy; she let her little bundle fall, and sank upon a chair, saying:—

"I must sit down, saving your favour, Monsieur le Chevalier; my limbs fail me. Ah! I have walked so far."

"And what did you come here for, my child?" interrupted Gaston, uneasy and yet touched at seeing her arrive thus.

"I came to give you news of M. le Baron and her ladyship your mother," replied she; "all at the castle are well, thanks be to heaven, saving Mademoiselle Anastasia's birds which have been rather languishing since her departure. I wished to bring her one or two of them in a cage, she would perhaps have liked to see them again; but Tonin advised me not."

"And he was quite right!" said Gaston. "And you made the journey on foot?"

"Yes, walking," replied La Rousse; "I started three weeks ago, on St. Joseph's day."

"And was it with my mother's permission that you undertook the journey?" asked Gaston again.

"I said nothing about it to the baroness; she would perhaps have prevented me coming," replied the girl with some embarrassment. "I did not mention my idea to any one save old Tonin, who did his best to dissuade me, but he was not able, poor man!"

"But," continued Gaston, "you must have been aware that both my father and my dear mother have written to let me know how they were. I also have sent two letters, and there was no necessity for your undertaking so long a journey—two hundred and forty leagues on foot——"

"I would have gone a thousand to see you again, Monsieur le Chevalier!" replied La Rousse, impetuously.

At these words Gaston de Colobrières began to have a glimmering of the truth. The simple-hearted youth blushed slightly, and turned away his eyes with the shy timidity of the beautiful Hippolytus.

"I fully expected you would reproach me," continued La Rousse in a calmer tone, and with a certain sadness of manner. "You are a little angry with me because I have come without your permission, but you see I could not live yonder knowing the way you were in here. Monsieur le Baron read us aloud the letter in which you spoke of the streets of Paris, and of the bad weather, and of your chamber where you were alone with Lambin. We wept, because we felt that you must be suffering greatly. That idea never left my mind, and the same evening I said to Tonin—'I must go and seek our young master; I will take care of him, and he will be no longer alone, for I will keep him company. As to the journey, that does not trouble me much; it is not as if one was obliged to cross the sea; one can go by land to Paris. I have no need either of carriage or horse; my limbs will carry me.' Well,

I then made my little arrangements. It is now seven years last Christmas since I entered the service of the baroness. I had three crowns a year wages, out of which I never spent much. At the end of the year I had always about ten livres remaining, which I used to lend to my godfather, Master Tiste. The good man returned me half of this money, I made up my best clothes into the little bundle you see here and started on my journey. Tonin had warned me that Paris was such a great city that one might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay as go from door to door seeking for any one; but the baron well knew the address he had put on his letter, I begged him to tell it me, and I remembered the name of the street and the number of the house; so by asking my way I was able to come straight here. Oh, sir, do not be angry with me! Look at poor Lambin how glad he is to see me again! he has been whining with joy ever since I came in. Well, and I have done right in coming. Consider how ill you are served here! your bed is not half made, and there is dust everywhere—and then I think you look paler and thinner than you used to do—Stay! I am pale too," added she, perceiving her face in the glass. "Gracious! does the air of Paris make one look so?"

"No, my child," replied Gaston de Colobrieres, smiling; "I have been rather unwell these last few days—that has made me pale; and as for you, it is the green glass which gives you that livid tint."

"You have been ill!" cried La Rouse, gazing anxiously on Gaston's sunken cheek.

"I am better—I am quite well," replied he, "my poor Madeleine; speak no more of that." Then he added with some embarrassment:—"It is of you that we must now think. What are we to do? You will not be so comfortable here as at the Chateau de Colobrieres, and you will soon regret having left it."

"I, regret!" cried she; "never! I have been too unhappy for these last few months, and yet the baron and baroness were very kind to me. Since Mademoiselle Anastasia's departure I was constantly with the baroness; in the afternoons she kept me beside her on the terrace, whilst the baron played his game of bowls with Tonin. Frequently in the evening I brought my sewing to the table, and on Sunday I watched them play at cards. But all that only increased my weariness. I roamed about the chateau looking on every side as if to seek you, and when I thought to myself that you were gone for ever I would burst out crying.



room door I would somehow tremble all over: the very sight of the places where I was accustomed to meet you produced the same effect. I could no longer bear to go near them; I was in despair night and day. You say that I shall not find myself so comfortable here. Ah! Monsieur le Chevalier, you do not know how I have wept yonder!"

"I understand," murmured Gaston de Colobrieres, with a sigh.

He did in fact now begin to comprehend the passion which La Rousse had just analyzed in her own way, and which perhaps she hardly even confessed to herself. This discovery grieved him. Although Madeleine was a very pretty girl, despite her red hair and colourless complexion, he was by no means charmed at having made the conquest of her affections, and she inspired him only with a certain feeling of compassion mingled with uneasy scruples. He began to reflect upon what he was to do with La Rousse: the situation in which he was placed was awkward and embarrassing; in his position he had no occasion for a servant, and it was not a very easy matter to find out and to propose to her another condition. The case, however, was urgent; it was necessary to find her some suitable shelter, and to obtain her consent to be taken thither at once. Gaston's thoughts naturally reverted to the convent of La Misericorde.

"Contentment has taken away all my fatigue already," said the young girl rising from her seat. "Well, Monsieur le Chevalier, what commands have you to give me?"

"None at all," replied Gaston; "I have nothing for you to do. Take this cup of milk and this penny loaf and eat some breakfast."

"I am not hungry: joy has taken away all my appetite," said she, sighing and turning towards Gaston de Colobrieres her light grey eyes, animated with a sort of languishing ardour.

"Listen to me, La Rousse," resumed he in a tone of gentle authority, "you cannot remain here: I have neither the means nor the will to keep you with me; but I know a place where you will be able to live happily and comfortably."

"You are going to send me away from you!" cried the poor girl in a doleful voice.

"A place where I go every day," continued Gaston.

"And where I shall be able to see you?" interrupted she again.

"A place where you will once more meet Mademoiselle

Anastasia," continued he, evading the question. "She will be very glad to see you again."

"Holy Virgin! you wish me to go to the convent!" exclaimed La Rousse in consternation, but a little consoled, however, by the thought that Gaston was not going to send her away altogether.

"Certainly; I must take you there this evening," replied Gaston de Colobrieres. "In the mean time, we will go and hear mass at the church of Saint Severin hard by, and then afterwards, if you fancy it, you can go and take a walk with Lambin to see the city."

As she still appeared to be in a state bordering on despair, and as it was evident that respect alone prevented her from bursting into tears and rebelling against his authority, Gaston undertook the task of convincing her. He spoke to her for a length of time, sometimes authoritatively, sometimes gently, and at length succeeded. She resigned herself to enter as a lay sister into the convent of La Misericorde.

In the evening Gaston arrived in the parlour with La Rousse. Neither he nor his sister suspected the sort of accusation which she had preferred against them, and which had exercised so great an influence on their father's determination. Anastasia greeted her joyfully, and was much touched at the mark of devotion she had shown Gaston. La Mere Angelique consented without difficulty to receive her into the convent, and before giving her in charge to the lay sister who was to introduce her into the house she was permitted to remain for a few moments in the parlour. Anastasia questioned her minutely upon all that had passed at the chateau and in the neighbourhood since her departure; she inquired after all the villagers she had been accustomed to see on Sundays at mass, and informed herself of the events which had taken place in their several families; but it was not until the last moment, when La Rousse was leaving the parlour, that she said to her with suppressed emotion, and almost trembling:—

"And my cousin, Mademoiselle Eleonora Maragnon, can you give me any news of her also?"

"She is at Belveser," replied La Rousse, laconically.

"Ah!" murmured Anastasia in a feeble voice, "she has returned there after her marriage."

"What marriage?" exclaimed La Rousse, in astonishment.

"Her own marriage," replied Mademoiselle de Colobrieres.

"She is not married!" said the young waiting-maid.

"Not married!" repeated Gaston, looking towards his sister. Both had turned pale on hearing these words; but no other

symptom of emotion betrayed the surprise and joy with which this unexpected news had filled them. Anastasia kept silence, and Gaston merely remarked with an appearance of indifference :—

"Indeed! can you give us any intelligence of what is passing there, and why my cousin's marriage has been put off?"

"Was she going to be married then?" said La Rousse in a dry tone of voice. "No one knew anything of it in the country. But what is very certain, is that she is still single—I know no more."

"You may retire, my child," said La Mere Angelique, pointing to the door where a lay sister awaited her.

From this day Gaston de Colobrieres and his sister had an additional pang to endure. A painful impression quickly succeeded to the joy which the words of La Rousse had left in these suffering minds; they fell into a state of cruel anxiety, for they were now reduced to tremble and shudder in the expectation of an event which they had believed to be already accomplished. Gaston returned to his garret, sadder, more worn with care, more unhappy than ever, and Mademoiselle de Colobrieres remained a prey to bitter uneasiness, and to the torments of an imagination exalted by recollections which the exterior calm and unvarying routine of a convent life only inflamed the more.

The rule, that occult and inflexible power, quickly subdued the naturally violent and passionate temper of La Rousse, for the lay sisters were kept in close subjection though they took only simple vows. The elders watched over the novices in their humble functions, directing them with that admirable tact which is the stay and strength of religious communities. The austere habits of monastic life permitting of no connexion being established between the lay sisters and the rest of the community, La Rousse never met Mademoiselle de Colobrieres save in the choir, during the celebration of the conventual mass which the lay sisterhood attended every day: as to Gaston, she had not once met him, either in the convent or in the street, where she went but rarely, and then always in the company of a sister of well tried vigilance.

Some weeks passed away in this manner. One evening the superior, in place of retiring according to custom to her cell after evening prayers, proceeded to the quarters where the novices' dormitory was situated, and entered Anastasia's cell. The young girl had already laid aside her veil, and her beautiful dishevelled locks floated in rich profusion, like a silken mantle, over her coarse woollen robe.

"You look just now like St. Madeleine," said La Mere Angelique, passing her hand over Anastasia's jet-black waving tresses. "There is no worldly attire so beautiful as this veil bestowed by the hand of the Almighty."

"Ere long, my dear mother, I must despoil myself of it," replied Anastasia with a melancholy smile; "one moment will see it fall beneath the sciss-ors."

La Mere Angelique shook her head with a sigh, and resumed in a more serious tone:—

"My daughter, I have this day received a letter addressed to you. According to my duty I unsealed and read it first. It is from your cousin Mademoiselle Maragnon, and I may therefore give it to you; here it is."

"Oh! my dear mother, it is Eleonora who has written to me," murmured Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, trembling and hesitating to take the letter; "doubtless it announces an event—Alas! what need have I of learning what is passing in the world?"

"Shall I read it to you, my child?" said the superior, gently.

She opened the letter and read as follows.—

"FROM THE CHATEAU OF BELVESER, *this 20th of May, 17—*

"My dearest Cousin,—It is now some time since I returned to this dear solitude, towards which my heart had a thousand times flown back during my absence, and where I fondly hoped to have met you again; but in place of the wished-for happiness I have found only bitter regret. Oh! my dear cousin, is it possible that you could have thus departed without so much as leaving a remembrance, an adieu, for your Eleonora? I could not resign myself to this sad separation, I made inquiries, and learned that you were at Paris, in the great convent of La Misericorde. I quickly formed a resolution, Anastasia, which I am now about to make known to you; you shall see if my friendship is lasting—I am about to give you a sure proof of it. But first of all I must relate to you what has passed since that melancholy day on which I bade you adieu at the Capuchin's Rock.

"On quitting you, I entered the carriage, weeping, and left Belveser, my heart torn with regrets which I cannot express to you. All along the road, I in vain endeavoured to overcome my grief; I sighed without ceasing and my poor heart was so full that every instant I felt as though choking with my sensations, and ready to burst into sobs and lamentations. My good mother was uneasy; Mademoiselle Irene said that I had the vapours, and made me ill by dint of compelling me to

inhale her smelling-salts, and talking of the magnificent wedding presents, the list of which my uncle Maragnon had already shown her.

"When we arrived at Marseilles I was really ill; I expected to be married immediately, and this thought caused me inexpressible agony. Happily I was soon relieved from this anxiety; my uncle came to meet us with an expression of annoyance on his countenance, and informed us that an affair of the last importance had obliged Dominick to start suddenly for Barcelona, where he would be detained for at least a fortnight. At this news I embraced him cordially, and felt my heart unburdened of a great weight. I had then fifteen days to recruit myself and tranquillise my mind, and after that fifteen days more, and then a fresh delay of a week; so that Lent had arrived before the return of my intended, and my marriage in consequence was again deferred.

"During this lapse of time I had reflected deeply, and had formed several resolutions; but I dared not open my heart to my mother, and still less to my uncle or Mademoiselle Irene. My mother would have asked my reasons for wishing to put off this engagement, and in truth I could have given her none. My uncle would have treated these ideas as the caprices and fancies of a child, and Mademoiselle Irene would not have failed to repeat to me sententiously the axiom which she had already inflicted upon me at least twenty times before:—When the heart of a young girl has not pronounced in favour of any one, she ought to allow herself to be married according to her parents' wishes.

"Amid these perplexities heaven inspired me with an idea, a happy idea, which all at once tranquillised me. Then, in place of fearing Dominick's return, I awaited it with a sort of impatience, and when he arrived I met him with a contented countenance. My mother was delighted, as was my uncle also. Dominick appeared surprised at this reception, and did not testify much joy at it; but far from feeling vexed with him for this coldness and reserve, I felt on the contrary a sort of gratitude which strengthened me in my design. After supper, when we were all together, I took my cousin's hand familiarly and drew him out upon the balcony, where I knew no one could hear us.

" 'My dear Dominick,' said I, in the same friendly and familiar manner with which I used to address him, 'my dear Dominick, you know that they wish our marriage to take place after Easter. Is there no means of putting it off—of deferring it for a year, for instance? We might thus have time to ac-

custom ourselves to the idea of this marriage which at present agitates us so much.'

" 'My dear Eleonora,' replied he, 'I will do all that you desire.'

" 'Well, then,' said I to him, 'say to your father that you wish in the first place to take a journey to the Levant; it has been frequently talked of already, you know, and they were going to send a clerk of the house in your place.'

" 'Yes, my father will perhaps listen to that,' said Dominick, reflecting; 'we wish to establish a house at Broos, and my presence there will be better than an agent's.'

" Then he added, with a sigh—

" 'But, my poor child, your destiny and mine too, must nevertheless be accomplished.'

" 'No matter,' said I; 'at all events it will not be for some time yet.'

" Then he took my hand, and continued, in a penetrating tone—

" 'Child that you are! You do not see into the depths of your own heart. May Heaven keep you in this ignorance! As for me, I know what is passing in mine. I know that it aspires to impossible happiness. Never have I conceived the slightest hope, never have I endeavoured to realize its visionary day-dreams. I am resigned. May you act like me! However, I will now do as you desire.'

" So saying, he left the balcony. Eight days afterwards he departed, and we returned to Belveser. Alas! cousin, I then learned that you had quitted Colobrieres, that you were in the convent, and that you had resolved to take the veil. A sudden idea then flashed across me as if by inspiration.

" You see, cousin, I am a young girl whose education has not been by any means completed. My poor mother, having lost all her other children, brought me up with extreme fondness and indulged me in every whim. I am a true spoiled child, and, as Mademoiselle Irene says, the gifts of nature have not been cultivated in me. Happily there is still time left to repair this imperfect education. This is what I said to my mother when supplicating her to place me for a year at the convent of La Misericorde. I have a whole host of faults, of which I shall be able to correct myself in your holy house. I shall lose the habit of always obeying only my own will; the good examples around me will render me humble, submissive, patient, and I shall feel so contented living with you that every duty will seem easy to me. My good mother at first resisted a little, but I gave her such good reasons for this step that she at last yielded. As it had been decided that I should

leave France immediately after my marriage for a long tour abroad, the idea of this separation did not much afflict her, and at length she consented to all that I desired. It is now settled that I shall enter your convent as a boarder, and my uncle will himself take me to Paris. My mother, who doats on the country, and who has undertaken some extensive improvements at the chateau, will remain all this year at Belveser with Mademoiselle Irene.

"Oh! my dear Anastasia, I shall then see you again! My poor heart trembles at the thought, and I now experience as much joy as I felt grief in parting from you.

"Do you know, cousin, what my uncle Maragnon said to me the other day? That I loved you so well that I was capable of taking the veil in order to pass my life beside you!

"Adieu, my dear friend and sister; you whose soul is so peaceable and holy, you who have now perhaps only a little corner in your heart for terrestrial affections, love me a little nevertheless, and pray for your Eleonora."

Anastasia listened to the perusal of this letter with inexpressible interest, and with a sort of painful joy, which penetrated her heart and caused the silent tears to course rapidly down her cheeks.

"Well, my daughter?" said La Mere Angelique, glancing at her interrogatively as she spoke.

"Ah! mother," replied she, "I shall be delighted to see Eleonora again; but the poor child has no idea of the life we lead here. She is not aware that the boarders are separated from the novices, and that she will scarcely ever see me save in the choir. I dread for her besides the little privations to which every one here is subjected. She has been brought up with so much delicacy, and in such a wealthy family. How will she be able to accustom herself to the discipline of the class, and to the dry bread?"

"I am certain she will find herself very comfortable here," replied La Mere Angelique, gravely. "It is very evident that her inclinations are forced with respect to this marriage; we shall see how things turn out by-and-by. In the mean time, my dear child, you have my permission to write and say that we shall be happy to receive her."

## CHAPTER VI.

ONE morning, about the hour when the busy crowd begins to circulate upon the ever-muddy pavement of the central quarter of Paris, a post-chaise suddenly turned the corner of the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, and stopped before the Convent of Notre Dame de la Misericorde. The foot passengers drew up on either side to make way for the dusty equipage, and the citizens of the neighbourhood, hearing the cracking of the postillion's whip, appeared at the thresholds of their shops. As the novices and boarders who came to reside at the Convent of La Misericorde seldom arrived in carriages, all eyes were turned with curiosity towards the post-chaise, through the half-raised blinds of which might be perceived the bluff, ruddy, but yet regularly handsome features of a man in the decline of life, and the delicate profile of a very young, fair, and slender girl, as fresh and lovely as a summer flower. At the appearance of these two faces a sort of murmur arose among the neighbours and passers-by. It was a sort of stifled expression of the ideas which at this epoch fermented in every brain.

"Oh! the monster of a father, going to immure his beautiful child in a convent!" indignantly exclaimed a worthy dame. "She is too old to be going as a boarder; she is certainly about to take the novice's veil."

"You might just as well say that her unnatural father is about to bury her alive," added an old bachelor *rentier*. "What barbarity! To tear from the bosom of society these young virgins whom nature had destined to become virtuous wives and tender mothers; to immure them in the icy solitude of a cloister! Woe to the man who commits this abominable crime—the crime of treason against humanity!"

"How many victims have already disappeared in this sepulchre!" cried a gentleman attired in black, turning towards the old *rentier*, as if replying to his ejaculation—"how many innocent beauties immolated to the demon of fanaticism!"

"Levez-vous à ma voix, victimes malheureuses!  
Levez-vous! entendez mes plaintes douloureuses!  
Accablez avec moi l'oppresseur abhorré,  
Dont je n'ai pu fléchir le cœur dénaturé!"

emphatically declaimed a young clerk—a budding genius who had read the "*Mélanie*" of La Harpe—casting a furious glance upon Uncle Maragnon.

During this explosion of disjointed sentences, the post-



chaise had turned; it entered the little court in front of the cloistral buildings, and the heavy gates of the convent were noiselessly closed in the faces of the curious spectators.

A lay sister presented herself, aided the travellers to alight, made them a discreet reverence, and invited them to enter. They followed her up an ill-lighted, narrow, and steep staircase, which led to an apartment where she left them. This apartment was the exterior portion of the parlour, that which was reserved for the accommodation of the secular personages who came to visit the recluses. The black curtain drawn in front of the grating formed a lugubrious contrast with the whiteness of the walls, imparting a certain sepulchral air to the little apartment, through the lozenge-paned window of which struggled a doubtful and greenish-coloured daylight. The furniture was in keeping with the apartment; a dozen of massive chairs arranged in a row before the grating seemed to await the presence of visitors, and a hideous representation of St. Lawrence the martyr, suspended opposite the door, gazed at them eternally from his gridiron. In whatever part of the room the visitor placed himself he could not escape encountering his fixed, contracted, and haggard eye, sparkling from beneath the motionless eyelid.

Uncle Maragnon seated himself upon one of the straw-bottomed chairs, in such a manner that his back might be turned towards the picture of St. Lawrence, took a huge pinch of snuff, and gazed around him with a certain sensation of uneasiness. Eleonora surveyed the apartment on all sides, clasped her little hands together, and cried with an air of profound content—"At last we are at the Convent of La Misericorde! What tranquillity, what silence! How peacefully ought one to live here! It is a blessed retreat. It is indeed the house of the Lord!"

Uncle Maragnon stared at her with astonishment, and shrugged his shoulders. In his opinion the atmosphere of the parlour was damp, the ground slippery, the furniture of the meanest, the picture of St. Lawrence frightful, and the general aspect of the convent horribly gloomy.

"How impatient I am to see the rest of the house!" continued Eleonora; "I can already fancy I beheld the cell of my dear Anastasia, and the cloister, and the garden. Perhaps we can catch a glimpse of a little corner of the garden through this window."

She ran with the vivacity of a child to the casement, placed her cheek against the opaque glass, but saw nothing save a blank wall, the only opening in which was a grated loop-hole.

At this moment a slight sound announced that some one had entered the reserved portion of the apartment, and almost immediately afterwards the black curtain was withdrawn and two veiled figures appeared behind the grating. Eleonora turned round with a slight cry, approached the grating, trembling with joy, and murmured as she passed her little hands through the bars:—

“Dear cousin!—at length I am with you again! How happy I am!”

“Dear Eleonora! I also am happy to see you,” replied Mademoiselle de Colobrieres in a low voice, partly withdrawing her hand from her large sleeve as she spoke, in order to touch the young girl’s hand with the tips of her fingers. The latter appeared neither surprised nor grieved at this reception, which by no means responded to the interest and joy which she had herself manifested, and continued in a tone of mingled gaiety and sensibility:—

“I have come to immure myself along with you for an entire year; I have come to do penance beforehand for the sins which I shall commit hereafter in the world. My dear uncle has been kind enough to take charge of me himself to the threshold of this house——”

“Mademoiselle Maragnon is welcome here,” said La Mere Angelique, addressing herself equally to both uncle and niece, “but before I open the door of the cloister to her, it is necessary she should become acquainted with the life that is led among us—it is necessary that she should learn the rather severe regulations to which she will be temporarily subjected.”

“Yes, madam, that is only prudent,” said M. Maragnon, gazing through the grating at the uninviting picture which the interior of the parlour presented to view, and endeavouring to discern under the dense black veil the lineaments of the superior’s countenance.

“My dear daughter,” resumed the latter, addressing herself to Eleonora with that tone of earnest zeal and severe firmness which was peculiar to her, “our boarders are subjected to duties little less severe than those of the novices; you will divide your time between prayer and assiduous work. Labour is here the principal obligation after that which we owe to God.”

“I shall submit myself to this regulation joyfully, in order to repair so many hours lost in frivolous occupations,” replied Eleonora, gaily.

“The mistress of the boarders will exercise absolute authority over you,” resumed La Mere Angelique; “she will constantly put your submission to the proof.”

"Ah! madam, I have had my own way so long that in truth I no longer care for it," cried the young girl, laughing; "this cannot therefore be called a sacrifice."

"You will be clad in a very coarse black cloth dress," continued La Mere Angelique, laying an emphasis on each word; "you will rise ~~early~~ morning at the first Angelus, you will partake only of the ordinary food of the community, which is a perpetual lenten fare, and, finally, you will be entirely separated from the novices during the hours both of work and recreation, and you will not see your cousin Anastasia save in the choir or the parlour."

"This last privation will be a severe one," said Eleonora, with emotion; "but I will support it, since I shall have the hope of sometimes meeting my dear Anastasia here."

"So you persist, my daughter," continued La Mere Angelique; "you persist in your design of entering as a boarder into our poor convent?"

"Yes, madam, I persist," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon.

"It is inconceivable!" murmured the uncle, who since the commencement of this dialogue had kept repeating in a low voice to his niece—"You see this convent life is not an agreeable one. Should you like me to take you back to Marseilles?"

"Monsieur," said La Mere Angelique to him, "embrace Mademoiselle your niece. I am going to open the door of the cloister to her; we will restore her to you in a year."

"I should hope so!" cried the stout old gentleman in an almost surly tone; for although not gifted by nature with a great stock of sensibility, he felt affected at this separation, and certain prejudices which he had always nourished against the monastic state were now vividly aroused in his mind. He advanced towards his niece, took her head between his two large hands, kissed her forehead, and said to her in a low voice:—

"In truth I cannot conceive why you came here, and why you persist in remaining. However since you have decided, and since your mother has consented, you must act as you please. But recollect what I now tell you: you are the only surviving child of my poor brother, who worked hard all his life to leave you a dowry of several millions of francs. You are pretty, charming; you have been brought up to live in the world, and neither your mother nor myself will ever suffer you to become a nun. In a year I will come for you—in a year to the day, and on arriving at Marseilles you shall marry Dominick. It is decided, promised—it is a settled affair. Good-bye, niece."

He bowed to La Mere Angelique, and hurriedly left the parlour.

"My uncle is going away in anger," said Eleonora, with a sigh. "He is a very worthy, excellent man, but what he desires he will have done."

"Like my father," murmured Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, to whose mind this simple reflection had suggested a crowd of melancholy thoughts.

Mademoiselle Maragnon quickly recovered from the dejection into which her uncle's last words had thrown her, and joyfully followed the lay sister who conducted her to the door of the cloister, and gave her into the hands of the portress, who was to introduce her into the interior of the convent. La Mere Angelique and Anastasia received her at the entrance of the cloister. Both had raised their veils. Eleonora examined for a moment the countenance of the superior, and exclaimed *naïvely*:—

"Ah! madam, you ought always to allow yourself to be seen; why then did you lower your veil before your handsome countenance when you came to the grating?"

"Because the rules oblige me," replied La Mere Angelique, with a slight smile; "the nuns of La Misericorde cannot appear with their faces exposed except before their near relations."

"That is indeed a great pity!" replied Mademoiselle Maragnon, quickly; "for the nun's costume is so becoming to a handsome woman."

"Here is a young lady who seems to understand perfectly the renunciations of a monastic life!" said the superior, in a tone of gentle irony. "St. Lawrence! how she would scandalise our dear sisters—how she would be admonished by the class mistress were she to speak thus before the community! I see plainly that she must be instructed a little in our usages before she enters the boarders' quarter."

"My dear mother," said Anastasia, "if your charity will intrust me with this task, I shall acquit myself with all the zeal in my power, and also with infinite satisfaction."

"I doubt it not, my daughter," replied the superior, kindly; "it is to your care that I confide our young boarder; you shall guide her in all the exercises of this day, but first of all take a few moments' recreation, and until the dinner hour let her see the house. Go; I permit you."

This hour of liberty was a rare favour, a priceless boon, which Anastasia hastened to profit by. She led Mademoiselle Maragnon through a labyrinth of halls and corridors, where they did not meet a single creature, for the entire community

were assembled in the workroom. At length she paused at the entrance of the garden.

"This is a very agreeable place," said Mademoiselle Maragnon.

"Most decidedly, cousin, you seem determined to be pleased with everything in the convent," said Anastasia, with a faint smile. "This spot, whose aspect charms you, has ever appeared to me extremely sad; one cannot even perceive here the return of spring."

And in fact the genial influence of spring had not yet enlivened the severe features of the scene. The lime-trees, which formed two long alleys parallel with the cloister wall, were scantily clothed with a thin and sickly foliage, through which their twisted boughs and gnarled and blackened branches were plainly visible. Under the shelter of this gloomy canopy vegetated a few indolent, lifeless, and scentless Guelder roses. The flower-bed was a sort of undefined neutral ground where some sickly tufts of gillyflowers flourished at random, and to speak the truth there was but one single green spot in the enclosure—viz. the pond, whose surface was overspread with a thick carpet of moss and chickweed. A few unhappy goldfish shot to and fro beneath this marshy vegetation, which also sheltered some frogs with their hoarse and piercing notes. The two cousins seated themselves upon a solitary bench at the farther end of the alley, and remained for an instant silent, their eyes swimming in tears, and their hands clasped together in a mutual embrace. Mademoiselle de Colobrieres was a prey to that fatal joy which takes possession of the soul when fresh agitations have succeeded to deep, silent, gnawing pains in which the faculties have been for a length of time absorbed. The poor girl felt old recollections revive within her. The presence of Eleonora recalled to her mind the deep emotions, the sufferings, the transports of that brief and deeply regretted period which seemed to fill and absorb all her past existence.

"Oh! my dear Eleonora," said she at length breaking silence, "how strong a proof of your friendship do you give me in coming to bury yourself along with me in this retreat, in submitting to the privations, the severe duties, the perpetual self-denial, to which all are subjected here!"

"The sacrifice is not so great as you imagine," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon; "would to Heaven it were permitted me to remain here all my life!"

"You would wish then to take the veil!" cried Mademoiselle de Colobrieres. "Ah! you know not what it costs to renounce the joys as well as the sorrows of this world! One

ought to be predestined by Heaven, or unable to see aught but afflictions upon earth, before immuring themselves here."

"There is no longer any hope of happiness for me in this world," said the young girl, with a deep sigh, "and I have already suffered severe afflictions."

"You, Eleonora!" cried Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, gazing with an astonished and almost incredulous air on the fair face, the brilliant and yet soft and gentle eyes, and the rosy and smiling mouth which had just given utterance to such melancholy words. "Ah! dear, dear child, unhappiness to you is an impossibility!"

"That is just what all the world thinks," said she, in a melancholy tone; "my mother herself believes it."

"Alas!" resumed Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, "you exaggerate to yourself a few passing troubles, a few slight sorrows, from which the destinies of the happiest are not exempt. My dear Eleonora, be not ungrateful to Providence; consider the blessings which He has conferred upon you. Of what sorrows can you speak? Until now you have lived as a young girl upon whom Heaven has lavished all its blessings. Your mother has brought you up with extreme tenderness, anticipating your slightest wishes, your most trifling caprices. In truth she must have looked upon you until now as a gay, thoughtless, and, above all, happy child."

Eleonora gazed on her cousin fixedly, and replied—

"Neither my mother nor any one can guess what is passing in my mind."

She drooped her head at these words and her countenance assumed another expression; some serious and deep-seated feeling was suddenly revealed on her infantine features.

"My dear Anastasia," resumed she, in a serious tone of voice, "they call me, and they imagine me, still a child. They have never suspected what I have felt, what I have suffered. I saw that I ought to conceal it within my own breast, that I might not afflict those who loved me, those who desire only my happiness, but who are even now unwittingly preparing my future and eternal misery. It is this marriage, this fatal marriage."

"Why did you not open your mind to your mother, my dear Eleonora?" interrupted Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, in a subdued voice; "she would have broken off this engagement, she would have restored to you at any price your happiness and peace of mind."

"She would not have been able," replied Mademoiselle Maragnon with a sigh. Then she added, vehemently—  
"No, no, no—I felt that all was in vain, and that I must re-

sign myself to my fate, as Dominick to his. My mother and uncle fancy they know better than we do what can assure our happiness, and they will never relinquish their ideas. In a year my lot must be accomplished. I will obey; I shall wed a man whose heart is devoted to another."

"What do you say?" murmured Anastasia, in a faint and agitated voice.

"He loves; I know it—I have discovered it," replied Eleonora; "it is his secret, and I ought not to have revealed it. Alas! he is very unhappy. We will both submit to our evil destiny—we will marry. Then, I pray Heaven that I may not long remain upon this earth—that I may soon die of grief!"

Then, after a short silence, she added with a sigh—

"However, I have still a year before me—a year of life."

She passed her handkerchief over her eyes to wipe away her tears, and appeared to make an effort to restrain those feelings which, despite her endeavours, had overflowed within her heart. Anastasia sighed, and pressed her hand in silence. Her own feelings enlightened her sufficiently as to those of Eleonora, and enabled her to comprehend the secrets of that tender and innocent heart which guarded within its deepest recesses so faithful a love for Gaston de Colobrieres. She had no need of a more entire confidence to enable her to comprehend her cousin's grief and her regrets. Mademoiselle Maragnon soon succeeded in recovering herself; the traces of her recent tears were effaced from her downy cheek, her eyes resumed their limpid serenity, and after a long silence she exclaimed abruptly—

"Dear cousin, give me some tidings of your brave Lambin who followed you to Paris!"

Had Anastasia entertained any doubt in her mind as to the secret sentiments of her friend with regard to Gaston, this observation alone would have been sufficient to dispel them, and she accordingly replied with a smile—

"Lambin is very well; he is with my brother, and we shall certainly see both this evening. Gaston comes every day to the parlour, my dear cousin."

"So I thought," exclaimed Mademoiselle Maragnon, ingenuously. Then she added, as if speaking to herself—"I wonder if he ever thinks of our ramble to the Capuchin's Rock!"

The bell rang at this moment. "Come," said Anastasia, rising; "it is dinner-time already. Our repast will seem a meagre one to you in comparison with those to which you have been accustomed in your mother's house."

"What makes you think so?" replied Eleonora, quickly;

"with a contented heart one can dine well on a piece of bread and an apple! and to-day I feel very happy!"

Thus chatting they proceeded towards the refectory. Already were the nuns standing before their places, waiting in silence until the superior should say the *Benedicite*. The latter-mentioned personage entered the room last, cast a glance round her flock to assure herself that all were assembled, struck a slight blow upon the table, and before sitting down recited the prayer which precedes the repast. In the refectory as well as in the halls she had a particular seat, a sort of throne rather more elevated than the benches appropriated to the use of the nuns. She caused a chair to be placed beside her for Mademoiselle Maragnon, and Anastasia seated herself near her cousin. The lay sisters, after having brought in the dinner, stood aloof for the purpose of assisting in waiting—by no means a difficult task, on account of the required simplicity of the repast. The long narrow tables were covered with coarse white linen table-cloths, the dinner service was of the plainest description, and the opaque *carafes* which accompanied the pewter drinking-cups contained only clear water. The food was the same for the entire community, and the superior, equally with the youngest lay sister, had but one dish for dinner. Silence was absolutely required in the refectory, and during the repast a nun read aloud portions of some pious work; conversations however in a low tone of voice, and the innocent gaieties which the novices permitted themselves, were tolerated by the superior.

"Cousin," said Eleonora, a little astonished at the aspect of this austere banquet, "will these ladies speak no more when they leave table than they do at present?"

"You will see during the hour of recreation," replied Mademoiselle de Colobrières with a smile.

"Tell me, cousin," continued Eleonora, "who is that tall, pale girl waiting at the first table, who makes so devout a genuflexion every time she passes the crucifix?"

"It is La Rousse," replied Anastasia, in a low voice; "a poor servant we had at the château, who came to seek Gaston in Paris because she fancied he had need of her services; little imagining the embarrassment, on the contrary, which her arrival would cause him. He brought her over here at once."

"And she consented without difficulty to become a lay sister?" asked Eleonora.

Anastasia shook her head in the negative and replied—"At first she did not like the convent at all. She had a violent self-willed spirit which it was not easy to subdue. It would



have been a vain task to attempt to persuade her had she not herself turned to God; but all at once grace touched her heart, and, as our mistress of the novices says, 'she is now on the highway to perfection.' If she were permitted to do as she pleased, she would practise mortifications beyond her strength. The other day she threw herself at our mother's feet, beseeching her to permit her to wear the hair-cloth, and to take the discipline for the space of a *miserere* every Friday."

"And Madame consented?" interrupted Eleonora.

"No, my dear child," replied La Mère Angelique, taking part in this dialogue; "these austerities are contrary to the spirit of our rules. I refused Sister Madeleine the permission she solicited, and I sent her back to her work, merely doubling her usual task."

So saying, she rose to say grace. The dinner was already over. The nuns on leaving the refectory dispersed themselves in groups through the garden; the elder sisters strolled together in the sun, and threw bits of bread to the gold and silver fish; the younger ones, with that delightful familiarity peculiar to children and persons entirely separated from the world, eagerly surrounded the new-comer. They addressed a thousand questions to her, and lavished on her all sorts of vows of friendship and pretty flatteries. All expressed their hopes that she might take the veil. What especially charmed and astonished them was the expression of content displayed on the countenance of Mademoiselle Maragnon.

"She is quite at home here at once," said one; "never was there a novice who had so gay a face the day of her entrance into the convent; one would imagine she had passed all her life here!"

"That is just what I thought when I saw her in the refectory," said another; "to see the appetite with which she ate our lentils, I judged she had the vocation."

"You were quite right," murmured Eleonora in her cousin's ear; "how these good sisters chatter to be sure!"

On coming to immure herself in the convent for a year, Mademoiselle Maragnon had changed her costume. A simple undress of violet cotton had replaced her silken robes, she had left off powder, and her hair which until lately had been curled and pomatumed with infinite art and care, now fell in fair and silken ringlets from beneath a little gauze cap ornamented with a sky-blue ribbon. In this simple attire she looked charming, and from an ingenuous feeling of coquetry she requested permission to retain it during this first day, deferring until the morrow the assumption of the black dress and *begin* of the boarders.

As the evening drew on, the lovely Eleonora became thoughtful; she experienced those indescribable anxieties and inward tremblings which the approach of long desired happiness ever causes. Some faint reflection of what was passing in her mind shone upon her countenance, imparting to it an unspeakable expression of gentle felicity. After the employments of the day she proceeded along with the community to repeat the office, and took her place beside Anastasia in the choir. The nuns who observed her admired the prompt vocation she appeared to manifest. In general the first sight of this cold and forbidding sanctuary chilled the warmest hearts; they felt a thrill of sadness and terror when kneeling before that altar where sacrifices such as theirs had been so frequently accomplished; they thought of those who had preceded them, and who having passed their lives within the walls of the convent, now reposed in the sleep of death in the chapel vaults. Mademoiselle Maragnon, far from appearing to be under the influence of these lugubrious impressions, gazed with a cheerful countenance on all that surrounded her, and smiled from time to time behind the formulary they had placed in her hands.

On leaving the choir the two cousins and La Mere Angelique ascended to the parlour. Already Gaston de Colobrieres was awaiting their coming at the grating. Mademoiselle Maragnon advanced, blushing, and, scarcely raising her eyes to the young man's face, said in a faltering voice, "Good-day, cousin." Then she began to caress the greyhound, who had raised himself upon his hind legs and thrust his tawney muzzle between the bars of the grating. Gaston replied to her laconic greeting by a respectful salutation, and took his seat, holding back Lambin, who having recognised Eleonora testified his joy by various anti-monastic gambols. The conversation had proceeded no further when another visitor unexpectedly entered the parlour and approached the grating; it was uncle Maragnon. The worthy man had determined to see Eleonora once more before his departure; he could not understand this sudden predilection of his niece's for a cloistral life, and he fancied to himself that she must be already regretting that she had entered the convent. On M. Maragnon's entrance La Mere Angelique and Mademoiselle de Colobrieres immediately lowered their veils and made him a mysterious reverence.

"Monsieur," said La Mere Angelique, after having invited him to be seated, "permit me to introduce to you the Chevalier Gaston de Colobrieres."

Uncle Maragnon bowed to the young gentleman, and coughed slightly in his cravat, a sure sign with him that some

sudden idea was fermenting in his brain. He then took his place beside Gaston, and said to him with a second inclination of the head:—

"I am enchanted, sir, to have the pleasure of meeting you. Have you been long in Paris?"

"No, monsieur, a few months only," replied Gaston; "I accompanied my sister Mademoiselle Anastasia de Colobrieres to Paris."

"That dear cousin whose absence Eleonora so much lamented, and whom she came here to seek?" said old Maragnon, with an air of good humour; "I now begin to perceive why my niece finds the convent so agreeable a sojourn."

After having thus negligently given vent to his idea, he coughed afresh, drew from his pocket a bonbonnière formed of shell, offered Gaston some lozenges, and began to converse with the superior about a journey he had formerly made to Rome, and of a beatification, in the ceremonies of which he had taken part. Whilst he edified La Mere Angelique by this discourse, Eleonora and Gaston de Colobrieres conversed only by timid glances, and Anastasia, silent and pensive, thought of their long interviews at the Capuchin's Rock.

M. Maragnon was a man of sense and experience, and had, besides, the sagacity and the prompt and unerring eye of his brother Pierre. The mere presence of Gaston de Colobrieres had revealed to him the solution of the enigma which ever since the previous evening he had been endeavouring to divine. He saw clearly to the bottom of his niece's heart, and rapidly calculating what steps ought to be taken to break off this connexion, he at once formed a decisive plan. Before retiring he begged, in a low voice, La Mere Angelique to grant him another interview that evening. As she hesitated, he added that he wished to speak to her without witnesses on certain secret and important subjects which concerned the mutual well-being and tranquillity of the two families. He then retired, having cordially saluted Gaston de Colobrieres, who soon followed his example for the convent bell was already tolling for evening prayers.

An hour later, when the nuns and novices had retired to their several cells, La Mere Angelique returned alone to the grating. The old merchant's words had caused her thoughts to wander more than once during prayers; she was far from suspecting the motive of this second visit, and she never dreamed that there could possibly be any question of Eleonora and Gaston de Colobrieres; for despite her penetration, she had no suspicions of the secret which old Maragnon had discovered at the first glance. The latter arrived in the parlour

almost at the same moment as she herself. The worthy man seated himself opposite this motionless veiled figure, which remained silent after having saluted him through the grating. He ransacked his brains for some phrase which might render more suitable to the ear of a nun the profane subject he was about to discuss; but he could find no terms of the monastic vocabulary which could explain even the most delicate cases of conscience, and, making an effort, he simply said—"My reverend mother, I sincerely ask your pardon; but, at the risk of scandalising you, I must tell you that it is of a love affair I am about to speak."

"When it concerns the salvation or interest of a fellow creature, persons of our profession can and ought to hear all," replied La Mere Angelique gravely.

"In that case," said old Maragnon without further preamble, "you must know, madam, that my niece Eleonora loves the Chevalier de Colobrieres, and that, according to all appearance, it is a reciprocal inclination."

"Heavens! what a misfortune!" murmured La Mere Angelique.

"It certainly is a misfortune," continued M. Maragnon, "but by no means an irremediable one. This journey has aggravated the evil, however. Who could have imagined what was passing in my niece's mind? The child is assuredly no fool. She never once mentioned in my presence this handsome cousin, of whose very existence almost I was in truth ignorant. It is most unfortunate that they ever knew and loved each other, for you can easily conceive, madam, that this marriage is impossible."

"Impossible?" repeated La Mere Angelique, in a tone of voice which did not display entire conviction.

"Absolutely impossible," continued uncle Maragnon. "Even were we to renounce a project, formed so many years back, of wedding Eleonora to my son Dominick—even were we to consent to break off this match, suitable as it is in every point, the daughter of Pierre Maragnon would never espouse Gaston de Colobrieres. We know with what an unfavourable eye such marriages are viewed in your family; we know the pride of the Colobrieres. My brother's widow will never expose her daughter to the disdain of her noble relatives. It would be a fine affair truly to see the old baron refuse for his son my niece's hand and her nine hundred thousand crowns!"

"We must make some allowances for the vanity of rank," said La Mere Angelique. "My father is a worthy gentleman, a little too deeply imbued perhaps with the pride of his birth,

but he loves and cherishes his children, and who knows if in the end he might not consent?"

"Pardon me, madam," interrupted the old merchant, in a vain-glorious tone which fully matched the Baron de Colobrieres' explosions of pride; "pardon me, but it neither suits us to await nor to solicit such an honour. Each family has its own sort of fame, and perhaps to-day that of the Maragnons is quite on a par with the Colobrieres'. Your name holds a distinguished place in the peerage, but ours is famous in the four quarters of the globe. The firm of Jacques Maragnon and Son is known in the interior of China. So much for renown: I speak not of the rest," added he, jingling the gold pieces in his immense waistcoat pockets, "that is nothing to the purpose at present. The question is how I am to repair the fault I committed in bringing this little girl to Paris, where she has again met her cousin Gaston."

"That is easily done, sir," replied the superior. "I shall withdraw from your niece the permission of coming to the parlour; she shall see the Chevalier de Colobrieres no more."

"True, so long as she remains here," interrupted M. Maragnon, "and at the end of the year they will meet at the convent door. No, no, it requires more efficacious means to break off this connexion; the Chevalier de Colobrieres must leave Paris instantly. The young man must have some career in view, I suppose?"

"He wishes to become a capuchin," replied La Mere Angelique, with a sigh.

"That is a very desperate resolution," answered M. Maragnon; "we shall easily persuade him to adopt another. He ought to think of making his fortune, and we will assist him to do so. I speak not of employing him in business, the blood of the Colobrieres would rise within him at the thought; he would think it derogatory to his rank. Besides, he would not perhaps accept anything from me. But I have got another project. I have some interest with certain persons in power, and I can obtain for the Chevalier de Colobrieres an important employment out of the kingdom. We will send him to India; he will make a considerable fortune there, he will marry some nabob's daughter, and return home in about twenty years laden with wealth and honours. When he is at the other end of the world he will forget my niece, and she, on her side, will think no more of him; she will marry her cousin Dominick, and will live happily with her husband."

"Poor children!" murmured La Mere Angelique with a sigh.

"I shall remain in Paris to hasten the conclusion of this affair," continued M. Maragnon; "In the mean time, do you, madam, make known to the Chevalier de Colobrieres that interest is being exerted in his favour in high quarters, and that a splendid career for his ambition is about to open before him."

"I shall mention to him what you say, sir, but I cannot answer for his consent," said La Mere Angelique; "to renounce his family and his country, perhaps for ever, is a terrible resolution."

"It will be far better for him to go to the East Indies than to become a capuchin," muttered old Maragnon almost angrily. Then he added in a milder tone: "I am certain that the Chevalier de Colobrieres will not even hesitate. It is just the same in love affairs as in trade; people end always by abandoning unfortunate speculations. A hopeless passion is precisely similar to a transaction in which one loses cent per cent; after a certain time we get tired of awaiting profits that never arrive, and give up the whole thing as a bad job. With this, madam, I shall take my leave, begging you to second me in my plans, and to consider me as your most devoted and obedient servant."

La Mere Angelique's reflections after this interview were long and melancholy. She had no objections to urge against the wishes or projects of M. Maragnon; she was, in fact, determined to second his intentions, but she felt a lively emotion of pity for these poor children who loved each other and were to meet no more. During a great part of the night she remained in prayer, beseeching the Almighty's assistance to strengthen her in her duty, and to restore peace to the souls desolated by human passions. On the following morning she announced to the two cousins that they were about to enter into retirement with the novices for the entire eight days of the festival of the holy sacrament.

It was now necessary, as she said, to decide upon the vocation of Gaston de Colobrieres, and in the evening when he came to the grating, where he found her alone, she commenced the task of sounding his inclinations for the new career which had been proposed for him. It required all the tact and marvellous address of a woman and a nun to change the dispositions of his mind, still intoxicated with the recent happiness of having discovered the object of its love. It was necessary to make the painful certainty of inevitable misfortune assume the place of confused hopes of present happiness. Without alluding to his passion, which Gaston de Colobrieres imagined was a secret carefully concealed at the bottom of his heart, La Mere

Angelique was able to strike a death-blow to the vague hopes which he still perhaps entertained. She spoke at great length of the marriage of Eleonora with her young cousin, of the projects of their Aunt Agatha for the happiness of her only child, and of the impatience of M. Maragnon for the conclusion of this marriage. Gaston listened to her with a mournful air, shaking his head from time to time with a gesture of despairing conviction, and replying only by half-uttered monosyllables.

"It is thus we all endeavour to provide for our happiness in this world until we depart to render account of our deeds in the next," added La Mere Angelique as a sort of corollary; "you alone, chevalier, scarcely bestow a thought on your interests here below."

"They are of so little consequence," murmured the young man.

"And yet, my dear brother, the care of our fortune is the most important affair after that of our salvation," resumed La Mere Angelique gently. "I have interested myself about your future prospects; certain persons are making exertions in your favour; you have powerful protectors, and I hope soon to obtain for you a good appointment."

"I do not wish for it," replied he, in a tone of discouragement; "what need have I of the goods of this world? I long only for retirement."

"What! still talking of becoming a capuchin!" interrupted La Mere Angelique hastily; "most certainly I venerate the habit of St. Francis, it has been borne by men of eminent virtue, several of whom have received signal favours from Heaven, but you do not possess the pious ambition of walking in their foot-steps and of becoming a saint. Be advised by me; renounce these ideas, accept what I propose to you, and, in place of retiring to a cloister, depart for the East Indies and make your fortune."

"Across the ocean! through a thousand perils!" cried Gaston de Colobrieres, his eyes flashing with sudden energy; "yes, you have divined my true vocation! I will go!"

Old Monsieur Maragnon kept his word; his application met with prompt and complete success, and he obtained for Gaston an appointment in one of the government offices in the East Indies. The old merchant had secretly provided everything necessary, and now hastened the departure of young Colobrieres with incredible activity. Before the last day of the Fête-Dieu had dawned, Gaston had quitted Paris for L'Orient, there to embark on board a ship bound for Chandernagor. He departed without again beholding Mademoiselle Maragnon, without even bidding his sister farewell, and both were still

in ignorance of his sudden determination when he was already on board the vessel which was to transport him to the other extremity of the world.

During their eight days' retirement the cousins had taken part in the exercises of the community under the immediate superintendence of the mistress of the novices, and they had not once seen the superior save in the choir. On the morning of the Fête-Dieu after the convent mass, the latter summoned them to attend her in her cell, and when there met together, addressing herself to Anastasia, she said in a calm tone of voice, though the tears stood in her eyes:—

"My dear daughter, God has willed that you should be tried by a severe affliction. Your brother Gaston has thought it his duty to accept an opportunity which presented itself to him of ameliorating his fortune; he has departed for the East Indies, and doubtless his absence will last many years. We must pray divine Providence to watch over him during his long voyage, and to grant that we may behold him again before we die."

At this news Anastasia clasped her hands passionately together, crying: "Gaston!—my brother!—I shall see him no more!" Then she burst into sobs and lamentations. Eleonora turned deadly pale, but she did not shed a single tear. She seated herself beside her cousin, and said in a broken voice, yet with a sort of firmness and self-possession:—

"My dear Anastasia, we must submit to the will of God."

Mademoiselle de Colobrieres then threw herself into her cousin's arms, exclaiming: "Ah! you at least still remain to me!"

"Yes, for a year," said the young girl with bitter resignation; "after which we must both of us bend to the irrevocable decree of Providence. I shall obey the will of my relations, I shall marry."

"And I shall become a nun," added Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, in an almost inaudible voice.

"Alas!" murmured La Mere Angelique, deeply afflicted; "it is not in my power to succour them; I cannot save them from these forced vocations!"

Before the end of the year, however, certain events occurred which overturned all their plans, and changed those destinies which had seemed irrevocably fixed. It was now the year 1789, and the first steps of the Revolution had been already accomplished. Although the secluded inhabitants of the Convent of La Misericorde occupied themselves but little with public affairs, the revolutionary movement did not fail to penetrate into this retreat, hitherto closed to all wordly rumours. The



emigration had commenced, the *noblesse* were already dispersed, and the court ladies no longer thought of purchasing the rich lace and magnificent embroideries manufactured at the convent. Almost instantaneously the skill displayed by the nuns in these difficult arts became a useless talent, and they no longer earned anything by the product of their needles. The establishment had no other revenue; the rules prohibited the daughters of La Misericorde from hoarding treasure, and the surplus gain had hitherto been scrupulously divided annually among the poor houses of the order. When their work ceased the community found themselves on the brink of poverty, and La Mere Angelique reflected with grief that a day might perhaps come, when, like the establishments of the seraphic order, they should be obliged to seek their daily bread from door to door. The nuns, however, were still in ignorance of the destitution which threatened them. The superior and the treasurer of the convent were alone aware of the extremities to which the departure of the grand ladies of Versailles had reduced them. In this difficult crisis La Mere Angelique displayed admirable prudence and strength of mind: she provided for the wants of the community out of the slenderest resources, and the day on which the decree abolishing religious vows was promulgated there remained but a six-livre piece in the convent treasury. La Mere Angelique forthwith assembled the nuns in chapter, and read aloud to them the decree: she then desired the portress to hand over the keys to her, saying as she placed them before her on the table: "My dear sisters, from this moment the doors of the cloister are opened."

There were doubtless some hearts which bounded for joy at this unheard-of news, but in general it was received with a sort of stupor. On the following morning a few of the younger nuns declared that they wished to return to their families, and they were permitted to depart freely. The older members of the sisterhood imagined that the beginning of the end was accomplished, and that the termination of the world approached. Some ventured as far as the convent gates but almost immediately drew back, terrified at the noises of the street and the appearance of the passers-by.

Some days after the promulgation of the decree, La Mere Angelique received two letters; the first was from the Baron de Colobrieres, and was to the following effect:—

CHATEAU DE COLOBRIERES, FEB. 1st, 1790.

"My dear Daughter,—Since the departure of your brother Gaston, who wrote to me from the port of L'Orient, I have not heard any news of you, and under present circumstances feel considerable anxiety respecting your situation. It is with

extreme pain that I have been informed of the troubles which desolate the kingdom. Not being in the habit of seeing the gazettes, I have no clear information as to the course of events; but I can see enough to learn that the revolutionary spirit has penetrated everywhere.

"The villagers here have for a long time back displayed certain colours, which they call national, in place of the fleur-de-lis, and other changes no less deplorable are taking place around us. A rumour has reached my ears that certain ill-designing persons have expressed their intention of pillaging and destroying the chateau, but up to the present time all is tranquil in the barony.

"I shudder, with all true gentlemen of France, at the misdeeds of the people. Having learned that our princes, as well as the higher ranks of the nobility, have taken refuge abroad, I have been reflecting whether it is not my duty also to quit this unhappy country; but the advice and entreaties of your mother have hitherto restrained me.

"People talk of the sale of ecclesiastical benefices, the destruction of the convents, and other similar abominations; these reports make me anxious respecting the nine children that I have in the religious orders. Write to me and let me know respecting your safety and well-being. Your mother and myself send you as well as our daughter Anastasia our heartfelt blessing, praying God to succour you in these tribulations, and to take us all under his protection. Do not forget us in your prayers, my dearest daughter, and rest assured of the unchanging affection and tender love of your father,

"BARON DE COLOBRIERES."

The second letter was from M. Maragnon, and was as follows:—

"Madame la Supérieure,—The decree lately promulgated abolishing religious orders changes all our arrangements. It is an event of paramount force, necessarily annulling the promise we made Eleonora to let her remain at the convent during a year. Neither her mother nor myself can go to Paris at this present moment, and we beg you will be good enough to find some confidential person to take charge of her during the journey. Madame Maragnon desires that her daughter may perform the journey with all the ease possible, in a good post-chaise, attended by such domestics as you may think proper to select, &c. &c. I beg that no expense may be spared in fulfilling her intentions, and I send you to this effect an order for five thousand livres.

"Accept, Madame la Supérieure, the homage of my profound respect, and believe me to remain your most humble, obedient, and devoted servant,

"JACQUES MARAGNON AND SON."

On reading the signature affixed by the old merchant to the conclusion of the letter, as if it had been a commercial despatch, the worthy nun could not restrain a smile, and turning to the two cousins who were with her in the now deserted workroom, she said:—

"Here is a letter from the firm of Maragnon and Co. requiring restitution of the precious deposit they had confided to my hands."

"A letter from my uncle!" cried Eleonora, taking with a trembling hand the paper presented to her by the superior.

"Tis well, my dear mother," said she, after having attentively read the letter; "but see! you have misread the post-script"—and she read aloud with feelings of emotion the lines traced at the back of the page:—

"My dearest child, I shall await you at Belveser, for these last decrees abolishing religious vows will inevitably close the convents. Say to my dear niece, La Mere Angelique, that I offer to her, as well as to such of the nuns as may wish to follow her, a shelter in my house. Bring me all these holy sisters. I embrace you with all my heart."

"You will come, my dear mother?" added Eleonora eagerly; "there is room for the entire community at Belveser!"

"Ah!" murmured La Mere Angelique as if speaking to herself, and the tears standing in her eyes, "it might be so! God might permit that I should behold once more the spot where I was born—my family—my mother!"

La Mere Angelique summoned together all that remained of the community, but her flock was already almost entirely dispersed. The monastic hive once overset, the terrified swarm had flown at random through the world, and there now remained only a few of the old sisters who persisted in clinging to the violated precincts of the convent. They declared that it was their intention to seek a refuge in the Catholic Netherlands, and to continue their religious profession in some house of the order of St. Augustine. The lay sisters, who were engaged only by simple vows, adopted the same resolution; and among the sisters of the white veil La Rousse alone declared that she would follow La Mere Angelique. These several resolutions were promptly carried into effect. A few days afterwards at nightfall, a post-chaise was drawn up in waiting in the court-yard of the Convent of La Misericorde. A sad and solemn

moment was that in which La Mere Angelique issued forth from the house which she had so long governed, and in which she had imagined she should have drawn her latest breath. She was the last to pass through the cloistral door, and kneeling on the threshold she offered up a short prayer ; she then entered the carriage with the two cousins and La Rousse. On leaving the convent she had laid aside her grey dress and the scapulary and black veil of the daughters of La Misericorde ; Anastasia also had changed her novice's attire, and both were modestly clad in an undress of a sombre hue. This costume was as a sort of transition state between the usual attire of the world and the strict and peculiar garb of the convent.

On hearing the carriage wheels rolling beneath the heavy arched entrance of the convent yard, the neighbours appeared on the thresholds of their shops, as they had done some months previously when they beheld the travelling carriage of M. Maragnon stop before this holy habitation. The young clerk, who knew by heart the verses of La Harpe, recognised by the light of the lanterns the rather pale complexion of Eleonora, and exclaimed with a tragic gesture, parodying the imprecation of Melanie and apostrophizing in thought the round fat features of honest Jacques Maragnon :—

“ Dieu!—c'est le dernier cri de sa fille expirante  
Qui seul retentira dans son ame tremblante ! ”

## CHAPTER VII.

It was the beginning of the month of March ; a mild and gentle breeze murmured between the branches, now just donning their spring attire ; the night had closed in, and the slender crescent of the moon rose behind the ruins of the tower of Belveser. A travelling carriage rolled rapidly forward through the silent country. After having deposited Eleonora on the threshold of Madame Maragnon's sumptuous dwelling, it proceeded towards the Chateau de Colobrieres. When it had reached the entrance of the rocky road which led directly up to the old tower, it stopped, and three female figures descended ;—these were La Mere Angelique, Mademoiselle de Colobrieres, and La Rousse. They climbed on foot the rude and rocky path, and gained the terrace. The most profound silence reigned around the chateau, and one might have imagined it utterly uninhabited had it not been for a feeble ray of light which struggled through the worm-eaten shutters of the apartment where the family ordinarily assembled.

"My dear child," said La Mere Angelique, stopping short and leaning on Anastasia's arm, "joy suffocates me—my heart fails me! I dare not approach—our dear parents are there."

Mademoiselle de Colobrieres gazed around her with an indescribable expression of interest, and also hesitated to cross the threshold.

"Come," said she, "let us approach gently; we shall be able first to see my mother through the window."

They advanced with the utmost precaution and gazed through the disjointed shutters. The picture which they then beheld struck a sudden chill into their hearts. The interior of the apartment was lighted by a little lamp whose feeble and vacillating flame was almost lost on the black and dingy background of the wainscoting; the furniture was ranged in the usual order, but in place of fire there was only a handful of cold ashes in the grate, and the table was bare. The baroness was alone in this vast apartment, and was working at her needle with mechanical activity. She was seated in her usual place, in front of her husband's empty arm-chair. While working she moved her lips as if in prayer, and from time to time she would let fall her work into her lap to wipe away the big tears which rolled down her pale cheeks.

"My father!" murmured Anastasia—"I do not see my father—some misfortune has happened—"

La Rousse now knocked vigorously at the door of the chateau, calling loudly for Tonin. The baroness tremblingly hastened forth at this summons, and drew the bolts.

"Is that you, Madeleine?" cried she, gazing at the lay sister with a stupefied air; "have you come from Paris!—and my daughters—my children?"

"Are here, Madame la Baroness," replied La Rousse—"see!"

The worthy old lady stretched forth her arms, murmuring.

"My children! Ah! providence sends you to console me.

Her daughters embraced her with tears of joy and led her into the sitting-room. There, seated between her children, a hand of each clasped in hers, she gazed on them in turns with rapture; then, while the tears stood in her eyes, she exclaimed:—

"My dear Euphemia, it is now nearly twenty years since I parted with you, never as I then imagined to behold you again! God is indeed very gracious to me: he has accomplished for me a desire that I had not even dared to form.—My dear Anastasia, my beloved child! you are also restored

to me. Blessed be this day!" She clasped her hands together and added, raising her eyes to heaven:—"Oh, that your father were with us!"

"My father!" said Anastasia timidly; "alas! is he not here then?"

"He left home yesterday with Tonin," replied the baroness. "I am to rejoin him soon."

"And where has he gone then, mother?" inquired Anastasia.

"He has emigrated to the other side of the Var," replied Madame de Colobrieres with a sigh. "It was an idea that he had long since entertained. Many things have occurred in the country which have annoyed him greatly: the lower orders insult the nobility; the peasants pillage and burn the chateaux. Amid all these disturbances we have not suffered the slightest damage, but your father could no longer support the sight of these calamities; he had besides an idea that sooner or later we should be victims of the revolution, so last night, accompanied by Tonin, he crossed the frontier. I am in momentary expectation of intelligence from him. Doubtless he will send for me to rejoin him in Italy; you will accompany me, my dear children; happily it is not far."

La Rousse on her arrival had proceeded straight to the kitchen, rummaged the safe, and now without saying a word began to prepare supper. When she entered the room to lay the cloth the baroness exclaimed:—

"Is there anything to put on the table? Since yesterday I have not thought of eating."

During supper La Rousse, who had for a moment left the room, hastily returned with a terrified air—

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, "something extraordinary is going on down below in the village."

The baroness and her daughters ran out upon the terrace: in the distance was heard the sound of the alarm-bell ringing, and the vivid reflection of an extensive conflagration was visible on the horizon.

"They have set fire to some chateau again!" cried Madame de Colobrieres. "When will these calamities cease! Pray heaven that the baron be in safety on the other side of the river!"

"The tocsin sounds from the village church of Belveser," said Anastasia uneasily; "who knows if these wicked people have not attempted to burn down my aunt's chateau?"

"Be tranquil, my child; they would not attempt such a thing," replied the baroness. "Young Maragnon is at the head of what they call the commune; he has been appointed

mayor of the district, and he wages fierce war against the malefactors."

Anastasia's heart bounded at this name; the sweetest recollections of her past life were again pictured in her thoughts, and something seemed to whisper to her that the happiness she regretted was not lost for ever. This evening the baroness kept her children beside her for a long time, and then conducted them to the little chamber they had formerly occupied. This apartment, so long abandoned, was now scarcely habitable; the heraldic thistle was effaced by the damp and mildew of the plaster; the wind had blown in the window, and the swallows built their nests beneath the wings of the cherubim. La Mere Angelique gazed with a moistened eye upon this desolate spot, and said, as she gazed at the bed:—

"I can remember, as if it was yesterday, the night my aunt Agatha embraced me and wept over me before going to be married to Pierre Maragnon, and left me here in her place."

"Poor woman!" murmured the baroness with a sigh, "I can scarcely hope that it will ever be permitted me to behold her again."

"Who knows, mother?" cried Anastasia; "so many things which appeared impossible have already come to pass."

These words were like a prophecy. The following morning a messenger sent by Eleonora brought unheard-of tidings: the old Baron de Colobrieres and his domestic Tonin, after having passed a single night upon the territory of Nice, had re-crossed the Var and found themselves once more in France. Their motives for retracing their steps were not very clearly explained. Scarcely had they again entered the kingdom when they fell into the hands of one of those armed bands which from time to time patrolled the country, and would have run considerable risk had it not been for the timely intervention of young Maragnon, who after having delivered them from their assailants conducted them to Belveser. Eleonora wrote to the baroness in her mother's name, begging her to leave the chateau where she was no longer perhaps in safety, and to come over instantly with her daughters to take refuge at Belveser, where her husband would join her the same day.

The interview between the baroness and her sister-in-law was a touching one. Madame Maragnon flew to meet her, embraced her affectionately, gazed upon her for a moment with melancholy interest, and cried—"Oh, my dear sister, I should have recognised you anywhere!" Then perceiving the charming features of Anastasia behind the baroness, she added quickly—"Tis you!—you were just such as she is when I left you thirty years ago!"

Shortly afterwards the baron arrived, escorted by Dominick Maragnon and a party of honest villagers armed with their fowling-pieces. The worthy gentleman was rather fatigued with his first campaign, for although he had comported himself valiantly, the troop of malefactors, who under pretence of baffling the designs of the aristocrats paraded in armed bands upon the frontier, had handled him roughly, and the worst disposed were even speaking of shooting him, when Dominick Maragnon rescued him from their hands. He entered the saloon and at first saluted Madame Maragnon ceremoniously, muttering a few words respecting the misfortunes of the times, but soon tears rushed into his eyes, he affectionately embraced his sister, and advanced towards Eleonora exclaiming—"My dear niece, I am truly glad to see you again! Do you know I think you are much improved. Had it not been for this young man," added he, giving his hand to Dominick Maragnon, "in place of being alive and well amongst you, I should have been at this present moment dead and buried at the foot of a tree."

Madame Maragnon installed the family of Colobrieres at Belveser. The baron offered some resistance, but they easily proved to him that his personal safety required him to defer his return to his chateau until the counter-revolution should be accomplished. His other daughters, nuns in the various houses of the order of La Misericorde, rejoined La Mere Angolique at Belveser, and there formed a sort of little community of which she was still superior. Uncle Maragnon shortly afterwards arrived. Foreseeing the course of events, he had prudently restricted his commercial transactions, and had now come to lie by, as it were, quietly until the crisis should be past. The old merchant soon discovered that he had surprised but half the secret in the parlour of La Misericorde, and that the inclination of Eleonora for Gaston de Colobrieres was not the sole obstacle to her marriage with Dominick Maragnon. He had too much judgment and too much sagacity to persist in combating this double obstacle, and anticipating his son's intentions, he determined not to expose him to the temptation of disobedience. After having imparted his discoveries to Madame Maragnon, he awaited a favourable moment to explain his wishes to the baron, and at the first onset to carry off his consent. Therefore whilst Dominick and his two cousins, accompanied by Mademoiselle Irene, took as heretofore their long rambles through the fields and culled bouquets at the Goatherd's Valley, he played at bowls with the baron or read aloud the papers. One day he read to him the decree of the constituent assembly suppressing the here-



ditary nobility and abolishing armorial bearings and every species of distinction between citizens, and profiting by the baron's stupor at this unheard-of intelligence, he spoke to him of the probability of a budding inclination between Mademoiselle Anastasia de Colobrieres and Dominick Maragnon.

"In these times in which we live everything is possible," replied the old gentleman coldly; "the Colobrieres are no longer nobles, I am no longer a baron, and our heraldic thistle is no longer fit for anything but to be eaten by asses! This is what your assembly has decided, is it not? In that case I see no obstacle to my daughter espousing your son; *morbleu!* it is the least the revolution can do for us."

A few days afterwards, Dominick Maragnon demanded and obtained the hand of Mademoiselle de Colobrieres. The baroness experienced so lively a feeling of satisfaction at this event, that she avowed confidentially to her sister-in-law that she was in her own mind reconciled with the government whose influence had produced such miracles. Eleonora also was rejoiced at this marriage; it was a partial realisation of her hopes. No intelligence however had yet been received from Gaston de Colobrieres, nor could any probable conjecture be formed relative to the period of his return.

The revolution still proceeded, events were rapidly accomplished, and at length the baron read a gazette dated the first day of the first year of the French republic. From this moment he declared that he would renounce for the future occupying himself with public affairs, and that he protested beforehand against all the acts of the new government. The Reign of Terror arrived, and proscriptions struck even the men who like Jacques Maragnon were devoted to the revolution. The tranquillity of the inhabitants of Belveser was not however for a single instant disturbed. At a period when fortune, rank, or religious faith led equally to the scaffold, the wealthy merchant, the old nobleman, and the poor Sisters of Mercy, lived together in safety in this forgotten corner of the world.

The war prevented communication with foreign countries, and notwithstanding the most active researches no news was received of Gaston de Colobrieres. During several years M. Maragnon never ceased writing to all the offices in the East Indies, but the greater portion of his letters never reached their destination, and from the replies he did receive only negative information was obtained. It appeared certain however that Gaston had long since left Chandernagor. Several years had now elapsed since his departure, and all hopes of his safety were given up. The baroness alone preserved some

hopes of seeing him again; Eleonora had for a length of time expected his coming, but at last she was convinced of her misfortune. When she no longer experienced those promptings of hope, and that faith in the future which had hitherto sustained her, she fell into a state of profound, constant, yet calm and resigned melancholy. Those who knew her well and could see into the depths of her heart, felt convinced that she would not sink beneath her grief, but that, faithful to the memory of Gaston, she would weep his loss during the rest of her life. She implored her mother not to think of establishing her in life, and announced her intention of spending the remainder of her days at Belveser with the two families, now united by double ties. No one sought to combat her resolution, with the exception of Mademoiselle Irene, who would sometimes in confidence urge her to think differently on her future prospects, and would say to her, raising her eyes at the same time to heaven:—

“At your age I was like you, mademoiselle; the very name of matrimony made me shudder. I refused an infinite number of excellent matches. Well! do you know that at present my repugnance vanishes every day, and I am almost prepared to repent my former severity.”

Eleonora however persisted in the sort of vow she had made. She considered herself as the widow, the inconsolable widow of him who had never so much as heard from her lips the confession of her love.

Six years had now rolled over since Gaston de Colobrieres had embarked at L'Orient, and no intelligence had been obtained either directly or indirectly concerning him, when one morning the baron received a letter dated from London. Gaston merely informed him that after many vicissitudes he had returned from India, his health impaired by fatigue and excessive sufferings, and that he brought home with him a little money with which he hoped with industry to make the commencement of his fortune. The baron read this letter in presence of the assembled family. Whilst the baroness and her daughters wept for joy and returned thanks to Heaven, Eleonora went up to her uncle Maragnon, and gazing at him fixedly, said—“Uncle!”

He understood her; he felt that the unhappiness he had involuntarily caused by sending Gaston de Colobrieres to the other end of the world, it was his duty to repair, and taking the hand of his niece, he replied—

“I will myself be the bearer of the baron's reply; in twenty days at the latest Gaston de Colobrieres shall be here.”

"You know what you have to say to him, uncle?" added Eleonora.

"*Parbleu!*" replied the good-humoured old gentleman; "I will show him one of the letters of invitation to your cousin Dominick's marriage with Anastasia. It is rather stale news now, but it will not be the less welcome to him on that account."

A month afterwards Mademoiselle Maragnon espoused Gaston de Colobrieres.

The two families continued to live together at Belveser. When the worst days of the revolution had passed, the baron spoke of returning to his château, which he had not visited since the period of what he called his emigration; but the seignorial dwelling-house was now only an uninhabitable ruin. The old gentleman appeared greatly astonished at seeing it in this state, but ended however by persuading himself that the revolutionists had demolished it, and consented to dwell among his children in the new château of Belveser. He reached an advanced age, exempt from infirmities and having only one care, viz. the fear of seeing his son partake to a certain extent in the revolutionary ideas. Two of his elder sons served in the army of the republic, and the baroness herself did not appear to regret the ancient régime.

Mademoiselle de la Roche-Lambert was the only individual of his opinion, and sometimes they would converse together on the calamities which had stricken them, and on the misfortunes of the revolution. Mademoiselle Irene would insinuate with a sigh that she had lost all she possessed by this dire convulsion, and in the end really believed it. The old gentleman would shake his head and reply—

"You are like myself, mademoiselle; the terrorists pilaged and demolished my chateau, emigration has completed my ruin—I almost perished in crossing the frontier."

It is a well-known fact—the Colobrieres family lost all in the Revolution!

SECOND NARRATIVE.

FELISE.



# FELISE.

## CHAPTER I.

ON the last day of December in the year 1700, about the hour when the busy crowd begins to fill the streets of Paris, a travelling carriage entered the great city by the gate of St. Anthony, and clattered along the muddy and slippery causeway. The well-worn springs creaked shrilly at every revolution of the wheels, while the postillion, cased in his huge boots to the middle, cracked his whip and swore at the foot passengers who did not hasten to gain the narrow space reserved for them along each side of the street in front of the shops. The somewhat antiquated-looking carriage was so coated with liquid mud that it was impossible to tell the colour of the body or the armorial bearings painted on the panels: nevertheless, the coronet of a count, formed with silver studs, was visible on the wooden blinds which were drawn across the windows. One of these blinds remaining partially open disclosed to view the travellers. On the back seat of the carriage a lady, wrapped in a dark pelisse and her face hidden in her coif, was slumbering, her head supported on a velvet cushion. The front seat was occupied by a man well stricken in years, who appeared to fill the station of a valet-de-chambre, and a woman, whose position seemed that of lady's maid in a good family. This couple, whose physiognomy was little attractive, uttered not a syllable, and only now and then cast a tired and sleepy look upon the street. Standing between the waiting-maid and the lady, and leaning with her two hands on the door of the carriage, stood a little girl of some five years of age, who gazed with admiration at the parti-coloured houses with their showy signs, the shop-windows, the itinerant venders uttering their cries at every corner, and the busy crowd who, taking advantage of a feeble ray of sunshine, hurried from shop to shop to make their purchases for new year's day. Every instant the little girl turned round to entreat the attention of the servant, and point out with cries of delight some magnificent bauble suspended from the toy-shop windows; but the attendant did not seem in the least amused by her childish prattle, and paid not the slightest attention. The child, still clinging to the carriage-door, manifested such transports of curiosity and joy, that the lady, wakening with a start,

caught her by the frock and thrust her rather roughly on the knees of the servant, who, thus roused from her taciturnity, exclaimed—

“Good Heaven! what is it? What is the matter?”

“Nothing,” replied the lady with strange unconcern, as she sank back into her corner; “I feared the child would fall into the street.”

She had scarcely uttered these words when the little thing, who with childish perversity had succeeded in regaining her former position, leaned far out of the carriage, quite transported at the sight of a fresh display of toys. While thus situated a sudden jolt caused her to lose her balance, and she fell head foremost on the pavement. A waggon heavily laden was coming up behind, and for some instants the little girl disappeared between the wheels and the horses’ feet. The bystanders were petrified with terror, and there was but one exclamation of agony among the crowd as they gazed at the enormous wheels revolving heavily on the causeway. When the waggon had passed, the little girl was observed sitting up, supported by one of her hands, and adjusting her little black taffeta hood with the other. The carriage, which was in rapid motion, could not be stopped for some distance. The lady then got down followed by her people, tottered through the crowd which opened before her, pointing to a shop whither they had already carried the child. As she entered the woman of the shop hastened to meet her, her hands clasped in an attitude of thanksgiving, and exclaiming—

“Madam, return thanks to God—the sweet little dear is not hurt—there is not so much as a scratch on her! It is a miracle!”

In fact the child was standing in the middle of the shop, chattering busily, and greedily gazing on the sweetmeats and playthings heaped upon the counter. The lady looked at her for a moment without embracing or even touching her, then sank pale and overcame on a seat, while she stammered out:—

“Oh, my God! I thought she was killed!”

A cold perspiration burst upon her brow, she passed her hand over her countenance, appearing to struggle for a moment with some overpowering emotion, and then sank quite unconscious into the arms of her attendant.

The bystanders hastened to her assistance, and the good women who were present bathed her face with essences, while the shopwoman exclaimed with sympathy:—

“Madam, compose yourself; the child is not injured I assure you. Only look at her, the sweet darling, and you will see that she has escaped safe and sound from under the horses’

feet. She is not so much as frightened, the dear innocent Come hither, my pretty one; kiss your mamma."

"My mistress is not this child's mother," sharply interposed the domestic; "she is not married."

"Excuse me, I meant no offence," replied the woman civilly; "but for all that the poor young lady has swooned away in her fright."

"She is so weak, so ill—it did not require this last stroke," muttered the waiting-maid, while she looked almost angrily at the innocent creature who had been the occasion of this scene.

Meanwhile the lady regained her consciousness, and opening her eyes murmured faintly:—

"I am better now, I feel quite well. Order the carriage round, Suzanne. Where is Balin?"

"Here, mademoiselle—here I am," replied the old domestic, coming forward.

"Very well; take charge of the child," continued the stranger, "and lead her by the hand to the carriage."

She said this in a tone of the most painful solicitude, but without casting one glance at the little creature whose life had been so wonderfully preserved! The women who stood around gazed at her with curiosity and astonishment. She was a young lady of some five or six-and-twenty years of age, of fair complexion, handsome, tall, and of commanding figure. Her features, though somewhat sharp, wore an expression of severe melancholy; her look was cold and distracted; and she had the slow gait and enfeebled aspect imparted by long-continued mental suffering. Nevertheless, the sparkle of her dark brown eyes still gave evidence of an acute and vehement temperament. She rose, adjusted her head-dress over her pale features, and leaping on her waiting-maid addressed some words of thanks to the shopkeeper with the dignified politeness of a person of lofty station. As she left the shop she signed to the old domestic to lift a penny toy, and drawing out her purse placed a gold piece on the counter.

The woman accompanied her to the door with low curtsies, and gently holding back the little girl for an instant, she respectfully kissed her hand and said:—

"What is your name, mademoiselle?"

"Felise," replied the child.

"It is a pretty name," said the kind-hearted woman. "Felise—that means happy; one that is born under a fortunate star!"

Hearing these words the traveller and her attendant involuntarily turned, and, doubtless struck by the same thought, cast a singular look upon the child.



"Your name has not belied itself to-day, Mademoiselle Felise," said the shop-woman; "may God ever thus protect you!"

The stranger, with an impatient gesture, ordered the old servant to lift the child into the carriage, and take her place beside her.

"Drive on, postillion," exclaimed the domestic, drawing the blind so as to intercept the gaze of the curious crowd which had gathered before the shop.

The carriage rolled along the Rue St. Antoine for a few moments longer, then, turning the corner of the Place de Birague, it stopped before the Convent of the Annonciades, situated at the end of the Rue Culture-St. Catharine, about a hundred paces from the hotel formerly occupied by Madame de Sevigné.

The old servant, acting in the capacity of equerry, respectfully offered his arm to his mistress, and while she got down, leaning one hand lightly on his sleeve, he said to her with an expression of anxious zeal mingled with uneasiness:—

"If mademoiselle will give me her orders, I can set out at once in search of apartments. I confess, however, that being ignorant of the town, I feel a little embarrassed."

"Any house will suit me, provided I am alone—quite alone," replied the traveller.

"I see several bills," said he, looking about at the different houses whose handsome exteriors faced the Convent of the Annonciades; "if mademoiselle thinks fit I shall see about it at once, unless indeed she prefer some other part of Paris."

"Good Heavens!" murmured the traveller with a look of indifference, "what does it signify whether I live in this street or at the other end of Paris? It matters little."

"I must decide at once," replied Balin, looking about him like a man resolved to take chance. "Since mademoiselle does not wish to remain even for a single night at an hotel, I must immediately see about an upholsterer to provide furniture. Mademoiselle stands in need of everything, and who knows how she will be accommodated to-night!"

"What is it to me?" replied the lady in a despondent and impatient tone. "Go, Balin, and do as you please; you have still an hour before you."

"Thank Heaven! But I shall not go far," muttered the poor man, sighing, as he proceeded in the direction of a neighbouring mansion, on the door of which was to be read: "This hotel, situated between court and garden, to be let immediately."

The door of the convent opened at the first sound of the

ball, and closed again noiselessly on the new-comers, who found themselves in a gloomy, damp, and spacious hall. Oaken benches were ranged along the wall, and at the farther extremity could be perceived the broad steps of a winding staircase. No one appeared, and the stranger was obliged to pause a moment and endeavour to find her way in these unknown localities. While she cast a wearied glance around, the little girl ran back hastily towards the door, exclaiming:—

"I do not want to go into this house, it is so ugly; let us go away!"

"Certainly not," replied the attendant, endeavouring to detain her; "come hither, mademoiselle."

"I want to return to the street!" exclaimed the child, pushing her back angrily: "I want out. I will not obey you, you naughty woman!"

"Leave her alone, Suzanne, leave her alone; I cannot bear to hear her cry thus," said the stranger, shuddering; and, hastening towards the staircase, she began to mount rapidly.

"Remain there by yourself, Mademoiselle Felise, and cry as much as you like," said Suzanne sharply; "stay where you are, no one will come to fetch you. You do not deserve to enter the house of God."

The circular staircase, of which the first few steps only were visible at the extremity of the vestibule, terminated on a landing-place, from which opened a folding-door exquisitely carved and surmounted with an escutcheon, the arms of which it was almost impossible to decipher owing to the thick coating of yellow paint which obscured the details. Above these half-defaced heraldic devices had been painted in fresco an azure cross between two branches of lilies.

At the instant when the stranger placed her hand upon the handle of the door, which was of brass and chiselled in the form of a rose, the door turned of itself on its hinges, and a lay sister presented herself. After making a kind of salutation, which might pass either for a genuflexion or a curtsy, she said in a half whisper of saintly humility:—

"Jesu-Maria be with you, madam; be so good as to enter and be seated."

The parlour of the Annonciades was a vast hall divided by a double grating covered with a black curtain into two equal portions, of which one communicated with the interior of the building and formed part of what was called the cloisters, while the other was appropriated to the reception of strangers who had received permission to visit the nuns. The taste with which this apartment was decorated showed that it had formerly been destined for a very different purpose, and, in

appropriating it to uses of a conventual life, many traces of worldly grandeur had been permitted to remain. Embossed leathern hangings, the arabesques of which, originally gilt, had assumed a dark brown tint, concealed the nakedness of the walls; the fireplace, in whose deep recess several people could very conveniently sit, was enriched with exquisite sculpture, and the huge and lofty mantelpiece, which threw its sheltering cover over the hearth like a canopy of stone, was festooned with crowds of little plump and smiling Cupids, which the pious nuns mistook for Cherubim. The Venetian mirrors which had formerly completed the furniture of this saloon, had been replaced by pictures; but, instead of the austere saints and frightful martyrdoms with which the whitewashed halls of most religious houses were adorned, these pictures represented two women, ladies of high rank, in all the splendour of beauty and rich attire. They were portraits of benefactresses of the convent, with which the recluses had adorned their parlour.

The stranger scarcely cast a glance around her, and without heeding the invitation of the lay sister, who urged her to warm herself at the cheerful fire which was blazing on the hearth, she seated herself close to the grating, concealing mechanically at the same time in her large sleeve her hands reddened with the cold, and said, with a faltering voice:—

"The superior has doubtless been already informed of my coming. I have come with a recommendation from Monseigneur the Bishop of Alais, to visit one of your novices."

"May Heaven preserve his highness!" replied the lay sister; "our reverend mother was apprised of your arrival, and I have received her orders. The parlour is opened only twice a year to near relations; but at the instance of his highness, and by special favour, Sister Genevieve is permitted to appear to-day. There she is."

With these words she bent her knees a second time, stooped her head as if about to prostrate herself, and then disappeared by the little door that communicated with the interior of the convent. Immediately the black curtain was slowly drawn aside, and a veiled female figure appeared behind the grating. She wore the dress which had caused the nuns of the Amnoniades to receive the name of *celestial*. A scapulary of cerulean blue covered the front of her woollen robe, and descended to her shoes of blue leather; a sort of cape resembling the scapulary hung from her shoulders; and her white veil, which fell below her knees, concealed her countenance beneath its thick heavy folds. It was impossible to distinguish either her figure or her features; nevertheless there was in that

veiled form something youthful which could not be mistaken. The graceful outline of the cape, the contour of the shoulders, the whole attitude, indicated a young girl of sixteen or seventeen years of age, tall, slender, and of the most noble bearing. Some paces behind appeared another nun similarly attired, except that her veil was black. She was one of those discreet personages who accompany novices to the parlour, and who, in monastic language, are termed *listening sisters*. She forthwith placed herself at some distance, and drawing from her pocket her formulary and spectacles, began to read.

The stranger had risen on the novice's entrance.

"Is it you, mademoiselle?—is it indeed you?" she said in an altered voice. "I should not have known you under this veil."

The novice nodded and held out her hand—a thin white hand—which could not however pass through the closely-railed bars. The stranger raised her eyes to heaven with an expression of compassion, while a tear bedewed her dry and hag-gard eyelids. The novice standing at the other side of the grating wept behind her veil, and for some moments smothered sighs and sobs alone interrupted the silence of the apartment. Restraining her grief at length, the young nun seated herself beside the grating so as to approach as closely as possible to her visiter, and said in an agitated voice:—

"Ah! mademoiselle, how good it was of you to undertake so long a journey in order to bring hither our poor child!—May God reward you for this good work!"

"Do not attribute the merit of it to me," replied the traveller in a bitter tone; "Suzanne and my old servant Balin thrust me into the carriage almost against my will. They had determined I should pass the winter in Paris, thinking that the change of abode might perhaps partially restore my health! as if anything could be of use to me!"

"Religion—time, will console you," said the novice with a sigh: "religion especially, believe me."

"Ah! so then you are consoled, are you?" interrupted the stranger.

"No; I am resigned," replied the young nun with melancholy serenity.

Then after a short silence she added:—

"But I do not see Felise—where is she? Our mother has given me permission to receive her. Is it not your intention to leave her with me to-day?"

"Yes—yes—this very instant," replied the stranger quickly; "see! she is here."

The little girl, tired of calling Suzanne in vain, had deter-

mined to ascend the stairs alone; she had just pushed open the door which remained half ajar, and was peeping timidly into the parlour. Suzanne seized her by the hand and led her forward to the grating in spite of her resistance.

"Aunt!" she exclaimed, catching hold of the stranger's dress, and casting a terrified glance on the black grating, "are they going to shut us up in this prison? I won't stay here! Come! quick—quick! there is no one below, and we can open the door and escape."

Then observing the two nuns through the grating, she looked at them with astonishment, and said in a lower voice:—

"Ah! there are ladies! Look, aunt! they are dressed in blue, with a veil like the holy Virgin. Is this their house?"

"Yes, my dear child," said the novice with emotion; "this is our house; it has a beautiful chapel and a pretty garden;—would you like to come and live with me?"

"No," replied the child; "I do not know you."

Then after gazing at her attentively for a moment, she added with childish resignation:—

"No, I would rather stay with Aunt Philippine and that ill-natured Suzanne."

"But if you knew me you would gladly come, would you not?" replied the novice, raising the corner of her veil.

"Aunt Genevieve!" exclaimed the child with a gesture of joy and astonishment.

"You know me, Felise—you are glad to see me again!" said the young nun in a tone of melancholy satisfaction, and inclining her face close to that of the little girl, who was clinging against the grating and endeavouring to kiss her through the bars.

The stranger cast a glance on these two faces, thus bent forwards, and immediately turned away shuddering. One would have said that on seeing them a feeling of horror and aversion had arisen in her soul. Such an impression would have certainly seemed strange in the extreme to any one who could have seen these charming heads bent towards each other, as they gazed on one another through the grating. The features of the novice were so faultlessly regular as to impart a peculiar expression of loftiness and distinction to her whole appearance. She seemed hardly to have reached the age of womanhood, so soft was the outline of her features, so slight her youthful form. The perfect oval of her countenance was defined by a linen band which covered her forehead till within a finger's breadth of the eyebrows, and hardly permitted the delicate contour of her cheek to be visible, while at the same time its deathlike whiteness enhanced the delicate

colour and incomparable beauty of her complexion. The child had brown hair curling in natural ringlets over her head, lips rosy as cherries, and cheeks plump and firm as those of the marble Cupids which adorned the chimney-piece. Her features faintly recalled those of the novice; but what completed the resemblance, and served to mark in both alike a peculiar sign of race, was the colour of their eyes, which were of so pale a blue that the iris was hardly to be distinguished from the pearl-coloured cornea when shaded by the long black eyelashes. This peculiarity gave to the novice a singular charm—an indescribable expression of languor, tenderness, and melancholy. In the eyes of little Felise, on the contrary, there was something dull; the soul had not yet shone forth from them; and even when a joyous smile played about her mouth, her look soon fell, veiled beneath her delicate eyelids. The stranger in the mean time seemed to have recovered from the painful impression which the sight of these two beautiful creatures had occasioned her, and turned towards the grating with the air of a person who is about to bid farewell. The novice then dropped her veil, and said with a sigh:—

“Grant me yet a few moments, mademoiselle; this is my last adieu to the world, and you are the last person whom I shall ever address through this grating.”

“What! are the duties of your profession so rigorous?” exclaimed the stranger; “do the rules impose such sacrifices upon you?”

“No, mademoiselle,” replied the novice; “they merely authorise them. Besides the three ordinary vows, we are permitted to make a fourth—viz. to renounce the sight and converse of the people of the world; to have no communication, even indirectly, with those not devoted to a religious life; in short, to live in absolute and perpetual seclusion. Some of the holy women who have set an example to this house have contracted this fourth vow, and I have resolved to imitate their example.”

“Will you never repent this excess of zeal?” exclaimed the stranger, whose countenance seemed to soften; “will you never regret having added another to the already onerous obligations of your calling?”

The novice shook her head, and replied in a melancholy tone:—

“Alas! who will ever come to ask for me at the grating? During a whole year that I have been here I appear at it for the first time. It seems to me, moreover, that I should be happier and more tranquil were I not to hear even an echo from that world which I had hardly entered when I was

forced to quit it, and which perhaps even yet recurs too often to my thoughts."

At these words her voice faltered; she could not proceed, and leaned her head on her hands as if to gain calmness and self-possession.

"So that," continued the stranger, "if I were to return here in a year I should ask for you in vain?"

"Were you to return," replied she with an air of unspeakable sorrow and resignation, "I should only be permitted to inform you that I was not dead, and that I commended myself to your prayers."

The stranger looked upwards with a gesture of despair, and remained for a moment as if overwhelmed by a host of agonising reflections; then the tears which had started to her eyelids disappeared, and her features resumed their attitude of stern repose. She turned silently towards Suzanne, and beckoned to her to place on the ground, beside the grating, a casket which she carried in her arms. The waiting-maid obeyed, and drawing from her pocket a silver key she placed it in the lock of the casket, which was in all respects a strong box in miniature, garnished with metal bands and gilt studs.

"These are the countess's jewels," said the stranger, pointing to the casket. "I do not know what is inside, for I have never looked at them, but everything I believe has been scrupulously preserved. These jewels belong to this child. I felt it my duty to place them in your hands."

"Alas! wherefore?" interrupted the novice; "the destiny of Felise is already fixed. Brought up in this house, she will here take the veil. Of what use therefore can these ornaments be to her?"

"She will give them to your church on the day she takes the vows," replied the traveller; "until then they may remain as a deposit in your superior's keeping. At that period the law will hand over to Felise her fortune, and she can in like manner dispose of it as she wishes."

"She will follow my example," said the novice, with a tearful smile; "at seventeen she will take the vows, and give her dowry to the poor."

Whilst these explanations were going on, Felise had seized on the casket as if it were a plaything, and endeavoured to lift it by the handle of chased gold, while she turned the key backward and forward in the lock. All at once she raised her head with an exclamation of joy—the bolt had shot, the lay open. Before Suzanne could interpose, the little girl plunged in her hand and drawn out a handful of jewels, with

she scattered before the grating. Among them was a necklace of pearls, each as large as a nut, rings, diamond ear-rings, and, in the midst of these magnificent jewels, a medallion portrait surrounded by precious stones. The child looked for a moment at the picture, which represented a young lady exquisitely fair, and with a gay and smiling expression; then the sight of the sweet countenance recalling to her memory faint and almost forgotten impressions, she turned to the novice and said—

"And mamma? Aunt Genevieve, where is she? Here perhaps?"

At this unexpected question the novice shook her head with a faint moan, and the stranger exclaimed, concealing her face with a gesture of despair—

"This is the first time that she has spoken of my poor sister—that she has seemed to recollect her."

"Mamma!" continued the little girl, looking around her;

"Where is mamma? Is she with you, Aunt Genevieve?"

"No; she is in heaven," murmured the novice, hiding her tears.

"Then she is with papa," replied the child; "papa too is gone to heaven; he is dead."

These artless and touching words produced a terrible effect on those who heard them. The young novice sobbed aloud, and the stranger, pale and trembling, and hiding her face in her handkerchief, wept convulsively. Terrified at this scene, Suzanne said to her, in a low voice—

"In heaven's name, mademoiselle, compose yourself! Request them to open the door of the cloister that I may take this child out of your sight—she will kill you!"

"Yes, I will see her or hear her no more!" exclaimed the stranger, whose thoughts seemed to be wandering. "Take her away—let me not see her again!"

"Come, Felise, come," said Sister Genevieve, weeping. "Poor little innocent! the world thrusts you from it, your relatives hate you—take refuge here with me."

The listening sister, who had ceased for a moment to read her breviary, and was observing this scene, now broke in:—

"Jesu-Maria!" said she, tranquilly. "it is a great sin to give way to such emotions; this good lady appears almost distracted. What can have driven her to such extremity? Let us retire, my dear sister; I shall give orders to open the door of the cloister to receive our new inmate."

"She is so little that I think she might pass by the turning-door; do you give permission, my dear mother?"

"Certainly; I shall raise the bolt myself," replied she.



at the same time directing her steps to a little apartment contiguous to the parlour, and which was called the chamber of the turning-door.

The turning-door or wheel, of a convent was a sort of press in the form of a cylinder, enclosed between a double wall, and turning on its axis in such a manner that articles deposited on the outside were received by those within without any one being seen. It was by this channel that the various little necessities and presents which lay persons forwarded to the recluses were admitted. The listening sister gave a slight push to this machine, which revolved on its axis with a creaking noise. Suzanne hastened to gather up the jewels and thrust them back at random into the casket, then taking Felise by the arms, she seated her in the turning-wheel, placed the casket on her knees, and, by a second impulse communicated to the machine, conveyed her into the interior of the convent.

Sister Genevieve then approached the grating, and making a signal of adieu to the stranger, said in a gentle and heart-broken voice—"We shall never see each other again in this world; may God comfort you, and in his overflowing mercy take pity on us both!"

The black curtain closed, the novice and child disappeared, and the echo of their retreating footsteps was soon lost in the distance.

The stranger remained for a moment with her eyes fixed upon the grating, as if absorbed in silent despair; then without uttering a word she allowed herself to be led away by Suzanne.

The old servant had already returned and was waiting at the carriage door.

"Well!" said Suzanne, "where are we to go now?"

"Merely a few paces off," replied he, pointing to a large gateway in a dead wall which served as the inclosure of a court-yard. "I have hired this house, and mademoiselle has only to cross the street to be at home."

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## CHAPTER II.

THE clock was chiming the hour for dinner, and the community was just entering the refectory, when Sister Genevieve appeared, holding Felise by the hand. On seeing the pretty little girl who came forward all astonishment, holding the corner of her apron trimmed with lace and curtsying with

infantine politeness, the good sisters uttered exclamations of joy. The arrival of a new boarder was an event of the greatest importance to the whole household, and occupied their entire thoughts for a week. Whatever was her age, she was a new member of the spiritual family of the Annunciation; for with few exceptions the young girls brought up there took the veil, their education being wholly directed to that end. It was a very suitable establishment for young ladies of family who had but a small dowry, and consequently the foresight of parents provided such with this asylum, which they entered without once coming in contact with the world, and in which their life flowed on gently, equably, and forgotten.

The superior took Felise on her knee, and said, whilst she kissed her forehead:—

“This is another lamb added to our flock; she is a present from the Archbishop of Alais, to whom we also owe Sister Genevieve, and truly we cannot be sufficiently grateful to his Highness.”

“Oh, my dear mother!” stammered Sister Genevieve, “it is I who should be grateful for the protection of the holy prelate.”

“My dear sisters, to your places, and let us repeat the *Benedicite*,” resumed the superior, cheerfully; “and out of consideration for this new daughter, the cellarist will add to the desert a plate of that famous almond confection which we enjoyed last Christmas, and I further extend the period for recreation half an hour.”

“Thanks, thanks! dear mother,” exclaimed all the nuns together as they took their places on their benches, which were comfortably fitted with backs, and were ranged on each side of the table.

“Will my dear mother please to say what seat her new daughter is to occupy?” said Sister Genevieve.

“I wish her to make acquaintance at once with your favourites, my child; let her take her seat between the Chameroys.”

Those meagre repasts, served on yellow earthenware and washed down with pure water, which constituted the daily fare of the carmelites and capuchins, were unknown at the convent of the Annonciades. The rule of St. Augustine, and the revenues of the house, permitted a better fare. Contrary to the usual custom of religious houses, all the community ate at the same table; the reverend mothers close to the superior, next to them those who had lately taken the vows, then the novices, and lastly the boarders. The dishes were simple,

plentiful, and well prepared, and the lay sisters waited at table with an order, quietness, and intelligence, which left nothing to be wished for; valets in livery could not have done better.

In the refectory, as in every other part of the building, there remained vestiges of a period anterior to the establishment of the nunnery. Traces of painting were visible here and there under the composition which had been plastered over the walls; and it was easy to detect beneath the transparent layer, a chase in full cry, the stag, hard pressed, about to take the water, the dogs in pursuit, the piqueurs blowing their horns, and the bold horsemen careering over the wide and extensive plain. Above the doors hung trophies of Bacchus and Ceres, which the good sisters would have been puzzled to explain, and over the chimney could be perceived an obliterated escutcheon, whose blazoning was covered over with the azure cross of the Annonciades, but the legend of which could still be deciphered:—“*Dieu ayde au premier baron chretien.*” Silence during the repast was not compulsory, and a subdued but incessant murmur might be heard amidst the noise of the glasses and plates.

“This dear little creature does not eat,” observed one of the reverend mothers, looking at Felise. “She looks quite terrified. Talk to her, Mademoiselle de Chameroy. Angela, take her hand.”

Angela de Chameroy was a child about the age of Felise, delicate, charming, and lovely as an angel. She gently advanced her rosy mouth to kiss her new companion, and said to her with infantine cordiality—

“Will you be friends with me? I love you with all my heart!”

In place of returning her kiss, Felise looked at her with an astonished air, and said, while she turned away her head—

“I do not know you.”

This expression made every one laugh.

“See the little savagel” exclaimed one of the nuns; “certainly she has been brought up in the woods among the wolves.”

“Oh! no, no, madam!” interrupted the indignant child; “I lived at Toulouse in a beautiful house with mamma, who was a great lady, and then my Aunt Philippina took me.”

“I thought she had lost her mother at her birth,” said the superior, looking at Sister Genevieve.

“The poor lady did indeed die when very young,” stammered she; “but yet Felise may perhaps have retained some faint recollection of her.”

"And what was your mamma called, my little lamb?" asked one of the reverend mothers, by way of saying something in her turn.

At this question the novice turned pale and looked at Felise with anguish. The child hesitated, pondered a moment, and then replied, somewhat ashamed—

"I do not remember."

Sister Genevieve breathed more freely, and having regained her composure, said to the superior—

"My dear mother will excuse her forwardness of manner; Felise is a spoiled child."

"Yes, yes, we shall bring her up better," replied the indulgent superior; "we can tame the most obstinate character. Heaven has favoured us with particular gifts in this respect."

They rose to say grace. It was the hour of recreation, and, leaving the refectory, the nuns descended to the garden. A large parterre, divided into beds by edgings of box-wood, extended along the facade, and was bounded by deep thickets intersected with paths which formed a sort of labyrinth. Lofty trees, now stripped of their leaves, overtopped the walls and shut out the perspective. During the summer season, when masses of foliage concealed the surrounding houses, and when nothing but the blue sky, bathed in light or chequered with fleecy clouds, was visible above the green and leafy summits, one might have imagined himself in a remote and sequestered valley, in place of in the heart of the modern Babylon.

The pale December sun had slightly tempered the atmosphere and melted the hoar-frost on the branches. The wind, now somewhat milder, had dried up the sandy alleys, and rude winter still permitted the gentle south wind to breathe for a moment. The nuns scattered themselves in groups over the parterre. Sister Genevieve sat down on the flight of steps which led to the garden, in the midst of the boarders, who sported around her like a flock of chattering birds. Whilst the little Angela endeavoured to make her acquaintance with Felise, her elder sister seated herself beside the novice, and said in a low tone—

"Ah, dear sister, what a resolute air she has! Our dear mother may say what she pleases, it will not be easy to inspire her with the vocation."

"The vocation!" replied Sister Genevieve; "has not every one the vocation who has never seen the world, and who, like you, my little Cecilia and my dear Felise, has entered here at the age of six?"

The boarder shook her head, and did not answer.

Cecilia de Chameroz was a young girl of twelve years of

age, fair, fresh, and pretty. She wore, like the other boarders, a blue woollen dress which displayed to advantage her slender and graceful figure; her hair, slightly curled, and of a bright auburn, formed a heavy mass which fell on her neck, and was imperfectly confined by a black gauze cap fastened under the chin; her eyes, of a variable shade of blue, her nose slightly turned up, and her full and well-formed lips, formed altogether one of the most wilful and charming faces in the world. It was impossible to imagine such a countenance under the veil. The little Angela's features, on the contrary, were sweet and gentle, and wore a thoughtful expression rarely seen in childhood. The two sisters were orphans, destined for the cloister. The elder vaguely remembered the parental mansion, but as for the younger, she had been brought to the Annonciades immediately on leaving the nurse's arms, and had no idea of any world beyond the walls of the convent.

Felise remained standing close by Sister Genevieve, and obstinately refused to join in the amusements of the boarders, who were playing blind-man's-buff on the terrace, and who beckoned to her engagingly as they passed. Whenever any one of them took her by the hand, or laughingly caught hold of the corner of her apron, she turned, all ashamed and angry, to Sister Genevieve, and hid her face with a pouting air.

"Come," said Cecilia, "I must try to tame this little savage; with your leave, Sister Genevieve, I shall take her to Bethlehem to see the holy infant Jesus."

"Yes, let us go—let us go at once!" exclaimed little Felise briskly, fastening on her cape, and herself taking hold of little Angela's hand.

Sister Genevieve slipped her arm inside Cecilia's, and murmured, sighing: "The poor child imagines we are going to take her far from this."

They crossed the parterre and took one of the paths which traversed the thickets. This part of the garden had a wild and pleasing appearance. Long wreaths of ivy twined round the trunks of ancient elms, whose roots were hidden among thick clumps of brambles and honeysuckle. In the lovely month of June the nightingale might be heard during the whole night singing amid the leafy branches, and the periwinkle flourished amid these quiet shades as in its native forest. The path which intersected this wood branched into many windings, so that one could have a long walk without returning by the same way.

Felise ran on before, curious and impatient. The decayed grass and leafless trees seemed to awaken no recollections in her breast; she remembered only the verdure and the flowers

of the preceding summer. Once, however, she suddenly stopped and said, looking up at the huge trees whose branches met overhead:—

"Aunt Genevieve, there are walks like these about our chateau, and then there is the park beyond. We used to play in the park; don't you remember?"

"Look, look!" interrupted Sister Genevieve, instead of replying; "there is Bethlehem."

"That little house!" exclaimed the child.

"Come in quickly, and you shall see," said Cecilia, pulling her forward.

It was a rustic pavillion, in which the nuns every year at Christmas made a representation of the nativity. It would have been difficult certainly to imagine a more simple and original picture. Green branches, mingled with moss and shells, formed the landscape, the sky being represented by leaves of blue paper sprinkled with silver stars. A crystal flask hidden in the moss did duty as a lake, in which swam golden fish. The stable in which our Lord was born had a straw roof, and was supported by gilt pillars; and to render the appearance of the place more elegant, the good sisters had placed a mirror at the bottom of the manger. It must have required all the skill and patience of nuns to clothe the personages who came in their best attire to worship the Newly-born. There were people of all ranks, from the milkmaid in her village head-dress and the water-carrier from Auvergne, to the lady in her court attire and the financier in his flowing wig. In the midst of this multitude appeared a man, dressed in a long black robe and wearing bands and a broad-leafed hat, in the act of bestowing his blessing on a nun of the Annonciades who carried paschal eggs to the infant Jesus.

Felise, standing on a footstool before the manger, expressed her astonishment and admiration by incessant exclamations. This sight had quickly reconciled her to remaining in the convent: she could imagine nothing more beautiful in the world than such an assemblage of dolls in magnificent dresses, and everything she had beheld in passing through the Rue St. Antoine appeared very mean in comparison. When she had recovered a little from her ecstacy, she began to inquire the names of all those pasteboard figures, which seemed to her real personages. Cecilia explained everything with extreme good nature. When she came to the person clothed in black, she gravely observed:—

"This one is alive in flesh and blood; he is the reverend Father Boinet, confessor to the community. Last year we had in his place the reverend Father Pacaud, our almoner, a

very holy person also; it is delightful to have his portrait there in the same niche as the blessed infant Jesus! It is the very image of Father Boinot!"

"He is very ugly," said Felise, naively.

During this dialogue, Sister Genevieve, standing at the door of the pavillion, followed with her eyes the little Angela, who, instead of looking at the manger which she had already visited twenty times, amused herself by running along the walk and scattering with her foot the dried leaves collected at each side. In turning up this bed of leaves which protected the soil from the frost, Angela uncovered a little verdant tuft, and immediately a sweet delicious perfume scented the air.

"Ah!" exclaimed she joyfully, "a violet!" She gathered it carefully, and brought it in triumph to Sister Genevieve. The novice placed the flower in her girdle and remained motionless, her head supported on her hand and her eyes closed, as if the perfume had overcome her. In truth the aroma which floated on the air had, as it were, overwhelmed her soul; her recollections were suddenly transported to other scenes, her thoughts flew with the speed of lightning to her native fields, under the broad lime-trees, at the foot of which the wild hyacinths formed a blue carpet on which she had so often sat. When Cecilia left the pavillion, with great difficulty bringing with her Felise, who would gladly have remained till evening looking at the manger, she found the novice still absorbed in her reverie.

"Sister—my dear sister!" exclaimed she with astonishment, "you are weeping— you are in pain?"

"No," replied Sister Genevieve, pressing her hand on her heart—"no, my child; on the contrary it was a very sweet feeling which I experienced; it was a sort of joy which I cannot define and which made me shed tears."

"Oh! my dear sister, you were thinking of scenes far distant from this!" said the young girl, pressing her hand with intelligent sympathy.

The chiming of a bell, echoing throughout the monastery, announced that the period for recreation had expired; it was now the hour for commencing needlework. On entering the workroom the superior said to her nuns:—

"My very dear sisters, we must clothe this lamb which the Lord has sent us to-day: we shall work for her till the hour of prayer."

She quickly distributed the work, and two hours afterwards the wardrobe of the new-comer was almost completed. She was then brought forward, and in place of her silk frock and muslin apron trimmed with broad Argentine lace, they clothed

her in the attire of the boarders her companions. This change of costume did not appear to please her highly; she allowed herself to be dressed without saying a word, gazing somewhat angrily all the time at the good superior, who herself handed the different articles one after the other, not forgetting to say each time.—

“Look, my dear sisters, how it becomes her! Jesu-Maria, how beautiful she is in this dress! I am sure it will have the effect of making her as docile and well-conducted as all our other daughters.”

When Felise's toilet was completed, the sisters kissed her one after another, expressing a hope that in a few years she might have the happiness of changing her attire afresh. The same day after service the superior sent a message to Sister Genevieve to accompany Felise to the little parlour. This was a favour rarely granted to the novices. The little parlour was an apartment furnished with a table, a few chairs, and a library, the shelves of which contained about a hundred volumes. There was no grating, and the door opened into the chamber of the turning-wheel. It was in this room that the superior of the Annonciades received the visits of those few persons who had the privilege of admission into the cloister.

The reverend Father Boinet, confessor to the community, was already in the little parlour with the superior when Sister Genevieve presented herself with Felise. He rose, and bowing with the politeness of a man of the world, said, as he took the child on his knees:—

“Good day, mademoiselle; you are welcome. It is long since Monseigneur d'Alais promised to send us a little Annonciade, and we were very impatient to see you.”

Felise, not much flattered at this gracious reception, glanced stealthily at Father Boinet from under her eyelashes and remained mute.

“Excuse her, father,” said the novice; “she is still as wild as a young bird just taken from the nest; she is terrified, and trembles under the hand which receives and fosters her.”

“I am certain, however, that the little bird has no wish to fly away,” said the director gaily. “What would she do elsewhere? It is cold and dreary outside, the frost is intense, and in a short time it will be night.”

The little girl raised her eyes mechanically towards the window. The daylight was in fact almost gone, a frosty mist obscured the panes, and gloomy night was advancing with its mantle of darkness. Felise shivered and pressed closer to the



novice, as she turned her face towards the fire where the clear blaze sparkled.

"The little bird is already tame," said Father Boinet smiling. "It feels happier in its close warm cage than in the open fields, and as I am well satisfied with it I shall give it a little seed to peck."

With these words he drew from his pocket a roll of paper, and pouring the contents into Felise's apron he added:—

"Go and munch these comfits by the fire, my pretty little girl."

"I foresee, father, that she will be your favourite," said the superior, patting Felise's cheeks with the end of her finger; "and if she prove very well-behaved, and very obedient, she shall be mine also. See how happy she will be with us!"

"No matter—I will go away whenever it is daylight," murmured the child, turning her large limpid eyes towards Father Boinet.

"Ah! father," exclaimed Sister Genevieve in a tone of anguish, "I greatly fear she will never have the vocation."

"In that case we shall not detain her, my child," replied the superior quickly; "it would be better for her to work out her salvation in the world than lose her soul in the cloister."

Father Boinet shook his head and merely replied:—

"God will dispose."

### CHAPTER III.

IN spite of the care, the marks of affection, and the little flatteries generally lavished in convents on new boarders, the sisters were not successful in thoroughly taming Felise. Hers was a disposition at once obstinate and fanciful, which it was impossible to govern either by mildness or severity; she feared no person, and loved none but Sister Genevieve. In process of time, however, she submitted to the easy duties imposed on her. Instead of rebelling every moment against the mistress of the boarders, expressing in no measured terms her little determinations, and frequently throwing the class and the whole dormitory into confusion by her petulance, she learned to walk quietly, and to employ the polite and Christian phraseology in use in the establishment. This was nearly all that could be obtained from her during the first few months she passed at the convent.

During this time Sister Genevieve pronounced her vows.

This irrevocable engagement was not accompanied, like the taking of the veil, with solemn and dreary ceremonies. Without pompous preparations, almost without any peculiar form, the novice promised to keep faithfully her religious vows, and received the black veil from the hands of the superior; after which she signed the authentic act of her profession.

Sister Genevieve endured this last trial with unusual fortitude and without appearing to give one regret, one rebellious thought, to that world from which she was separated for ever. This was a source of great joy and edification to the community, and especially to the superior, who had at first entertained doubts of the young girl's vocation, since from her entrance into the house she had rather manifested a taste for retirement and a secluded life, than a spirit of fervent piety; but when they beheld her accomplish her sacrifice with a countenance so tranquil and firm, they decided that she was truly called.

On the day of her profession, immediately after the ceremony, Sister Genevieve was permitted to retire to her cell to collect her thoughts and repose for a short period. Leaving the choir she reached the dormitory alone. Her step was firm and rapid, and she walked like one under the influence of some inward agitation, subdued and governed by the will. The moment she entered her cell she threw herself upon her knees, raised her hands to heaven, her face bathed in tears, and exclaimed aloud:—

“Lord! do not repulse one who has taken refuge with thee in her distress! Take me, O my God, for I am now thine alone!”

She endeavoured to proceed, but her mental energy was exhausted; she felt her thoughts wander and become confused. Pale, her forehead covered with a cold perspiration, she remained almost prostrate upon her knees, both her mind and body plunged in a sort of swoon. Cecilia de Chameroy surprised her in this situation. The young boarder, prompted by a sort of instinctive solicitude, had followed Sister Genevieve's steps, and when she saw her thus prostrate, her features bedewed with tears, and her eyes closed, she knelt down beside her and said with a mixture of grief and terror:—

“Sister, dearest sister! you deplore the day on which you made your profession! Oh, Heavenly Father! then you had no real vocation!”

The nun recovered by degrees from her stupor, and passing her hands over her still moistened eyes, she said with ineffable sweetness and resignation.—

“Wherefore have I wept? Oh! God, what have I left

behind in the world that can occasion me a tear? am I not too happy to obtain a refuge here? Ah! let me rather bless the Lord who has opened his house to receive me, and who has given me a place amongst this Christian family."

"You are an orphan then, my sister," said Cecilia de Chamero, sighing.

The nun made a gesture in the affirmative.

"And finding yourself without protection in the world you decided on taking the veil?" continued the young girl eagerly: "you came here of your own accord? Ah! dear sister, had I been old enough to know my own inclinations when I lost my parents, I should never have entered the Convent of the Annonciades."

"But you are still free to leave it, my child," replied the nun.

"Where could I now go?" asked Mademoiselle de Chamero.

"Alas! my dear child, such reflections are sinful. Let us submit to the lot which Providence has appointed, and endeavour to love the duties which are imposed upon us. Besides, what more do we require here for the solace either of body or mind?—is there on earth a more agreeable or tranquil abode?"

At these words she rose, made the circuit of her cell, and opening the window looked out upon the garden; then resuming—

"See," she exclaimed, passing her hand over the counterpane, "we are not lodged as the capuchins, who sleep upon a plank, with a death's-head beside their pillow. This little chamber is neat and clean; there is a lovely view of the garden; and the air is so pure, and so impregnated with the sweet odour of the foliage, that one might fancy one's self in the country.

"It is true, sister," replied the young boarder; "here everything has a pleasant aspect: in winter the apartments are well heated and impervious to the cold, in summer we have long recreations, and can breathe the fresh and healthful air in the garden; nevertheless, in the midst of all this luxury and comfort I never cease to think with regret of another abode."

"The house in which your parents lived?"

"It was a dilapidated old mansion," replied Cecilia ingenuously; "it looked out upon an obscure little street, where you could not see clearly even at mid-day. My father took possession of it on his arrival in Paris, whither he had proceeded to present a petition. He was a gentleman of high family—a brave and loyal officer beggared in the service of his king. My mother accompanied him. He reckoned upon re-

turning to his country-seat with a pension. At the end of four years he had obtained nothing—and meanwhile, what misery! what destitution! My poor father! I think I still see him writing out his memorials before the window in a large room without a fire, and afterwards reading them aloud to my mother, who remained with me in bed almost all the day for want of a billet of wood to put on the hearth. We went out only on Sundays to mass; but then, what joy!—I dreamed of it all the week. We had to pass through a square called the Place Royale; sometimes the sun was shining, and then it was an unspeakable pleasure for me to course along the alleys in the open air. My mother would often kindly seat herself on a bench and allow me to play for half-an-hour, after which we would return home and immure ourselves for the rest of the week. I could not now find our dwelling again; I have even forgotten the name of the street; but I have still before my eyes the house—the damp, dark staircase, the neat and homely apartment where it was always cold, the dilapidated furniture, the large uncurtained bed, and the sideboard, ornamented with some pieces of plate which disappeared one after another. It was in that house that Angela was born, and on the same day my poor mother died!”

Cecilia’s voice faltered as she uttered these words, and her soft and laughing eyes were filled with tears.

“And then, my child,” said Sister Genevieve much affected, “what happened?”

“Alas! after this misfortune, there came another,” replied the young girl; “my father took ill, and in a few days it was evident that he had not much longer to live. During his last days Providence came to his assistance. A distant relative, having learned his forlorn situation, hastened to Versailles and interceded in his behalf. Having some credit at court, he obtained all that he required; but the munificence of the king came too late. Before he expired, my father commended us to the care of this relative, and implored him to take charge of us; he then addressed some observations to me which I hardly understood, and to which I only answered by my tears. As soon as he had rendered his soul to God, our relative the Baron de Favras brought me here. Our dear mother, moved by our misfortune, consented to receive Angela also who was still an infant in the cradle.”

“And this relative, this guardian, has he ever shown you any attention?” asked Sister Genevieve; “does he sometimes come to see you?”

“Never,” replied Cecilia—“never, although he lives very near this, for I recollect he had only to cross the street to

bring us here. He hardly knows us, and certainly cannot love us. Angela and I have no other father and protector but God."

"Poor children!" murmured Sister Genevieve, convinced of the necessity of their vocation.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was an Italian devotee, a noble lady of Genoa called Victoria Fornari, who had founded the order of the celestial Annunciation, and a Jesuit, Father Taunoni, had written out the constitution at her dictation. The object of the institution was to offer a retreat to young women, who, feeling no vocation for the world, wished to live for ever concealed and unknown, thus imitating the example of Mary, whom the angel found alone in her chamber. Their life was to be inaccessible from without, gentle and pleasant within. The house at Paris practised these observances in their primitive strictness. Directed by the Jesuit fathers of the Rue St. Antoine, it had preserved intact the traditions of the order, and there was not perhaps in all France a nunnery where the discipline was so strict, and where the duties were so light and easy. All causes of disturbance, all agitation of mind and any approach to relaxation of discipline were eagerly avoided. The majority of the nuns, inmates from infancy, never overstepped even in thought the narrow horizon which barred their gaze: for them the house was the entire universe. They were simple, ignorant, and happy souls, who floated down the stream of human life without meeting an obstacle on their course, and as it were in the midst of an eternal twilight. Some, more energetic than the rest, had felt their faculties developed in the course of their religious teachings, and they naturally turned them towards God; all their intelligence and sensibility were absorbed in their mystic existence. They sought out the ways of salvation with ardour, and found in their religious duties sufficient nourishment for their activity.

La Mere Madeleine, the superior of the Convent of the Annunciation, was a nun who had grown old in the practice of the most difficult duties of monastic life. Clever, prudent, of sincere piety, and strictly upright in character, but at the same time cheerful, easy, and gay, she governed her flock with absolute sway, tempered however with gentleness and indulgence. Elected to her dignified position at the age of twenty-five, she once more united every suffrage at the expiration of

her term of office, and, what was perhaps unparalleled in the history of religious establishments, she continued thus to exercise her functions without intermission for twenty years.

It was always from among the Jesuits of the Rue St. Antoine that the confessor and almoner of the *blue nuns* was chosen. Father Boinet, their present spiritual director, united to sincere piety the utmost correctness of conduct, and the tact and cleverness which distinguishes the members of the Society of Jesus. His superiors saw, with their usual tact and penetration, that he was one of those men who are even better defended by their appearance and manners than by their principles, and they did not hesitate to confide to his care some thirty women, who were not all reverend sisters with sallow faces and snuff-stained noses. Although deficient neither in ability, knowledge, nor acuteness, his discourses never surpassed mediocrity; no person, however, knew better than he did the art of placing himself on a level with simple minds, and entering into their modes of thinking. His portly good-humoured aspect inspired even the most timid with confidence, and he was besides so homely and uninteresting in his appearance that there was no danger of even the most enthusiastic looking upon him with any dangerous degree of admiration. In place of forcing his docile flock into the rude paths of penance and discipline, he guided them along easy ways which equally led to heaven.

From her entrance into the convent, Sister Genevieve had been the object of Father Boinet's peculiar solicitude. Confided in, and appealed to as the judge of her vocation, he had encouraged it by motives which were for ever buried in the secrets of the confessional, and which the young novice had imparted to none but himself. When the superior expressed some scruples as to the admission of this beautiful young creature, whom a sudden resolution had seemed to hurry into the cloister, he had always simply replied:—

“Do not be uneasy, reverend mother; her soul is free from taint; she has abandoned the world in her baptismal robes, and has brought hither not a single regret, nor a single recollection which can sully her purity.”

As soon as Sister Genevieve had taken the black veil, it devolved on her to assist the mistress of the boarders in her duties. The task was not a difficult one. The *Annonciades* did not pique themselves on deep study. Many of the nuns had never opened any book but their formulary; but, on the other hand, no house could equal them in embroidery or in the fabrication of altar bouquets with tinsel and gilt paper. Sister Genevieve taught the young boarders to read, and

worked with the elder ones at the church ornaments—master-pieces of skill and care, which were often a whole year in progress of construction, and in the preparation of which the whole community took a part.

The young nun had thus an opportunity of devoting her attention to the education of Felise. At first she endeavoured to subdue her proud and intractable temper, but she succeeded only imperfectly in the attempt. The little girl, naturally obstinate and wilful, resisted all her exhortations, all her commands, but yielded at once to her entreaties, for she loved her with as much tenderness as the volatile and selfish heart of childhood is capable of. On her side Sister Genevieve felt an uneasy, and, as it were, painful affection for Felise. Her gaze often rested on the pretty little creature with an expression of sorrow and bitter regret, and she would murmur as she passed her fingers through the little Angela's curling locks, who generally remained quietly on her knees, while Felise bounded about with the untamed vivacity of a mountain kid:—

"Heavenly Parent! when wilt thou grant her the grace to resemble this little angel?"

Cecilia de Chameroy also became the favourite and almost the friend of Sister Genevieve, and soon this young person discovered what the penetrating eye of the superior had never perceived, what no person ever suspected, that the soul of the young nun was overwhelmed with gloom, and with some mysterious and incurable grief. Cherished and yet sad recollections, deep regrets, secretly occupied her mind; and although she never spoke of her family, nor of the period which preceded her religious profession, Cecilia guessed that her thoughts dwelt without ceasing on all that she had left behind. Often when evening came, Sister Genevieve would stand for hours at the window of her cell, absorbed in her sad reflexions, and would shed tears as she gazed at the starry firmament. Then if her young friend came also to lean over the narrow balcony, she would say to her with a sigh—

"Oh! my Cecilia, how lovely is the night! 'Turn your eyes towards the garden; you can see nothing now but the foliage of the trees and the vault of heaven. I can fancy that I am in the country, and that I breathe the pleasant odour of the woods, and the fresh sweet air as it passes over the meadows. Oh! if you knew how lovely it is in summer evenings beneath the allays of long lime-trees by the water-side!"

Sometimes she would abandon herself to the recollections of her childhood, and, seated in her cell with Angela on her knees, would sing in a low voice the Christmas hymns of Languedoc, to which the little girl would listen with a curious

and lively air, but without understanding what they meant. Felise also would listen at such times and repeat these airs, the same doubtless with which the nurse had hushed her in the cradle. At other times, during the period of recreation, Sister Genevieve would leave the garden and proceed to a gallery situated in a part of the mansion which the nuns did not inhabit. It was a long hall, paved with marble like a church, and was still ornamented with a few pictures, whose dislocated frames, formerly gilt, were now enveloped in spiders' webs. The dust of a century had so effaced the figures and blackened the colours that nothing was to be seen but a few dim outlines on a dark ground. The furniture had altogether disappeared, except a few tattered chairs which were heaped up in disorder in the corners. This apartment, which was still termed the *hall of princes*, had at one time witnessed splendid fêtes. The light foot of the dancers had often glided over its humid pavement, while the gay ritornellas might have been heard even in the shadiest recesses of the garden. But these magnificent entertainments had left no trace behind; of all this noise and splendour there remained no other record than the dark outline which the smoke of the torches had left on certain portions of the ceiling.

One day it occurred to Cecilia to join Sister Genevieve during her solitary recreation. She found her seated at the entrance of the gallery, her head supported on her hand, and her gaze lost in the extremity of the apartment, which was dimly lighted by a ray of sunshine that streamed through the broken shutters and fell obliquely on the tapestried wall.

"Hail my dear sister," exclaimed the young girl, laughing, "what are you doing here amongst all these old portraits, which seem to stare at you so sternly from their lofty position?"

"Come hither, foolish one, and become acquainted with them," said the nun, making room for Cecilia beside her on the worm-eaten bench where she was seated. Then, resuming her pensive attitude, she added—

"I was picturing to myself the time when balls were given here."

"A ball!" repeated Cecilia, with profound astonishment; "have you any idea then, my dear sister, what a ball is like?"

"Assuredly, for I have been at one," replied Sister Genevieve with a sigh.

"You have danced?" exclaimed Cecilia, in a low voice, and clasping her hands in amazement.

Then, after a moment's reflexion, she added still lower—

"It is very delightful, is it not?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the young nun, ingenuously.



And as Cecilia continued to fix on her an inquiring gaze, she added—

"I was once at a ball, just once—the happy day on which I was sixteen."

She leaned her head on her hand, and appeared to indulge with melancholy pleasure in the childish recollection, then, suddenly rising, she took Cecilia's arm and led her towards the pictures.

"I take a pleasure in looking at all these personages," said she; "I know them every one."

"Holy Virgin! Where could you have seen them?" exclaimed the young boarder, with an astonishment tinged with some little incredulity.

"In books," replied the nun with a smile. "We are here in illustrious company. Look at the names written at the foot of the canvass, and where those are wanting at these emblazoned escutcheons."

"You know heraldry, then?"

"Yes, like all girls of noble birth who have passed their childhood in old chateaux. This house, which is now a nunnery, once belonged to the Montmorencies, for their escutcheon is everywhere, and these portraits are those of the great Constable's family."

Cecilia examined in succession the long series of faces ranged on their respective panels, and endeavoured to distinguish their features beneath the dust of ages that veiled them; then, recurring to the idea which had first struck her, she pointed to a female figure whose black eyes and white hands alone were visible on the canvass.

"Do you believe then, my dear sister," said she, "that this beautiful lady ever gave a ball here?"

"Certainly," replied Sister Genevieve; "she has, most probably, danced in this very spot the minuets and country dances which were in fashion a century ago."

"Ah!" cried Cecilia, laughing, "if our reverend mothers knew that, they would hasten to sprinkle the place with holy water!"

At this moment the tolling of the bell announced the close of the period for recreation.

"Jesu-Maria! What! already?" exclaimed Cecilia; "Mother Perpetua must have advanced the clock, I am certain. Come! we must take our leave of this fair company."

With these words the merry rattle made a low curtsy to the pictures, and skipped off, followed by Sister Genevieve.

Time meanwhile rolled on amid these monotonous duties and recreations, and four dull, uniform, uninteresting years

gradually glided away. Sister Genevieve felt every hour drag its slow length along, and to her this period of her existence seemed but one long, dreary, never-ending day.

Angela and Felise were still children, but Cecilia was on the verge of sixteen. The growing girl had become a lovely young woman, fresh and brilliant as a rose-bud in the spring. Her smooth clear complexion was exquisitely fair and blooming, and her golden locks were the finest in the world. On a sudden movement of her head her magnificent tresses would at times become unfastened, and fall down even to her feet. Then the mistress of the boarders would replace them in her black gauze cap, and gently chide the giddy-pate, who only replied, laughing—

“Pardon me, dear mother! I shall soon no longer give you this trouble. When the day arrives for my taking the white veil, the great scissors of Mother Perpetua will free me of all that!”

The period was in fact now approaching when the young boarder was to assume the attire of a novice, and she seemed to await it without either terror or disquietude. Her temper was ever cheerful, her bright and laughing eyes betrayed neither secret tears nor sleepless nights, and her charming countenance preserved its unalterable serenity. Certainly she did not manifest, on the other hand, the impatient fervour of a soul that longs to embrace its mystic ties. The worthy superior averred that she had a passive vocation, and in her opinion this was the best. She determined therefore to defer no longer the ceremony which was to close the gates of the fold for ever on this spotless lamb.

The custom for the postulant was, before taking the veil, to prepare herself for this step by some days of solitude and self-examination. There was set apart for this purpose an isolated apartment, the furniture of which was entirely in keeping with monastic poverty. A pallet without curtains was placed between a straw chair and a praying-desk; while a narrow window, opening on an inner court, shed a dreary light on the naked and whitened walls. This melancholy abode was called *the solitude*, and pious nuns sometimes requested permission to occupy it for a few days for purposes of mortification and prayer.

Mademoiselle de Chameroy still continued to all appearance gay, careless, and tranquil as ever; nevertheless the evening previous to her entering on her solitary abode, finding herself alone with Sister Genevieve, she said to her abruptly in an altered tone of voice:—

“Ah, my dear sister! I do not know what is passing within

me; I feel overwhelmed with sorrow and even with despair when I think that in eight days I shall take the veil. Oh! how I long to be a little bird, that I might escape over these walls and fly away!"

"Oh! my child, what is that you say!" exclaimed the terrified Sister Genevieve; "what! would you leave the convent?"

"To live, were it even but a few days, away from this, I think I would gladly give the rest of my existence."

"But, gracious heaven! what would become of you—in a world where you know no person, and of which you are completely ignorant?"

"What matters it?" replied Cecilia impetuously, "it looks so beautiful from this!"

Then she added, bursting into tears:—

"But I shall never leave the convent! Never—never—either living or dead!"

At this moment the nuns entered the dormitory, and Sister Genevieve had only time to press Cecilia's hand and whisper:—

"My child, to-morrow Father Boinet will doubtless come to direct your spiritual exercises; you must then reveal to him openly the state of your soul. Fear nothing; he is a good man, full of intelligence and mercy; he will listen to you with indulgence, and will console you!"

The following day Mademoiselle de Chameroy entered the retreat, and Sister Genevieve saw her no more save in the choir between the superior and the mistress of the novices.

The taking of the veil was an important event in religious houses. The ceremony attracted a great number of persons, and the good sisters took a pious pleasure in the display of their church ornaments. As the day approached, an unwonted agitation pervaded the convent. The reverend mothers never quitted the sacristy; they took out from the cypress chests the vestments of cloth of gold and the lace surplices, and began once more with pride to make out the inventory of their relics and pieces of plate, whilst the young nuns manufactured artificial bouquets, and the little boarders cut fresh paper ornaments for the waxen tapers. They sat up late in order to finish these grand preparations, and there was a collation in the workroom: in short all was activity and joy.

In the midst of this gaiety, Sister Genevieve reflected sorrowfully on Cecilia's last words; she trembled lest the exhortations of Father Boinet might prove ineffectual with this rebellious soul, and she saw the day of the ceremony arrive, with inexpressible anxiety. The evening previous to the

important day, as the choir retired, perceiving that Mademoiselle de Chameroy was proceeding alone to her cell, she waited a moment behind and hastily said as the nuns were moving away:—

"Well, my child, is your soul freed from the emotions which troubled it; have Father Boinet's admonitions strengthened you in your vocation?"

Mademoiselle de Chameroy turned towards the nun her countenance pale with the internal conflicts she had endured, and bursting into tears replied:—

"My dear sister, I am not changed; I still feel the same terrors, the same anguish—the Lord has withdrawn his favour from me."

"Have you confessed to Father Boinet?"

"Yes, my sister, I declared the repugnance, the culpable wishes I entertained in spite of myself; but he saw without anger the state of my soul. He treated my apprehensions as groundless scruples, and in short he assured me I had a sufficient vocation."

"And he has not thought fit to defer your taking the veil?"

"No, my sister; he merely recommended me to place myself in the hands of the Lord, who knows better than we ourselves the paths by which we are to come to him. Then, overcome by mortal grief, I threw myself at the knees of our reverend mother, and declared that I did not feel called to a perfect life, and that in taking the veil I risked my eternal salvation. She listened to me with extreme kindness, without blame or being astonished, and calling me always her dear daughter, her precious lamb. She afterwards assisted me to examine my conscience afresh; and although I freely avowed the sinful thoughts which arose in my mind the more I consulted my inclinations, she would not believe that the Lord had abandoned me, and persisted in reassuring me of my vocation. Oh! my dear sister, so great is my ingratitude and wickedness, that so much goodness and mercy has not moved me; I have experienced, on the contrary, feelings of rebellion and hatred. I will take the veil, but I shall not be a good nun, and in the depths of my heart I shall detest my vows."

"Oh! my child, do not utter such words," interrupted Sister Genevieve with terror; "you are in the Lord's house, a few steps from his tabernacle—"

"It is true—ah! do not punish me, Heavenly Father. I submit—thy will be done!" murmured Mademoiselle de Chameroy, drooping her head on her bosom with a gesture rather of utter prostration than of resignation.

The arrival of the superior interrupted this dialogue. On

observing Sister Genevieve, she frowned slightly and said with mild severity:—

‘Have you not heard the bell, my dear daughter? The community is already in the workroom. Go, and whilst performing your task, mentally repeat ten *Paters* and ten *Ave Marias* for having failed in holy obedience.’

Then turning towards Mademoiselle de Chameroy, she added:—

“And do you, my dear child, prepare to appear in the parlour. You have to perform a last duty to the world. You must ask the consent of your guardian the Baron de Favras to your taking the veil, and express your desire that he should be present at the ceremony. I begged him to come to-day for this purpose, and you shall see him immediately at the grating.”

“Yes, my dear mother,” replied Mademoiselle de Chameroy, with passive submission.

Many years had passed since she had seen this old guardian—who, after placing in the hands of the superior the little dowry of the two sisters, had troubled himself no further with their future destiny—and she judged truly that he had almost forgotten their existence.

The superior led Mademoiselle de Chameroy back to the solitary cell in which she was performing her probationary retreat, and then returned to the little parlour where Father Boinet entered at the same moment.

“Well, reverend father,” exclaimed the superior, “what is the result of the attempt which you have had the charity to undertake?”

“Thank Heaven, it has had perfect success;” replied Father Boinet, with the satisfied air of a man who has just triumphed in a difficult enterprise. “The Baron de Favras will shortly appear here to signify to his ward that he is opposed to her taking the veil.”

“Will he indeed do so, reverend father?” exclaimed Mother Madeleine joyfully; “are you certain of it?”

“He is quite determined.”

“And it is your reverence who has succeeded, by the happy gift of persuasion which you possess, in obtaining from the Baron de Favras his promise that he will undertake the charge of these orphans?”

“God forbid that I should take any credit for his resolution; my eloquence goes for nothing in the matter. Having inquired what sort of a man the Baron de Favras was, I relinquished my first idea, which was to confide to him the embarrassment into which we were thrown by the sudden

aversion of Mademoiselle de Chameroy for the religious profession, the scandal that might ensue if we constrained her to adopt it, and the dangerous example it might offer to the community. The baron is an old officer of the king's forces, and has all the rudeness of manner and overbearing spirit of military people. He is tinctured with Jansenism, and piques himself on his austerity: nevertheless, he never goes to mass except when absolutely necessary; he hates the members of our order and only listens to a sermon when some father of the *Oratoire* mounts the pulpit. You may imagine, my reverend mother, that I could not act openly with such a person. Heaven then inspired me with the idea of making use of his very aversion in furtherance of our design. I sent to him one on whose ability, good intentions, and discretion, I could rely. This person hinted at our influence in this house, and, in reply to his questions, made him fully aware of the spiritual authority which we exert over, and the particular affection which we bear to, the order of the Annunciation. The worthy man fired up at this discourse. He expressed his indignation at the general approbation we received, was only astonished that he had not sooner been aware of the hands into which his wards had fallen, and in short gave vent to all the injurious remarks with which passion inspires our enemies. It was at this juncture that your message arrived, and I doubt not that he will very shortly make his appearance in the parlour. It is not the salvation of these innocent souls which engages his attention, it is the hatred which he bears towards us; but whichever it may be, our object is not the less attained. This very day he will remove the two sisters, and the scandal of this affair will redound on his own head. Your daughters will never know that there has been a rebellious spirit among them, and we shall have separated in time the tare from the good grain."

"Yes, reverend father, I rejoice with you," said the superior with a sigh; "yet I confess it is not without regret that I part with these children. It seemed as if the Lord had given them to me for ever, and now all at once I lose them. If I were even assured of their happiness in this world—if I did not tremble for their eternal welfare—"

"It is a feeling which you must sacrifice to the safety of your other spiritual daughters," replied Father Boinet with authority; "consider, reverend mother, the sudden change in Mademoiselle de Chameroy and the consequences which such an example might have. You saw better than she herself into the very depths of her soul; it was not any passing feeling of disgust which she experienced, or any sudden apprehension

which one might appease; it was the vocation which was wanting, and which we cannot impart. Let her go therefore—we can now only pray for her.”

“But her sister—that sweet little creature whom we received in the cradle—to lose her too!” said the good superior, wiping away a tear which escaped, in spite of her efforts, from her eyelids.

“The baron will not take one without the other, and since we must lose or keep both, the alternative is obvious.”

“I do not hesitate, my good father,” replied the superior with resignation; “is not our life one of sacrifice and self-denial?”

At this moment the bell rang to announce that some visiter had presented himself in the parlour; the superior immediately caused Cecilia to be informed, and, proceeding to meet her, she said with an emotion which she could not entirely control:—

“Proceed to the parlour, my dear child; you know what you have to ask from your guardian; listen with respect to what he shall say, and come to me again.”

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Cecilia returned to the little parlour, pale and overcome, but with her hands raised to heaven and her face radiant with joy.

“My dear mother,” said she, “the baron refuses his consent; he will not permit me to take the veil!”

“You must submit, my dear child,” replied the superior calmly; “adore the will of God, and prepare to obey the orders of your guardian.”

“Oh, I am ready to do so!” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Chameroy with transport.

Then she added, with a mingled expression of sorrow and joy:—

“My dear mother, who would have thought it? The baron has also decided on our leaving the convent.”

“I shall not oppose it,” replied the superior, still preserving her equanimity, although her heart was sensibly afflicted. “When your father died, he handed over all his rights to the Baron de Favras; he has authority over you, and I am ready to give you into his charge.”

“And I shall leave the convent!” murmured Cecilia, clasping her hands in astonishment not unmixed with doubt. “Oh, my God, is it possible that I am about to pass the gates of the cloister?”

“Yes, my daughter,” said the superior, looking at her sorrowfully, “you are about to leave us for ever.”

At these words, which were uttered without the slightest accent of reproach, Mademoiselle de Chameroy was sensible

of her ingratitude and the involuntary error of her heart. She threw herself on her knees before the superior, bathed her venerable hands with tears, and said in a voice broken with sobs:—

“Oh! my dear mother, pardon me—I have made a bad return for all the kindness you have lavished on me. I am not worthy of the title of daughter which you have so long bestowed on me!”

The good superior could not restrain her tears; she clasped in her arms the child that was about to abandon her, and said in a voice in which sorrow, tenderness, and pious fortitude struggled for mastery:—

“My daughter—my dear daughter—in the new life on which you are about to enter, remember the example which has been set before you here. You were not called to be a saint; renounce therefore a life of seclusion, but never cease to be a Christian and a woman of honour.”

The same day Mademoiselle de Chameroi and her young sister crossed those terrible gates which opened so rarely to permit the young girls brought up in the Annunciation to enter the world again; but this great event was not known until the evening. The superior announced it to the nuns when they were assembled in the workroom to conclude the preparations for the approaching ceremony. She explained to them briefly that the Baron de Favras had interposed to prevent Mademoiselle de Chameroi from taking the veil, and commended the sisters to the prayers of the community.

This unheard-of piece of intelligence threw the good nuns into a state of inexpressible astonishment and indignation. They raised their hands to heaven, and declaimed aloud in the workroom against such tyranny.

“Sweet Saviour!” exclaimed Mother Perpetua; “such an outrage at the very moment of taking the veil! This man must be an atheist, an idolater, a huguenot!”

“He will not succeed in his damnable projects,” said another nun. “Be assured, my dear sisters, that these children will resist persecution, and, after having confounded him by their constancy, will oblige him to restore them to us once more.”

“May the Lord grant them his superintending grace,” said a third, “and hasten to open the fold again to these dear lambs!”

One of the elder sisters, who had followed the superior out of the workroom, returned at this moment.

“Ah, my dearest sisters,” said she, “let us pray for these doves on whom the cruel vulture has pounced. I have just



been speaking to Sister Ursula. It was she who opened the parlour-door to this bad man; she was there when he took them away."

"Oh, my dear mother, tell us all! What was he like? What did he say?" exclaimed all the nuns.

"Why, he is an old gentleman, quite crippled with gout and rheumatism; his valet had to give him his arm to assist him to the parlour. Sister Ursula did not hear what he said at first to Mademoiselle de Chameroy; she merely perceived that he spoke in an angry tone of voice, uttered many threats, and was prepared apparently to drive matters to extremity, for our reverend mother yielded the point at once. They brought the two sisters to him, the convent gates were opened, and the poor children departed, shedding tears. Angela was terrified when she heard the noise in the streets; she returned quite confounded, and her sister was at last obliged to carry her away in her arms."

"Poor children! May the Lord deliver them from the power of that bad man!" exclaimed Mother Perpetua. "My dear sisters, we must ask the very reverend Father Boinet to make a *neuvaine*\* for this purpose."

During this colloquy Sister Genevieve sat aloof, weeping and holding the hand of little Felise, who whispered from time to time, with a surprised and sorrowful air—

"Do you hear? The Chameroy's are gone? They went without telling you, and yet you loved them so dearly!"

Sister Genevieve returned thanks to Heaven for this event, which changed the fate of her young friend; but from that time a more deep-rooted sorrow weighed upon her soul—a death-like weariness wasted her away. It was a separation which deprived her of a powerful and unceasing source of consolation. Cecilia's cheerful temper had often dispelled her sorrow, and she felt in her own mind a sort of reflection of her young friend's cheerful disposition and engaging manners. She had felt a solace also in the care which she lavished on her sister. Angela had, without her knowing it, become even dearer to her than Felise, and she was in the habit of looking on her as a child that heaven had given her for ever. At first she cherished a vague hope that she would be restored to her, but Father Boinet, who for some time had allowed her to retain this faint consolation, deprived her of it by degrees, and made her understand that she was for ever separated from the two charming beings whom she had educated with so much love. The world was indeed hermetically closed to the daughters of the Annuncia-

\* A nine days' devotion.

tion; no noise ever penetrated the massive walls of the cloister; and though the mansion of the Baron de Favras was situated in the neighbourhood, and one could almost perceive from the gate of the convent what took place in his dwelling, the nuns never heard the *Demoiselles de Chameroi* spoken of again.

Sister Genevieve relapsed by degrees into a sort of mental languor, a physical exhaustion, from which however she did not appear to suffer. She was like a young and vigorous plant, which, transplanted by violence into a place without sun or air, withers by degrees and slowly perishes. She vegetated thus for some years without complaining, without expressing any apprehension, and without even being aware that her waning existence was about to close. Almost till the last moment she appeared among the choir and performed her task in the workroom. Neither did she give up her duties of under-mistress of the boarders; during the hours of labour she still watched the idle and inattentive little hands of the children, collected in a circle round her; but during recreation, in place of following them, she remained seated at the entrance of the garden, her head drooping, and her wandering looks sometimes turned towards the sky, sometimes on the trees, whose leaves began to fall.

One evening she was so weak that she could not reach her cell alone, and sunk fainting into the arms of the nuns who accompanied her. The superior hastened to her immediately, and, judging that her wasting malady had arrived at its climax, she summoned Father Boinet. Sister Genevieve spoke no more, her breathing was difficult and unequal, and her half-open eyelids displayed only a portion of those blue orbs whose gentle radiance was already dull. Life was about to abandon this weakened frame, and the soul hovered on the uncertain confines of eternity. Father Boinet spoke to her, but she no longer heard, and before the ceremonies with which the church surrounds the dying were completed, she breathed her last. She expired without suffering, murmuring some unintelligible words, and sighing faintly like a child that falls asleep.

They had taken away Felise from the first, and she passed the night in a remote cell. She slept without uneasiness, for, with the inexperience and thoughtlessness of her age, she never dreamed of death. As Sister Genevieve was yet so young, it had never entered her mind that she might soon die, and the preceding evening she was not alarmed although seeing her so weak and ill. In the morning when the bell sounded the first *Angelus*, she rose, wondering at the silence which reigned throughout the dormitory, and, still without feeling

any apprehension, she proceeded softly to seek the other boarders. At this moment the superior entered to announce, herself, the sad event.

"My dear daughter," said she, leading her to her cell, "kneel down and commend your heart and soul to God, that he may comfort you. Young as you are, you have experienced a great misfortune."

Felise obeyed, fixing on the superior her large clear eyes, in which astonishment rather than uneasiness was depicted. While she thus interrogated her with her looks, not daring to address a direct question to her, the passing-bell was heard resounding along the dormitory. Felise uttered a cry and began to tremble; she had all at once divined the fatal event, and her features expressed at the same moment anxiety, doubt, and utter despair.

"Pray, my child," said the superior, overwhelmed with grief; "pray and submit; God has taken away Sister Genevieve—she is in heaven with the angels."

"She is dead! No—no—I will not believe it!" exclaimed Felise, rushing to the door.

The good mother could not keep her back, and the nuns whom she met in the passage vainly tried to arrest her progress. Distracted, she ran to the cell of Sister Genevieve, and remained as if thunderstruck on the threshold. The poor lifeless form was stretched on her pallet, clothed in the garments of her order and the crucifix between her hands; her face was so pale and calm that the beholder might have imagined he saw the marble image of a saint of the order, clothed in the long white tunic, the scapulary, and mantle of celestial blue.

Felise looked steadfastly, and as if transfixed, at this woful picture; she then knelt down in a corner of the cell and remained motionless, her form drooping and her countenance turned towards the wall. The exhortations of Father Boinet and the attentions of the superior were fruitless; she neither changed her place nor could be induced to utter a word, and her grief was only evinced at intervals by a low sob or an involuntary shudder. She did not shed a tear, but her half-closed eyes were surrounded with a livid circle, as if the tears which found no outlet had crushed her snowy, transparent eyelids.

Some hours afterwards the community came in solemn procession to seek the remains of Sister Genevieve, and convey them according to custom to the middle of the choir, where they were to rest till the following day. When they had removed the bier, Felise rose of her own accord and followed the mournful train. During the rest of that day and the fol-

lowing night, whilst the nuns prayed, she kept aloof, her body bent down and resting on her knees, and her head sunk upon her breast. Neither exhortations nor commands were able to rouse her from her stupor, and she remained in the same state during the interment; but when all was over, when the body was deposited in the vaults of the church, her passive suffering changed into frightful despair. The unhappy child repulsed the nuns who hastened to surround her, and left the choir with a rapid step; but almost immediately her strength failed her, and she paused at the foot of the grand staircase.

"My dear daughter," said the superior, with a mixture of mildness and decision, "you sin grievously at once again: God and yourself in giving way to these transports. It is not in this way that the grief of a Christian should manifest itself."

"My dear mother," said Felise, interrupting her, and speaking in an abrupt and hurried manner, "I have a favour to ask of you—one which you will surely not refuse me after the deplorable misfortune which has happened."

"Speak, my dear daughter; I am disposed to grant you everything that may be needful for your comfort. What do you ask?—what do you wish for?"

"I wish to leave this house instantly," replied Felise, casting a distracted look around her; "I long to be far away from this place!"

At this unexpected avowal a murmur of astonishment and indignation was heard on all sides. Never had any girl brought up at the Annunciation uttered such words: it was almost blasphemous—a sentence of condemnation pronounced by her own lips on one who wished to abandon the sacred asylum where her youth had found temporal and spiritual nurture. The superior, somewhat moved and at the same time scandalised, exclaimed, raising her hands to heaven:—

"The Evil Spirit is plotting the destruction of this feeble and erring creature! Pray for her, dear sisters!—it is a soul which we must lead back to God."

With these words she motioned to the nuns to retire, and approaching Felise said with her habitual tone of patience and

"Come, my dear daughter, your body is not less indisposed than your soul; you can hardly support yourself—lean upon my arm."

"Whither do you wish to lead me?" exclaimed Felise, with an expression of fierce despair. "Would you have me return to the cell of my Aunt Genevieve—revisit once more the choir, the workroom, the garden—in short, every place where I have

been accustomed to meet her? No—no; since she is no longer there I shall see them no more!"

"I will bring you to my own cell, my child," replied the superior, filled with commiseration: "I myself will tend you and comfort you; you will be consoled, dear Felise. "God at times tries his creatures and deals out grievous afflictions, but his mercy comforts and soothes the desolate heart. Your grief is transitory; it is only souls sunk in iniquity who suffer eternally. Soon, very soon, you will discover that heaven has not abandoned you. It is true you have lost one who was very dear to you, but there remains a numerous family to whom you are united by all the ties of love and Christian charity. I am your mother, dear Felise; the daughters of the Annunciation are your sisters."

After waiting for a moment to observe the effect of these words, she added, with an air of affectionate authority—

"Come, my child, follow me."

The poor forlorn one made a step backwards, and turned away her head.

"Obey, my daughter," replied the superior, in a severe and sorrowful tone; "if I cannot persuade, I shall be obliged to constrain you."

Felise remained motionless, and did not reply. The superior then having called two lay sisters, desired them to conduct her to a cell close to her own, and not to lose sight of her for a moment.

When Father Boinet learned from the superior what had happened, he said, after some reflection—

"This is a serious matter, reverend mother. This child cannot leave the convent as the *Mademoiselles de Chameroy* did. Whatever be her vocation she must become a nun."

"Oh! my father, what do I hear?" exclaimed the superior. "Have I not often heard, you express your abhorrence of forced vocations, and denounce the obstinacy of parents who oblige their children to take the vows?"

"It is true," he replied quickly; "but, without further explanation, believe me that this child's place is not in the world, and that charity urges you to use every means to keep her here, and induce her to take the veil."

The cell in which Felise had been placed was separated from the dormitory by the two apartments belonging to the superior. It was neat and well lighted, looked towards the garden, and was warmed and cheered by the rays of the autumnal sun. A lay sister took charge of the young boarder, and remained constantly with her, but without uttering a word. Every morning the superior spent an hour with her,

every evening she again returned; but her patience, her exhaustless charity, her skill in winning over souls, were powerless before this extreme and resolute grief. Felise was inaccessible to every species of consolation. At times gloomy, silent, and dejected, she passed whole hours in the darkest corner of her cell, her head drooping upon her breast, and absorbed in mournful reverie; at other times she had paroxysms of despair, whose violence exhausted her strength, and which were succeeded by complete mental prostration.

One day the superior brought one of her companions to see her, and, retiring immediately afterwards, left them together.

The young boarder then seated herself beside Felise, who as yet had not spoken to her, and embracing her said with tears in her eyes—

“Oh! my dear friend, how afflicted we all are! Our reverend mother has requested that we should offer prayers for you, and every day after mass the whole community chaunt a nine-days’ service on your account. You must certainly be comforted by it, and when it is completed you will return to us again.”

Felise was silent, and merely shook her head.

“We will throw ourselves at the feet of our mother,” exclaimed the young boarder; “we will intercede for you, and when you are forgiven, we shall seek you again; and, as Mother Perpetua says, we shall bear you back in triumph to the fold.”

These tokens of kindness and affection produced no greater effect on Felise than the admonitions of the superior, the good Mother Madeleine. She withdrew her hand from her young friend, and replied briefly—

“No; allow me to remain here. I feel better here than with you.”

“Jesu-Maria! do you then love us no more?”

“I do not know. I have but one thought, one feeling now—that my Aunt Genevieve is dead, and that I shall never, never, see her again! I wish to die too, I loved her so dearly.”

At these words she burst into tears, and covering her face with her apron as if to shut out the light of day, she signed to the young boarder to leave her. The latter retired sorrowfully from the cell to impart to her companions the state in which she found Felise; but the superior, whom she met on her way, having heard her account of what had taken place, said to her in a serious tone:—

“It is well, my daughter; you have spoken to this poor child as you ought to have done. At present charity commands you to suppress the replies which the evil spirit has dictated to

her, and when your companions question you on this subject, you may simply say that she listened to your discourse without breaking silence. This is not a falsehood; it is an allowable suppression, which you are at liberty to make."

Next day, Mother Madeleine said to her spiritual director:—

"I have faithfully followed your instructions, reverend father, but hitherto without success. In spite of your penetration and address, you have not perhaps altogether appreciated this child's character. Notwithstanding her habitual giddiness and carelessness, she displays a stubbornness of will very unusual at her time of life. Although she had a sincere affection for poor Sister Genevieve, her heart seems incapable of attachment; she no longer loves any one here, and only yields to authority and force. I am deeply afflicted at finding myself unable to ameliorate her disposition, and I always leave her overwhelmed with grief."

"Then you have not, reverend mother," said Father Boinet, "observed the least change, the slightest progress?"

"Not the least; she remains exactly in the same state. My exhortations weary her, the attentions of Sister Ursula annoy her; she pines away in a state of profound depression, and if we keep her long, she will perish."

"You despair then of this soul, reverend mother," said Father Boinet, with a slight accent of reproach: "you are ready to abandon your task? But the good pastor did not thus leave his lost sheep to stray at random. There is more than one way of reclaiming her and we must consult upon the best."

He reflected a moment, and resumed:—

"This child must quit the convent for a time."

"She is an orphan; in what hands, good heaven! can she be placed with safety?"

"You may remember, reverend mother, that she was brought here by a lady nine years ago, on the last day of this year. She was a near relative, her mother's sister, who came from a remote distance to place her in the Convent of the Annunciation. Since then, this person has sent from time to time to inquire for Sister Genevieve and to entreat her prayers. She lives near this, and will not refuse to receive her niece."

"But, reverend father," observed the superior, "it is contrary to your first decision, to restore Felise to the world."

"If what I have been told be true, it is to send her, on the contrary, to a dreary abode, and she will soon herself request to return here. Let our design be concealed from her to the last moment: I shall at once proceed to work, and endeavour to bring the matter to a successful issue."

"May heaven bless your efforts and your intentions," exclaimed the worthy superior, with gratitude. "It is certain, reverend father, that God always prompts you towards whatever may redound to his glory, as well as to the repose and the prosperity of this house."

The second evening following, after vespers, Father Boinet requested an interview with the superior in the little parlour.

"With heaven's assistance I have arranged this matter satisfactorily," said he; "the lady before whom I presented myself was sensibly affected on learning the death of our poor Sister Genevieve, but refused for a long time to receive her niece. It was no easy task to vanquish her resolution. In the mean time, reverend mother, call hither your rebellious child."

Felise entered the parlour with a countenance of indifference and gloom. She perhaps expected a severe admonition, and was prepared to receive it in silence; but in place of addressing her with severity, Father Boinet said in a kind voice:—

"You have expressed a desire to leave this establishment, mademoiselle; do you still persist in your resolution?"

"Yes, reverend father," stammered Felise, embarrassed by this unexpected question.

"In that case," replied Father Boinet, "you may leave it to-day; your aunt Mademoiselle Philippine de Saulieu will receive you in her house."

"My Aunt Philippine!" repeated Felise with a feeling of vague apprehension, for this name immediately recalled the gloomy impressions of her childhood.

"You are about to be conducted to her house," said the superior; "may heaven grant that you there experience the consolation which you found not here! Love her, honour her, live in the fear of God, and remember that the Convent of the Annunciation is ever open to those who, weary of the world, long to return there for the remainder of their days."

Felise hesitated for a moment; on one side she pictured to herself the stern and commanding countenance of her aunt, accompanied by old Suzanne; on the other the sad and desolate dwelling where Sister Genevieve had dwelt and from which she had departed for ever. The feeling of this cruel bereavement decided her; she moved instinctively towards the door, and said with a choking voice, and covering her face with her handkerchief:—

"I am ready!"



## CHAPTER V.

SOME fifty paces from the Convent of the Annunciation there was situated a large mansion fronted by a high dead wall, the only opening in which was a carriage entrance. The court which separated this abode from the street was planted with elms, whose branches had been suffered for years to grow in wild luxuriance, and which formed a thick and somewhat gloomy shade. Beyond these there opened a vestibule, which the vicinity of the trees deprived of the little light which a window secured with iron bars permitted to penetrate. A large stone staircase occupied one side of it, but from the appearance of the steps, covered as they were with a layer of dust which no broom had ever disturbed, it was evident that the upper apartments were not inhabited. Beyond the vestibule was an antechamber of such vast dimensions that the retinue of a grandee of Spain might have found ample accommodation in it, and so dark that even at mid-day there reigned in it but a doubtful twilight.

Felise entered this gloomy and silent abode, conducted by Suzanne, who had gone to receive her at the gate of the cloister. The morose waiting-maid still retained the same surly air, the same shrill voice, and the same anxious, withered, old-maidish look that had formerly characterised her. At this moment she seemed to labour under some suppressed feeling of irritation, and muttered incoherent exclamations, accompanied by abrupt gestures. Felise followed close behind her, almost trembling, and not venturing to utter a word. In the antechamber she found old Balin, dressed in black as formerly, silent, stiff, and motionless in his suit of livery. On recognising Felise by a side glance, he threw open the door of an adjoining apartment, drawing himself up at the same time to let her pass. Although naturally neither apprehensive nor timid, she entered with a palpitating heart this vast apartment, feebly lighted by the last beams of day, at the extremity of which she dimly perceived a female figure erect and motionless. In place of advancing, she paused, confused and not daring to raise her eyes; then, making an effort, she stammered out:—

“You do not recollect me perhaps, aunt?”

“Oh, yes! I recollect you, Felise,” replied Mademoiselle Philippine de Saulieu, casting on her but one glance, and then turning away with a shudder which betrayed the involuntary

feeling of repulsion under which she laboured; but quickly overcoming this impression she added.—

"Then you were uncomfortable in the convent since you wished to leave it?"

"Yes, since I lost my good Aunt Genevieve," she replied, weeping. "So long as she lived I never thought of leaving the convent. Could I ever leave her?—I loved her so well! When I went to her I was a mere child; I knew no other relatives; for I never saw you, aunt, and had almost forgotten you."

At these words she raised her eyes to recognise the noble and beautiful features which had remained imprinted on her memory, but she could scarcely believe she saw the same person. Those fair locks which formerly hung in golden curls had become perfectly white, and their silver bands shaded a brow furrowed with wrinkles; the delicate features were sallow and withered, and premature age had stooped that queenly figure. Mademoiselle de Saulieu still retained the deep mourning which she wore, when she arrived in Paris; her velvet robe trailed behind like a widow's train, and her black crape handkerchief was fastened with pins of bronzed steel. Felise gazed at her with astonishment and sorrow; then, struck with her dreary costume as well as with her countenance, she said with a sigh.—

"You are in deep mourning for my Aunt Genevieve?"

"I have worn it for ten years, and I shall continue to do so for the remainder of my life," replied Mademoiselle de Saulieu.

Suzanne had entered the apartment with Felise, and appeared to watch with anxiety the effect of this first interview upon her mistress. Apparently she saw that Mademoiselle de Saulieu had already recovered from the painful impression which the appearance of her niece had produced upon her, for she approached Felise and said somewhat mildly:—

"With mademoiselle's permission will you not retire to your apartment?"

"As you please, Suzanne," replied she, well satisfied to escape from the embarrassment of this first interview, in which her aunt played so cold and laconic a part.

When she had curtsied and turned to retire, Mademoiselle de Saulieu glanced after her, and murmured with a sigh which seemed to issue from the depths of her lacerated and bleeding heart.—

"Good heavens! what a sacrifice!"

She then once more seated herself in her usual place, and mechanically resumed her embroidery.

The suite of apartments which Mademoiselle de Saulieu occupied was on the ground floor, and was composed of three large rooms forming the interior façade of the building, and running back so as to form two wings extending to the garden. Each of these wings, which were not deep, contained but one apartment on each story. The chamber which opened from Mademoiselle de Saulieu's apartment had been hastily arranged for Felise's reception. This abode was far from presenting the cheerful and agreeable aspect of the convent cells: the walls, which were divided into panels and painted in imitation of cameos, had no other decoration. Each compartment formed a picture representing a group of allegorical personages, such as the Seasons, the Elements, &c.—a procession of white figures on a grey ground which produced a most melancholy effect. The mantelpiece, under which one might stand erect, was covered with festoons of carved wood-work, and the huge four-post bed, placed on a platform, was of dimensions well calculated to astonish a young person accustomed to the narrow couch with its white coverlet, in which the boarders of the Annonciades enjoyed such tranquil slumbers.

The day began to decline, and the lofty windows which looked out upon the garden admitted but a feeble twilight which each instant grew less. The autumn wind whistled through the chinks of the doors and rustled the curtains against the wood-work. Felise, shivering with cold, seated herself upon a stool, and surveyed the apartment with a mournful air. Suzanne lighted a couple of wax tapers, opened one of those beautiful cabinets inlaid with mother-of-pearl and shell, which served at once as secretary and wardrobe, and commenced to arrange the modest effects of the young boarder. Among the robes and linen, carefully folded, was the casket which Mademoiselle de Saulieu had intrusted to Sister Genevieve on the day on which Felise had entered the Annonciades. As it had been immediately placed in the hands of the superior, and had remained from that period shut up in a press of the sacristy, Felise had entirely forgotten it. Even now she did not perceive the sudden movement which Suzanne made when she found it beneath her hands; the old waiting-maid cast but one glance at the rich jewel-case and hastened to place it in a secret drawer which she closed on the instant. After all these arrangements were completed, she withdrew the bed-curtains, folded down the coverlet, and said to Felise, who, with her hands crossed beneath her apron and her head drooping, followed with her eyes all her movements without uttering a

"At present, mademoiselle, I am about to serve supper; afterwards you will go to bed."

"What! already?" observed Felise; "at the convent they never retired to rest till nine o'clock. I am not sleepy yet; I should like to sit with my aunt, if she will permit me, during the evening."

"Mademoiselle never sits up late," replied Suzanne; "so soon as it is night she retires to bed and there is no further stir in the house."

"Holy Virgin! what do you tell me! Our reverend mother always said that in order not to have bad dreams one should take a little recreation before going to sleep, and sanctify one's soul by prayer. Does my aunt take no amusement after supper?"

"She does not sup. I shall presently bring her a biscuit and a glass of water after she has retired to bed; that is her entire repast."

"And is this all she takes the whole year round?"

"The entire year. But you are not obliged to follow her example. For you supper is about to be served."

"I am not hungry," replied Felise sorrowfully.

Nevertheless, when she saw Suzanne take a light and prepare to leave the room, she preferred following her to remaining alone until the next day in this vast apartment, the aspect of which appeared to her so gloomy. The dining-room into which Suzanne conducted her was large and sombre, like all the other apartments; and in the evening the light of the wax candles scarcely rendered visible the lofty ceiling, rounded in the form of a cupola, and painted in fresco in the Italian style. In the centre of the room was a large table, on which was arranged a dinner-service of plate for a single person. The sideboard opposite was ornamented with silver salvers of colossal dimensions, which shone like huge shields in the uncertain light.

Felise sat down, gazing with an astonished eye at this sumptuous display, and at the saloon whose walls were lighted up, as it were, with the profusion of plate arrayed on the sideboard. The poor child endeavoured to partake of the cold collation which was set before her, but she could taste only a little fruit and wine. While she made this slender repast, Balin, with his napkin over his arm, stood behind her chair ready to change her plate and pour out for her to drink. The old servant's countenance was mingled in her thoughts with vague recollections of her infancy, and she began to recall to mind the time, already distant, when she arrived after her long journey at the gate of the Annonciades. She remembered distinctly the moment when Balin lifted her from the carriage and carried her

to the wicket, where the heavy folding-doors opened noiselessly to admit her.

"It is many years since I saw you," said she, turning quickly round, "nevertheless I recollected you at once; but you would not have known me, I am sure, if Suzanne had not announced me?"

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," replied Balin drily.

"Oh!" said she incredulously, holding her hand on a level with the edge of the table, "I was not taller than that when you left me at the door of the Annonciades; and my features can bear little resemblance to those of a child of five."

"It is not in my memory that I have preserved the features of mademoiselle, which I would have known anywhere," replied Balin; "it is from the family likeness."

"Do I then resemble my poor mother?" asked Felise

Balin sighed and shook his head.

"Then my face must remind you of my father's," continued Felise; "my father!—alas! I see him as if in a dream; I have a confused recollection of his features."

"It is not possible!" murmured Balin; "you deceive yourself."

Felise leaned her elbow on the table, her gaze fixed on vacancy and her head resting upon her hand, and resumed slowly, interrupting herself at intervals like one who endeavours to recall to mind events almost faded from the memory.

"We lived in a chateau. There was an apartment hung with blue tapestry and a great many rose-trees before the windows. It was my mother's room, I think—but I cannot remember her—my poor mother! My father's face on the contrary is distinctly present to my eyes. He had handsome features, a lofty forehead, and a somewhat pale complexion. One day, it must have been the last on which I saw him, he was dressed all in black, and apparently this gloomy costume terrified me, for when he advanced to embrace me I turned away, shrieking. He was not in the chateau then; he was in some place which I do not recollect—nevertheless, I see—I still see—"

Here she paused, as if to disentangle these scattered scenes and pictures of the past; then turning towards Balin, she suddenly resumed:—

"But now I think of it, you too were there: it was you who carried me in your arms to the room where my father was—then you brought me to my Aunt Philippine, and I did nothing but cry the whole way, I cannot tell why. You see I recollect."

"It is true!" replied Balin, who had turned deadly pale as he listened, and whose trembling lips could hardly articulate; but Felise, busied with her own thoughts, did not observe his agitation.

After a long silence he resumed:—

"Permit me to give you one piece of advice; never repeat to Suzanne what you have just told me; more especially beware of speaking of it to mademoiselle; and never ask her a single question about your family."

With these words he took up a taper and preceded Felise, who returned dejectedly to her chamber.

Suzanne hastened to put her in bed, and then, after making the circuit of the apartment in order to see that all was safe, retired, taking the lights with her. When Felise found herself alone, shut in by the curtains, and left in silence and darkness, she began to reflect and to collect her scattered thoughts. From the moment she had crossed the threshold of the convent a sort of dreary astonishment had diverted her attention from her sufferings; but when she no longer saw the gloomy abode she at present inhabited, when the shrill accents of Suzanne and the croaking voice of old Balin no longer sounded in her ears, her thoughts once more flew back to her poor Aunt Genevieve, and she commenced anew to weep bitterly for her loss. Her tears flowed long, and moistened the cambric pillow on which her head reposed, till at length towards morning, utterly worn out, she sunk into a deep slumber.

During the day as well as the night, a mournful silence pervaded the dwelling of Mademoiselle de Saulieu; no noise from without penetrated there, for the garden front of the mansion was separated from the street by the court-yard and by the deep vestibule, the doors of which were always closed. When Felise awoke, she saw that it was day by the faint rays which gleamed through the fissures of the shutter and fell upon her pillow. She hastened to get up, and at the same moment a neighbouring clock, possibly that of the convent, struck nine.

"Holy Virgin!" she innocently exclaimed, "Aunt Philipine will scold me, and that cross Suzanne will call me lazy! At this hour everybody must have been long since astir."

She scarcely took time to dress, and, opening her door with a sort of fear, she entered a saloon which separated her apartment from that of Mademoiselle de Saulieu; the windows were still closed however, and the most profound silence reigned in the mansion. This stillness and gloom aroused a feeling of terror in her breast; she advanced with some hesitation, and perceiving at the other extremity of the saloon a door partly open through which the sun shone brightly, she ventured to

cross it, and found herself in a large apartment opening into the garden. It was the saloon in which she had been received the evening before, but she had not then observed the furniture or the general arrangement of its details.

No person appeared; no sound was audible. Felise glanced curiously round this room which Mademoiselle de Saulieu usually occupied. Her attention was first arrested by two portraits placed on each side of the fireplace. One, which she recognised at once, was that of her Aunt Philippine, but such as she had never known her, richly attired, her fair hair wreathed with pearls, flowers on her bosom and a smile upon her lips. The other represented a man in the prime of life; a military uniform displayed to advantage his vigorous and active form; he held his plumed hat in one hand, and with the other caressed a favourite hound. The picture bore a singular impress of truth. The head was animated, and the look especially—clear, gentle, penetrating—was almost living. These two faces, so beautiful, so bright, and on whose foreheads shone pride and happiness, and the bounding hopes of youth, seemed out of place in this immense saloon hung with black like the apartment of a widow, and whose very mirrors were covered with black gauze draperies. Mademoiselle de Saulieu's arm-chair fronted these portraits and was half surrounded by a screen on whose folds were painted, in greyish outline, the insignia of mourning. On a work-table placed beside it there was a piece of tapestry partly wrought, and a book of prayer. A large cat reposed on the seat, and followed with its half-opened greenish eye every movement of Felise, as she slowly made the circuit of the apartment, returning at last to the pictures, which she again contemplated with a sort of dreamy curiosity. The sight of those noble and charming faces aroused confused impressions in her mind, and she could not turn away her eyes. Suzanne surprised her in her contemplation.

"Are you there already, mademoiselle?" exclaimed the *porose* waiting-woman; "I was about to call you."

"Thanks, Suzanne," replied she turning quickly round; "I feared I had slept too long, and I made all haste to dress. I said my prayers hurriedly and came here expecting to find my aunt."

"Mademoiselle never rises till noon."

"Jesu-Maria! is she still sleeping?"

"She is taking repose—she is so weak!"

"Oh, yes! she looks very old now," said Felise, raising her eyes towards the picture. "Her face is quite pale and wrinkled; how different from that face!"

"She was like that at twenty years of age," said Suzanne with a sigh; "who could recognise her now?"

"And the other picture," resumed Felise, "is it that of some gentleman of our family?"

Suzanne merely shook her head.

"It is the picture of one who is dead?" continued Felise with instinctive penetration.

At this second question Suzanne started, and turned upon Felise a look at once uneasy, astonished, and full of secret horror, as if this single word had awakened dreadful recollections in her bosom. When she had recovered a little from this fearful emotion, she said abruptly—"Do not ever appear to notice these pictures; above all never question *mademoiselle* about them. At present you may take a turn in the garden if you choose."

With these words she opened one of the glass doors, and gently pushed Felise out upon the steps. The garden, which extended along the entire length of the façade of the mansion, and was bounded by a high dilapidated wall, presented much the appearance of a huge dry moat in which an attempt had been made to trace out flower-beds and walks. The lofty buildings which bounded it on the south prevented the sun from penetrating its depths even in the middle of summer. Some wretched lilacs, and a Guelder rose or two, threw out their branches in this eternal shade, but no flower bloomed within the thin and stunted borders of box, which formed symmetrical compartments in front of the windows: moss alone covered the beds, the stones, and even the roots of the shrubs with its tenacious vegetation. At the angle of the garden which was formed by the boundary wall of the inclosure and the wing of the building which Felise occupied, there was a sort of summer-house with a trellised roof, covered with straggling stalks of ivy. It was Balin who in his moments of leisure had arranged this recess, around which he kept constantly sowing the seeds of climbing plants, which never appeared above the soil.

Felise seated herself on the highest step of the portico. The garden of the Annonciades appeared to her a terrestrial paradise in comparison with the little greenish enclosure before her eyes, and she found her aunt's sitting-room, hung with black, much more gloomy than the halls of the convent. The prophecies of Father Boinet were now perhaps at the point of being fulfilled; Felise at that moment had perhaps already, like the Israelites of old, regretted her captivity, if a word from Suzanne had not suddenly changed the entire current of her feelings.

The old waiting-woman half opened the glass door, and said in a gruff voice :—



"Since you are not walking, come hither till I dress you. To-day is Sunday and you must go to mass."

"I am going out! I am going into the street!" exclaimed Felise, her heart beating with surprise and joy. "Jesu-Maria! I never dreamed of that—I had forgotten that there was no convent door here!"

Her toilet was soon completed. Suzanne threw over her boarder's dress a petticoat of black satin with large folds, fastened on her shoulders a mantle of the same material, and completed her attire with a bonnet closely fastened under her chin, and flapped over her eyes so as to permit nothing to be seen but the lower part of her face.

When old Suzanne had settled the last pin, Felise hastened to the door, without so much as glancing at the mirror before which she had dressed, and said with mingled impatience and satisfaction:—

"I am ready now—let us go at once." Then correcting herself she added:—

"Perhaps we had better wait for Aunt Philippine?"

"Mademoiselle never goes out," replied Suzanne; "she has a dispensation and reads mass at home. It is I who am to accompany you."

It was one of those lovely autumnal mornings which tempts abroad the entire population of Paris. The humbler citizens and artisans already thronged the streets in their best attire; the carriages began to roll along, and on all sides rose on the ear that low, incessant, and monotonous murmur, resembling the sound of the ocean waves, which is heard night and day in the great city.

Felise walked on a few paces in advance of her duenna, light and joyous as a bird. She had been seized with a sort of vertigo on breathing the open air; the instinct of liberty was once more alive and vigorous in her soul, and it seemed to her as if her feet were not sufficiently active to bear her onward—she would have skimmed through the air upon wings. Suzanne, rather discomposed by her brisk gait, muttered between her teeth, and sometimes held her back by the petticoat, exclaiming angrily:—

"Mighty fine, mademoiselle! you bound along like a mountaineer! Walk quietly and straight forward, without staring at the people and turning round every instant like a weathercock!"

But Felise could not avoid looking around from time to time at the crowds who elbowed each other along the sides of the houses, while the carriages proudly held the centre of the streets, and she followed with a longing eye the little girls in

their Sunday dresses as they crossed to and fro over the thoroughfares without guide or protector. Suzanne brought her to the church of the Jesuits in the Rue St. Antoine, and when she saw the beggars displaying their rags and their sores on the door-way, and imploring charity in lamentable tones, she was seized with astonishment. In convents, where poverty was a vow, the spectacle of want was never presented to the eye, and it was the first time that Felise had ever seen the really poor. Her generosity awoke at the sight, and she turned to Suzanne and said, looking towards the famished group:—

“I should like to give them money.”

“You can do so,” replied Suzanne, drawing a handful of money from her pocket and giving it to her; “you can afford that and much more—you are rich.”

Felise listened to the mass with wandering thoughts: the church was crowded with rank and fashion, and in place of perusing her missal she gazed with insatiable curiosity at everything that surrounded her. The ladies' dresses peculiarly attracted her attention, for she instinctively delighted in what was rich and elegant. On leaving the church she happened to see through a half-opened door a quantity of silk and lace dresses in a shop.

“I should like to buy that,” said she, stopping.

“That robe of Indian satin with white wreaths on a dark ground, and that blonde lace?” asked Suzanne with a careless air.

“Yes, that is it.”

“You shall have them to-morrow. At present it is impossible; shopkeepers do not sell their goods on Sunday.”

Returning from church, the young girl found Mademoiselle de Saulieu in the saloon. She was seated in her usual place behind the screen, whose circular folds formed a little retreat in the midst of this vast apartment hung with black. She was reading the service of the day in the missal placed before her on the stand, close by her folded work, while her grey cat slumbered on the cushion which her feet hardly pressed. She replied by an inclination of her head to Felise's salutation, and making a sign to her to sit down, she continued her reading. At the first stroke of noon she closed her book; Balin threw open the folding-door, and said in a loud voice:—

“Mademoiselle, dinner is served.” And thereupon they proceeded to table.

The gloomy festival at which the statue of the Commander presided was not more silent or melancholy than this family repast, the sumptuousness of which formed a striking contrast with the scanty number and dejected countenances of the

guests. Poor Felise scarcely ate a morsel, and hardly ventured to raise her eyes from the table. The severe and immovable countenance of her aunt chilled and discouraged her; she seemed to her like some supernatural being, living and dead at the same time. One would have said, indeed, that Mademoiselle de Saulieu endeavoured to reduce life to the narrowest limits, and that her only object was to arrive at a purely passive state of existence. She hardly spoke, and only moved from her bedroom to her sitting-room. Never had she advanced as far as the vestibule, and never once had she made the circuit of the marshy garden whose moss-covered walks she saw every day from her accustomed seat.

No strange face had ever appeared in this mansion before the day when Father Boinet had called to pay the diplomatic visit which had caused the return of Felise to her aunt. This accomplished, he had never again presented himself at the door of the hotel, probably because he felt that the austere proprietor would not willingly receive him a second time.

Suzanne, old Balin, and a stout wench called Cateau, constituted the whole household. Cateau never left her kitchen, and during a space of nine years she had not once seen her mistress's countenance, nor even caught a glimpse by stealth of her spectre-like form. Balin guarded the approaches to her apartment. Ever grave and taciturn, the old domestic passed his entire time on the benches of the antechamber, his only solace and amusement being the fancied cultivation of the miserable garden, where he never had the satisfaction of beholding a flower in bloom. Suzanne never left her mistress's apartment; long accustomed to serve and tend her, she required no directions, and anticipated her slightest wishes before they were expressed. Often indeed the inseparable pair spent the entire day without exchanging a single word.

Poor Felise lived completely neglected in this dreary solitude. Her wants and even her whims were scrupulously and lavishly attended to; she had new robes, lace caps, and was even supplied with money for the poor, but every indulgence was limited to these outward wants of which Suzanne took the sole charge. Never did she hear a single word of affectionate interest issue from the unsocial waiting-woman's lips. Her aunt, who had at first regarded her with evident dislike, soon came to look upon her with the same dull indifference with which she viewed everything else. Whether it was that the whole life was thus concentrated in herself could not long remain sensible to any outward influence, or whether she had succeeded by a violent effort in conquering her first im-

pression, Mademoiselle de Saulieu suffered this young creature's presence with passive indifference, or rather she seemed no longer to be aware of it.

Felise had discovered from the first day of her arrival that the convent was an abode full of amusement and dissipation when compared with her aunt's mansion; nevertheless, contrary to Father Boinet's prophecy, she expressed no wish to return. A less energetic nature could not have borne such a mode of life, but in Felise there was a mixture of strength and cheerfulness; a force of character, joined to a power of adapting herself to circumstances, which supported her amidst the most painful influences. She bore up against daily weariness and want of occupation in the hope of breathing the fresh air for an hour on Sunday, and in other respects the complete liberty which she enjoyed in all her movements, consoled her for being left almost entirely alone.

She rose early in the mornings, and with the natural activity of youth unsettled everything in her chamber, took up and abandoned her work ten times in succession, walked up and down the garden, and thus endeavoured to pass the time till Suzanne's long yellow hand threw open the glass doors of the saloon; she then seated herself quietly until the first stroke of twelve and Balin's voice simultaneously announced that dinner was upon the table. This meal, which rarely lasted more than fifteen minutes, being over, her aunt returned to the saloon and silently resumed her work. Felise then seated herself opposite the screen, and not daring to speak aloud, played quietly with the huge grey cat and whispered terms of endearment in his ear. At times Mademoiselle de Saulieu raised her head and also addressed the animal, who turned his stealthy eye towards her without altering his posture. Felise would then venture to reply for puss, and in this manner she carried on at long intervals a sort of conversation with her aunt.

One day that she had risen earlier than usual, and was walking in the garden still wet with the dews of night, she perceived that Balin was not yet in the antechamber, and, advancing, she saw, through the door and the lofty windows which were lying open, the whole extent of the vestibule, and beyond the elms which shaded the court-yard. Felise entered the great hall—no person appeared. For a moment she felt tempted to gain the street, but she feared to meet Balin in the court-yard, and spying the grand staircase, whose dusty steps bore no recent impress of his broad and heavy foot, she ventured to ascend. All the apartments of the first floor were open. They were, like those below, vast saloons looking out upon the garden, and the piers and ceilings of which were ornamented with

paintings; but they did not contain a vestige of furniture, and it was evident at the first glance that they had been long unoccupied. A fragment of forgotten tapestry, however, hung on the walls of one of the bedrooms, and the back of the fireplace was partly hidden by a roll of moth-eaten papers and tattered books. On the mantelpiece were two little volumes which time had covered with a thick binding of dust. Felise took them up mechanically with the tips of her fingers; they were the tales of Perrault and an odd volume of the "Princess of Cleves." A narrow staircase led to an upper story consisting of garrets which had formerly served as sleeping-rooms for the domestics of the mansion. The lacqueys were in truth more agreeably lodged than their masters, for all these small apartments looked into an enclosure which the garden-wall rendered invisible from the apartments below, and which was laid out in parterres ornamented with fountains, a bowling-green, walks enclosed by lofty hedges clipped into smooth and symmetrical forms—in short, the gardens of Versailles in miniature.

"Oh, what a sweet spot!" exclaimed Felise, transported with delight and leaning her head out of the little circular window; but she hastily retreated on perceiving old Balin in the garden below walking gravely amid his withered rose-trees. Standing behind the shutter which concealed her from view, she continued to survey for some time longer the scene which she had just discovered; then descending the staircase on tiptoe she passed like a shadow behind Balin, and hastened to shut herself up in her chamber which it might be supposed she had not left.

Without attaching the least importance to her prize, she had brought away the two books forgotten on the mantelpiece. Having glanced hastily over them she threw them into a drawer, and it was not until one day when more in want of occupation than usual that she commenced to read them. For a girl who had never opened any book save the formulary of the Annunciation, the tales of Perrault was a wonderful production! Felise read these fresh and sparkling fairy tales, like a young girl who peruses a romance for the first time—with a curiosity, a transport, and emotion not to be expressed. These fictions transported her into an enchanted world, and for whole days together she dreamed of nothing but Riquet with the Tuft and the beautiful Princess Finette, reduced like herself to solitary captivity. The first volume of "The Princess of Cleves" interested her at first much less than these fantastic narratives; but when she knew the tales of Perrault by heart she commenced to read a second time the romance of Madame de la Fayette. The polished, delicate, and refined language

of the *beau monde*—the exalted sentiments of honour, virtue, and chivalrous love, was a new language which she had now to study: but these chords at length vibrated in her soul; she commenced to be interested in the romantic narrative which she was prevented from following to its close, and many a time recurred in fancy to the long speeches in which M. de Nemours so delicately analyses his passion for the beautiful Princess of Cleves. Felise thus became acquainted with things which in the ignorance and simplicity of her mind she had never even suspected; it was the first ray which lighted up her imagination and infused life into her mental existence. From this time beautiful phantoms peopled her solitude; she lived in fairy land, and only left its enchanted palaces to find herself once more with the great ladies and gallant cavaliers of the court of the Dauphin Queen. At times she almost fancied herself some young princess who had a wicked fairy for a god-mother, and she was tempted to look upon those around her as the evil genii to whose charge she was committed.

One day, while rummaging through her apartment, she discovered the jewel case which Suzanne had hidden in the secret drawer of the cabinet. She immediately recognised the trinkets, and recollecting that they had been placed in her apron when Sister Genevieve received her in the chamber of the turning-wheel, she was convinced that they belonged to her. The medallion portrait first struck her, from its resemblance to that which hung in the saloon; there was the same light hair and the same lofty and fascinating expression. Felise glanced instinctively in her mirror, but nothing in her features recalled any resemblance to this lovely countenance; she was at once less pretty, and more regularly handsome, than the portrait.

She placed the little miniature beside the crucifix at the head of her bed, and then, returning to the mirror, she took a childish pleasure in decking herself with all the jewels that the casket contained. Suzanne surprised her while thus employed; a triple row of pearls around her neck, her long black hair studded with diamonds, and her fingers laden with costly rings.

"Good heavens! what are you doing there?" exclaimed the old waiting-maid, almost angrily; "why bring out all those ornaments? they must never more be worn by any one!"

"And why?" exclaimed Felise boldly. Then she added, laughing:—

"They would be so becoming in a bridal dress! Tell me, Suzanne, when shall I be married?"

The waiting-maid stepped back, and looking at Felise with an air of consternation, replied abruptly:—

"Never!"

## CHAPTER VI.

FELISE was approaching her fifteenth year when she quitted the convent. She was then tall for her age, but as yet without the usual attractions of youthful beauty. She was slender almost to leanness, and of that sallow complexion which is often seen in young people whose growth, at first tedious, is at last sudden and rapid. In fact the pale and sickly child gradually underwent the same metamorphosis as the chrysalis, which in a single night throws off its ashy mantle to assume its gold and azure wings. No person however appeared to notice the change; no one seemed aware that Felise was now sixteen, and that this blooming flower was being rapidly developed. Suzanne continued to treat her as a child, and Mademoiselle de Saulieu heeded her no more than formerly. Once only, as Felise was leaving the saloon, she looked after her and said with a sigh:—

“This child grows handsome!”

One Sunday Felise was at mass with Suzanne, and was placed as usual in the shadow of a pillar, and separated from the crowd by her terrible duenna. From time to time she raised her head imperceptibly and glanced stealthily around, for she took a singular pleasure in gazing at the gay multitude which thronged the church of the Jesuits. At the moment when the service was about to commence, two young ladies, rather late, proceeded along the great nave, followed by a lacquey who carried their missals in a velvet bag. Every eye was directed towards them, and doubtless they heard more than one flattering exclamation in their passage. The one, dressed in a rich silk robe with a black scarf, wore the mourning of one who had been a widow for a year; the other was attired in a dress of taffeta, over which was thrown a white muslin mantle. Her gauze bonnet, ornamented with bright rose-coloured ribbons, was worn high off her forehead, and her face was shaded by curling ringlets which imparted an inexpressible grace to this simple head-dress. They crossed the church with a measured step, and a lofty yet modest mien; without appearing to remark the effect which they produced, and proceeded to seat themselves in the first ranks before the high altar. On the appearance of these two lovely creatures, Felise could not restrain an exclamation of surprise and joy; she had recognised her companions, her dear friends of the convent, Cecilia de Chameroiy and her young sister Angela.

“What now? what is the matter with you?” said Suzanne,

looking at her with an astonished air, "you seem all agitated."

"It is because I am so glad!" replied she in a low voice. "Do you know who those two ladies are, so handsome, so well dressed? They are the best friends I had in the convent. What happiness! I shall make up my acquaintance with them again! you will surely permit me to speak to them on leaving the church?"

"Certainly not, mademoiselle," replied Suzanne in the driest and most determined tone.

Felise reddened, and turned away her head with bitter vexation and internal rage, but she saw that it was useless to insist. She cherished a vague hope of being able to approach the sisters on leaving the church, and speaking to them under cover of the crowd; but Suzanne was on the watch and kept her in her place until the congregation had dispersed. In the bustle caused by this movement she lost sight of her lovely friends, and was returning home, her heart bursting with sorrow and indignation against her inexorable duenna, when all at once she perceived them crossing the Place de Birague, and entering the Rue Culture-St. Catherine.

Immediately regulating her speed so as not to pass them, she followed them with her eyes, and her heart bounded with joy when she saw them stop and enter the mansion immediately adjoining her own.

Felise then began to reflect; and almost by inspiration the stratagems, the artifices, and all the various means which a carefully watched and captive girl employs to deceive her persecutors, rushed to her mind. She saw at a glance that the garden which she had discovered from the garret windows was that of the adjoining hotel, and that she was only separated from it by the horrible wall whose cracked surface formed the sole prospect from her aunt's sitting-room. She spent all the rest of the day in walking up and down the garden, measuring with her eye the impregnable rampart, and pondering on the means of crossing it. For an instant she thought of making her escape by the street door, and taking up her abode with her young friends; but in spite of her inexperience, she had good sense enough to perceive that she could not thus openly withdraw herself from the authority of Mademoiselle de Saulieu, and, although she might not perhaps herself have been able to explain her determination, she chose the best alternative, namely, to await the result of time and chance. Neither one nor the other were long wanting.

It was now the beginning of May, when the evenings grow long and warm. Balin made every day the circuit of his garden,



scrutinizing the frail shoots and tending with a careful hand the feeble vegetation to which the ungrateful soil gave birth. The good man cherished the hope of training a passion-flower about the sort of cage which he called his summer-house, and with this idea he had strengthened the primitive wood-work with a trellis, and surrounded it with a sort of paling which rested against the wall. Seeing him thus employed, it occurred to Felise that it would not be difficult to climb this species of ladder. She had already remarked that about nightfall a faint light mounted even to the summit of the wall, as if the neighbouring enclosure had been partially illuminated; and frequently she had distinguished the murmuring of voices, as if her neighbours were spending the evening in the open air among the verdant alleys of the bowling-green.

One evening when Suzanne had closed the shutters of the saloon, and Balin, after having extinguished the lamp in the antechamber, had retired to the nook where he slept, Felise slipped out gently from her apartment, and gazed long into the darkness, listening attentively to all the noises which floated on the air around her. A slight wind rustled the trees, whose lofty branches overtopped the wall, and amidst this gentle murmur she could hear occasionally the sound of voices as if speaking in a neighbouring enclosure.

Felise returned towards the summer-house. She was light and active, and in a moment she had surmounted the little edifice, and, standing on the trellis, she leaned with her hands on the summit of the wall and looked down on the other side. Angela and Cecilia were seated on one of the garden chairs, and beside them was arranged a collation on a rustic table. Wax tapers, enclosed in glass shades, illuminated their lovely countenances, whilst behind them the perspective of the garden was lost in the darkness. Perceiving this face peeping over the wall at a few yards' distance, the sisters gave a slight cry and rose from their seats in terror; but Felise having called them by their names, they immediately recognised her and advanced towards her with joyful surprise.

"It is she! it is Felise!" exclaimed the elder, laughing. "Oh! the pretty little robber!"

"I long to get down to you," said she, in a low voice, "but how shall I accomplish it?"

"Quick! bring a garden ladder here!" exclaimed Angela, ringing a silver bell, "this is what I call falling from the clouds! Oh! my dear Felise, come quickly till I clasp you in my arms!"

A lacquy appeared, all amazed, placed his double ladder against the wall and discreetly retired. Felise descended

lightly and uttered an exclamation of joy as she touched the ground.

"Tell me, my poor child, where do you come from in this style?" exclaimed Cecilia, embracing her; "who could have expected to see you make your appearance here this evening, and especially by such a strange way?"

"How tall and handsome you are!" added Angela, pressing her again to her bosom.

"And you too are beautiful!" replied Felise, holding her by the hands, and gazing at her with a joyous air

"Come now!" continued Cecilia, seating her between her sister and herself, "tell us in a word, my dear princess, why you are no longer in the convent, and how it happens that you pay your visits by night and in scaling walls?"

"You shall soon know," replied Felise, with a sigh; "I have had many sorrows, but my story is easily told."

She then related how she had left the convent after the death of Sister Genevieve, the reception she met with at her aunt's, and the life which she led in this abode, a thousand times more dreary, silent, and inaccessible than a convent. The sisters listened with lively interest and profound astonishment; at every detail they pressed Felise's hands, kissed her, and said with tender commiseration:—

"Poor child! what a life! But that can be changed—it shall be changed, please God! You shall not always remain under the yoke of this cruel aunt. You shall quit your prison. Take courage; you see that people escape from every place, even from a convent!"

"True," exclaimed Felise, raising her head proudly, like a young war-horse escaped from the *Herradero*, "since we are all three here; but tell me, in your turn, what has happened since the day when your guardian took you by force from the convent. Do you know that Mother Perpetua daily expects your return, and has predicted that Angela will one day take the veil?"

"There is a horoscope which will soon be contradicted!" replied Cecilia with a gay smile, as she looked at her sister; "as for myself, I never was predestined; our poor dear sister Genevieve, alas, knew that full well! Oh! how I wept in that cell, which ought to be called *the chamber of sorrow* and not *the solitude*! But do not let these sad recollections overcome us. You know, fairest, how our guardian the Baron de Favras came clothed with authority to take us away. At first he shut us up in a room in this hotel, where we led a melancholy life enough, and he since told me that not knowing what to do with us, he was on the point of placing us in another convent,

when a person in whom he placed every confidence told him the history of the poor poet Scarron, who, although lame and infirm, married a girl of sixteen beautiful as an angel, the same who at the present moment is the greatest lady in France. The baron was quite struck with the example, and a few days afterwards the person to whom I have alluded came on his part to offer me his hand and fortune. The beautiful Mademoiselle d'Aubigne did not refuse Scarron, and Mademoiselle de Chameroy might therefore very well decide in favour of the Baron de Favras. I married my guardian."

"What!" exclaimed Felise, "that lame old man, of whom Mother Perpetua gave such a horrible picture? Ah! Heavens!"

"He was one of the best men in the world—the kindest heart and clearest understanding under heaven," replied Cecilia. "Immediately after our marriage he brought us to his estates in the country. He treated us like his children; he called me his daughter; and in truth I was so happy in this union, that when I lost him I wept as for the tenderest of fathers, and I am firmly resolved never to marry again."

"And probably enter a convent?" said Felise with simplicity.

"By no means," replied Cecilia quickly; "I wish to live in the world with all the liberty which my situation as a widow properly permits. I love society and intercourse with intelligent people, and for that reason at the close of my year of mourning I returned to Paris and was thinking of setting up my establishment afresh; but as a widow of my age, with a young sister, could not with propriety receive the visits of the court and the gay world, I have resolved to arrange everything suitably by marrying Angela."

"What! do you propose to dispose of me in this nonchalant fashion, sister?" exclaimed the charming young girl, with a lively air that but ill concealed her secret emotion.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I shall marry you," replied Cecilia in the same tone, and looking at her tenderly, "and if needful I shall even force your inclinations."

"And will you make her marry some gouty old husband?" asked Felise almost angrily.

"No, no," replied Cecilia, laughing. "He whom I propose to give her is young, handsome, brave, gallant—in short an accomplished cavalier."

"Like M. de Nemours," said Felise gravely.

"M. de Nemours!" repeated the young widow, "do you know any one of that name?"

"No, but I have read a part of his history. He was a most amiable nobleman who loved a great lady, unhappily already

married, the Princess de Cleves. Can you tell me if she at last became a widow and married M. de Nemours?"

"Heavens! it is the romance of Madame de la Fayette, that you are telling us about!" exclaimed Cecilia laughing and kissing her forehead. "There is nothing true in all that, simpleton!"

"Ah! it is a story like *Cats'-Skin*," murmured Felise a little confused; "and yet it seemed true!"

And changing the conversation she added, looking around her:—

"How delighted I am to find myself here! Once I saw this garden without imagining I should ever be in it, or that I should there meet my dear friends, the two Chameroys, as we used to call you at the convent."

"And now that you have come, my heart, you must return often," said Angela with affectionate vivacity. "Perhaps your aunt would give you permission, if you asked her; if we ourselves waited on her"—

"No, no," interrupted Felise; "if she knew I was here to-night, all would be lost, and I should never see you again, I am certain."

"In that case," replied Cecilia gaily, "let her remain in eternal ignorance of it. The way you have taken has neither gate nor knocker; and although not very convenient, it is at least practicable."

"And we, dear Felise, will often await you here," added Angela. "As soon as the sun goes down we come to saunter through the alleys, and in the evening we breathe the fresh air on the terrace as if we were in the country."

"And are you always alone?" asked Felise,

"Always until now," replied she with a smile, and looking at her sister; "a young widow cannot be at home to every one. It would not be thought improper if she should some day take it into her head to collect a band of musicians, and give a ball, but she cannot, without giving cause for scandal, receive a few friends in private. Indeed we should live like hermits if some who were formerly intimate with the baron did not receive us, and afford us an opportunity of meeting some noble society."

"What happiness to go out when you choose, to go to assemblies, and pay visits!" said Felise sighing; "as for me, I have no other recreation than going to mass, and that only on Sunday."

"Make your mind easy, my queen, we shall think over the matter, and in spite of your aunt we shall produce you in the world, we shall amuse you, we shall marry you!"

"Delightful!" exclaimed Felise. Then hearkening to the

hour, which sounded simultaneously from all the clocks of the hotel, she added: "midnight! already midnight! ah! if my Aunt Philippine, who never sleeps, should happen to put her nose out of the window just now—should see me return—but she will not hear me! I shall descend very softly, without making more noise than her cat Mitouffe, when he glides stealthily around her on the carpet."

Thus saying she kissed the sisters, enjoining them to leave the ladder against the wall so that she might return soon. A few minutes afterwards she once more regained her apartment in the dark, and crept into her huge four-posted bed, her heart still palpitating.

These interviews were often repeated, with the same pleasure as at first. Their girlish friendship was quickly renewed and strengthened, and the gentle Angela's heart, especially, beat with the warmest affection for her companion of the convent. She was one of those kind and affectionate natures who reckon the happiness of another their own, and she took the liveliest interest in that of Felise. The young widow also loved her; there was a naïveté, a romantic spirit, and a liveliness of disposition in all her actions that charmed her. Their long conversations always turned upon the gay world, which Felise had never seen, and of which she had formed so agreeable an idea. In a short time she fancied she knew the personages of whom they so often spoke to her, and she would often inquire of herself for the Dowager Countess of Manicamp, the Marquis de Gandale, &c. The dowager was a great lady, clever and devout, who received at her house the best society of the Marais, and the Marquis de Gandale, her nephew, was considered one of the most amiable gentlemen and one of the best matches among the youthful noblesse. Madame de Favras instanced him as a perfect model of intellect, bravery, and chivalrous gallantry.

"We have spoken to him of you, my angel," said she to Felise, "and you cannot imagine how the picture of your captivity interested him. He says you seem to him a little enchanted princess, such as one meets with in the stories of Madame d'Aulnoy, and he calls your aunt the fairy Dentue. Madame de Manicamp also is constantly inquiring about you; she is quite impatient to see you, and I must positively one day give her that pleasure. I have promised to do so."

"Meanwhile," replied Felise, half seriously, "present my best respects to her and assure her that I am her very humble  
companion

Every time that M. de Gandale's name was mentioned, the colour mounted to Angela's forehead. She listened with downcast eyes and uttered not a word; but Felise did not observe

these blushes, or this silence which spoke more eloquently than words, and never suspected that this was the husband whom Madame de Favras proposed for her sister.

One evening the young widow smilingly said to Felise:—

"My fairest one, a delightful idea has occurred to me! The last six weeks of my mourning have just expired, and there will be now no impropriety in our seeing a little more of the world. I have resolved to have the musicians one of these days; we shall dance, and there will be a little concert, followed by supper. Should you not like to be present at this gala, my queen?"

"I? I shall see a ball!"—exclaimed Felise, clapping her hands with delight! "Good Heavens! is such a thing possible?"

"Oh, yes! it is not only possible, but easy," said Angela laughing; "Cecilia and I have been employed all day making arrangements for it; we shall deck you out as well as we can, my angel, with a dress which we shall cut out—"

"Dresses! I have dozens of them," interrupted Felise, "and pretty ones too, assuredly; that naughty Suzanne buys them for me, and I am always asking her for new ones for want of something else to do. I have pearls and diamonds too—"

"Well! you shall wear them all!" said Cecilia gaily; "you must look lovely and be exquisitely dressed."

"Oh, my dear Felise!" added Angela, "how happy I shall be to lead you into the saloon and present you to all these people!—and shall I not be proud when they praise your beauty and your grace?"

"I shall be just like Cinderella at the ball," replied Felise ingenuously; "I shall want nothing but that little glass slipper—"

"And the king's son to make love to you!" exclaimed Madame de Favras, with a merry burst of laughter; "but, my dear heart, you must be satisfied with less glorious conquests." ●

For eight days Felise dreamed of nothing else but this fête; she was all curiosity, impatience, and joy. At length one evening—a lovely summer evening—at the hour when the twilight dies away into the shadows of night, she stole softly over the wall as usual, and entered the garden of the Hotel de Favras. This portion of the terrace had been left purposely in darkness and was masked moreover by a light shrubbery, so that Felise could enter without being perceived into a pavilion on the ground-floor, where Angela awaited her.

"Oh! what a charming dress! you are positively dazzling, love!" exclaimed the young girl rapturously, and gazing

at her with a delighted air; "those jewels are worthy of a queen!"

"I dressed myself and arranged my hair at hap-hazard and without light," said Felise, as she approached a large slanting mirror in which she could see herself from head to foot.

She had put on a silver-grey taffeta robe with a boddice of the same material, without any sort of embroidery or trimming, but the simplicity of this style, which Suzanne had chosen for Sunday use, was relieved by the precious jewels which Felise had taken from the casket. Her waving black hair was wreathed with long strings of pearls and diamonds, while a necklace of precious stones encircled her bust and fell as low as her girdle. This rich yet simple costume suited admirably with her noble figure and queenly beauty. Felise felt this intuitively, and, raising her head with a movement of joy and pride impossible to be described, she said to Madame de Favras, who had just then entered:—

"Here I am, all ready! let us go!"

"One moment," said Angela, "you need a few flowers to brighten this somewhat sombre costume."

And with her own hands, the amiable young girl adjusted a bouquet of roses and Spanish jessamine on Felise's bosom, similar to that which she wore on her own robe of white damask.

When Felise appeared in the saloon, conducted by Madame de Favras, a murmur of admiration was heard on all sides; the dancers stopped, the lansquenet players forgot for a moment their cards,—the effect which she produced was universal! There was something strange and striking in her triumphant beauty which recalled the women of the olden time, the heroines of Ariosto, the beautiful Florentines of the *Decameron*. Her black hair and straight clearly defined eyebrows, her light blue eyes sparkling from under their long dark eyelashes, her glances, sometimes keen and piercing as a sword, sometimes soft and languishing, and still oftener sunk in reverie,—all these singular contrasts rendered the young girl a strange and charming creature, whom no one could look upon without curiosity, interest, and emotion.

She felt her triumph and was intoxicated with delight. It seemed to her that she was at this moment assuming her proper place in society, and that her beauty raised her to the rank of queen of this brilliant throng who surrounded her with flattery and admiration.

In the mean time the lansquenot players resumed their cards, the dancers finished their minuet, and the dowagers continued their conversation round the basset-table. Felise

at first made the circuit of the apartment, leaning on Madame de Favras' arm. When she saluted Madame de Manicamp, the old lady looked steadily at her and exclaimed :—

"I am no longer astonished, mademoiselle, at what I have been told; your beauty is one of those rare treasures which must be hidden for fear of occasioning the greatest disasters! Wherever you appear, you will make faithless, jealous, and unhappy lovers."

Having paid this compliment, she kissed Felise on the forehead, and, turning to the lady beside her said in a whisper :—

"She puts me in mind of Mademoiselle de Fontanges; she has the same figure, carriage, and goddess-like air, but her expression is very different. Poor Fontanges had a stupid, tender look, while this girl has large, clear, piercing eyes. For my part I prefer the pretty little Angela, with her sweet countenance, her complexion delicate as a rose leaf, and her Madonna hair."

Felise was returning to her place, when her eyes met, for the second time, those of a man, who from her entrance into the saloon had remained apart, without seeming to take any share in the amusements of the evening. He was young, of distinguished bearing, and although there was nothing remarkable in his features, still there was in his look, in his manner of smiling, and in the carriage of his head, something so spiritual and noble, that his appearance struck every one. Felise immediately thought that he must certainly resemble the Duke de Nemours, the tender lover of Madame de Cleves, and she felt a secret emotion when Madame de Favras, having beckoned to the unknown, said with a playful air as she introduced him :—

"Fair charmer, here is the Marquis de Gandale who was dying to see you, and who, since you have appeared, seems so petrified with admiration that he has not been able to come forward to pay you his respects."

There exists between two persons who have heard each other much spoken of, a sort of reciprocal interest which easily glides into a more animated and dangerous feeling. The first glance which Felise cast upon M. de Gandale was far from the indifferent and curious look with which she regarded the rest of the gay crowd who filled the saloon; and the marquis, on his side, could not meet her gentle gaze without embarrassment. The dancers presented themselves in crowds to ask the favour of Felise's hand, but in order to free herself once for all from their importunity, she informed them that she could not dance the minuet. From the manner in which she expressed herself, M. de Gandale was able to perceive that she was delighted to have so good a pretext for not breaking off their conversa-



tion, which after all consisted merely of the usual commonplace remarks. They conversed thus during the whole evening.

The moon had now risen, and her pale rays commenced to tinge with a silvery light the foliage of the garden, which could be seen in the distance through the open windows buried in the deep twilight of a summer evening. Felise leaned on the window-sill near which she was seated, and pointing with her finger to the gloomy wall which separated the two hotels, said to the marquis with a sigh:—

"Yonder is my prison—in a few moments I must once more enter it."

"Ah! mademoiselle," he replied with ardour, "think rather of leaving it for ever!"

"Yes, yes, I do think of it," murmured she earnestly.

A young girl brought up in society would not have thus kept by her side for a whole evening one whom she distinguished with so marked favour, but Felise abandoned herself with too unsuspecting ardour to the ineffable sweetness of these first emotions, to be able to break off this species of tête-à-tête. When they proceeded into an adjoining apartment where supper was served, she further permitted M. de Gardale to offer her his hand, and invited him with a glance to seat himself beside her at table.

Madame de Favras appeared uneasy, and her sister could with difficulty conceal her deep vexation. The dowager Marchioness of Manicamp observed Felise and her nephew with mingled anxiety and astonishment.

"The appearance of this child had produced a wonderful effect here," she whispered to one of her intimate friends; "only observe the marquis, he never leaves her side—he could not be more attentive if he was her declared lover. I confess I feel annoyed, I had formed other plans for my nephew."

It was late ere the company separated. Felise had already disappeared, and the marquis had retired a few moments after her. When the two sisters were alone, they shut themselves in their apartments, and dismissed their women.

"Ah! sister, what have we done!" exclaimed Angela, throwing herself weeping into the young widow's arms—what a ball! alas, what a fatal evening! The marquis has had eyes for no one but Felise—he loves her—he loves her already!"

"No, sister, no, I cannot think so," replied Cecilia; "he is merely dazzled with her beauty and flattered by the preference she so openly manifested for him;—speaking, and looking at him alone. These innocents, these lambs, have strange privileges! but M. de Gandale's heart, I am sure, is not really touched."

Angela shook her head dejectedly, and, drying the scalding

drops that trickled down her now pale cheeks, she said in a tone of conviction :—

"He loves her ! she is so beautiful ! but, sister, have I any right to complain ? In your anxiety for my happiness, you thought of this marriage ; Madame de Manicamp wished it ; but M. de Gandale's wishes in the matter were never consulted. We were wrong in thinking that he loved me. Did he ever tell me so ? Is he bound by the slightest promise ? Alas ! my heart alone formed this engagement."

"He did not love you yet perhaps, but he would have loved you, my Angela !" exclaimed Madame de Favras, weeping, and clasping the young girl in her arms. "Your happiness and mine are alike torn from us ! oh how blind and unhappy he is in thus disdaining you ! But another will appreciate better than M. de Gandale the treasure I wished to bestow on him."

"We must renounce these ideas, my sister," said Angela with gentle firmness : "I feel that my heart cannot be given twice. At present I suffer deeply, more than I can express ; but my affliction will gradually die away if I turn myself to God. Our good Mother Madeleine always told us so. He alone can comfort us."

The following day Madame de Favras brought her sister to a country seat not far from Paris, where they spent fifteen days in complete solitude without hearing any intelligence of Felise, and without the name of M. de Gandale being once uttered. Angela continued in very low spirits, and Madame de Favras both wished and dreaded to learn what had taken place during her absence. On returning to Paris, she found the following note awaiting her from the Countess de Manicamp :—

"MY DEAR BARONESS—My nephew is a puppy whom I shall certainly disinherit. He has fallen in love with that little creature who is kept shut up in an enchanted castle. From what you tell me, she is rich and of a good family ; but I am not ambitious for the alliance of this Sleeping Beauty in the Wood. I had other intentions. I told the Marquis de Gandale that I could not enter into his views, so that he may go himself to demand her hand from the fairy *Dentue*.

"I wished to inform you of this fine marriage, in order that you might not be taken by surprise, and I entreat you ever to consider me your best friend and very humble servant,

"COUNTESS DE MANICAMP."

"Well, sister ?" said Angela, after having read this note.

"We shall return to the country, we shall not be present at this marriage at least !" exclaimed Madame de Favras, impetuously.

"Yes, let us set out," said Angela; "but before I go, I wish to write to Felise."

She took the pen, and, endeavouring to repress the sobs which were ready to burst from her overcharged heart, she wrote the following lines with a trembling hand:—

"MY DEAR FELISE—Heaven, which tried you so severely when very young, has happiness yet in store for you: one of the best of men loves you, and is about to solicit your hand. That you may be happy with him, and make him happy in return, my dear Felise, is my sister's prayer and mine, which we now express to you on the eve of parting, perhaps for ever. In your prosperity do not forget those who pine and suffer, pray for them, for yourself, and loaded with the goods of this world, turn your thoughts to still higher and holier concerns.

"Methinks the prediction of Mother Perpetua will not prove groundless, and that one day I shall take the veil in the Convent of the Annunciation. Think of me then, and sometimes speak of Sister Angela."

A dexterous valet promised to convey this letter to Felise, and an hour afterwards she found it lying rolled around a stone at the entrance of her apartment. Felise knew nothing of what had happened, and had remained for fifteen days in a state of inexpressible agitation. The sudden departure of the sisters had occasioned her extreme astonishment and vexation, while their absence left her without the means or the hope of seeing M. de Gandale. She spent her days and nights in tears, like a loving and despairing maiden. Twenty times she was on the point of escaping and flying far away, she cared not whither, from this accursed house, where she was pining away with vexation, weariness, and restraint.

Angela's letter threw her into transports of astonishment and joy, which she was unable to repress. Pale, her eyes sparkling, her head erect, she entered the saloon, where Mademoiselle de Saulieu, seated in her accustomed place, was working at her never-ending embroidery. The young girl sat down, for her trembling limbs were no longer able to sustain her, and said in short and hurried accents:—

"Aunt, I must speak to you. Listen to me. The moment has arrived when I shall at length leave this house. Soon, perhaps this very day, a man of wealth and station will come to ask my hand in marriage."

"What did you say? I do not rightly understand you," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saulieu, with the doubtful look and manner of one whose mind has been wandering in another world.

"I repeat that M. de Gandale wishes to marry me, and that he will come himself to demand my hand from you," replied Felise. "You will not refuse him, aunt?"

Mademoiselle de Saulieu looked stupified and made a ges-

ture in the negative. At this mute response Felise's anger and indignation, so long pent up, overcame all restraint.

"Do not think I shall obey you!" she exclaimed. "I have only too long submitted to the slavery in which you keep me! Yes, you have inflicted nothing but suffering on me, and I hate you! What have you ever been to me?—a cruel relative. When a child you cast me into the cells of a convent, and now you keep me here a prisoner. But my place is in the world, and I have a right to live there like other girls of my station. I know that I am rich and of a good family; give me my fortune, that I may at length assume my proper rank. You do not answer, but you will be forced to answer when M. de Gandale demands the reason of your refusal."

"Unfortunate child!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Saulieu, raising her hands to heaven.

Then with an indescribable gesture of sorrow and command she pointed to the door, saying:—

"Return to your apartment—I shall receive M. de Gandale, and if he persists after this interview, I consent to your marriage—go!"

Subdued by her authoritative manner, struck with these last words, Felise retired, shuddering, and ran to shut herself up in her chamber, where she remained for the rest of the day standing at the window and listening for the least movement or the slightest noise. Mademoiselle de Saulieu had given her orders. Balin waited in the antechamber, and Suzanne with a terrified look kept her eyes incessantly turned towards the entrance gate.

The following day, in the afternoon, the noise of a carriage entering the court-yard announced the arrival of the Marquis de Gandale. The young nobleman crossed the forbidden threshold of this sombre dwelling with much emotion. This impression increased when the old servant, dressed in mourning, announced his name with a loud voice in the deserted and echoing halls. Mademoiselle de Saulieu rose to receive him. At the sight of that impressive countenance, grown prematurely old from grief and suffering, and that look, at once proud and melancholy, which sunk at his approach, the marquis felt a thrill run through his veins, and he was obliged to pause for an instant to recover himself. Mademoiselle de Saulieu waited in silence until he should utter his request.

"Mademoiselle," said he at length, "I am Hector, Marquis de Gandale, and my name, I trust, justifies me in aspiring to the honour of your alliance. I possess a fortune which is sufficient to maintain my rank honourably; I have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with your niece, and,

struck by her rare beauty and the still rarer qualities of mind which she possesses, I have become passionately attached to her. She is an orphan, I am informed, and from you, as her only relative, I come to ask her hand."

"I refuse it, M. le Marquis," replied Mademoiselle de Saulieu, greatly agitated.

"And will you favour me with the grounds of your refusal, mademoiselle?" exclaimed M. de Gandale.

"If you absolutely require it, sir;" murmured the grief-stricken lady, almost inaudibly; "but be advised, and without explanation or details give up the hand of my niece."

The marquis only replied by an impatient gesture; his pride and his love seemed to equally offer an indignant refusal.

Mademoiselle de Saulieu paused as if to summon up all her strength, and then said, at first very slowly, but, as she proceeded, in abrupt and hurried accents:—

"It is a melancholy history which I am about to relate, sir—the frightful misfortunes of two families. An orphan from infancy, I was brought up, along with a younger sister, by an uncle who adopted us. At sixteen my sister married a man of rank, while I remained with my uncle, now grown infirm. I deferred my own establishment in life in order to watch over his declining years, and I remained with him up to the age of twenty-five, persuaded that he would share his fortune between myself and my sister, whom he had already richly portioned. But these anticipations proved groundless—a will, which he concealed from us, made me his only heir. Alas! how shall I recall the consequences of this preference? My sister's husband had long entertained a hateful passion for me; his avarice was equal to his depraved love. I was about to be married to one whom my heart had long selected. The wretch formed the design of marrying me himself, and getting rid of all obstacles previously. A dispensation from the Holy Father authorises a man to marry two sisters in succession. The same night his wife was assassinated in her own château, while he to whom I was to have been united was shot through the head almost before my very eyes. The murderer had arranged his double crime with extreme address, but Providence willed his immediate chastisement. His crime had secret witnesses; his victims were avenged, and he perished by the hand of the executioner. You have doubtless heard, sir, the dreadful history of the Count de Chardavon, who was broken on the wheel at Toulouse. He was the father of Felise. He had a young sister: she was called the fair Genevieve. Disgraced by his infamous crime, and his no less infamous punishment, she died in a convent, and I, whom this monster deprived of

so many objects of affection, wear out the remainder of my life here with the old servants who have followed me, and this child who accuses me of cruelty, but from whom I must for ever hide our misfortunes."

The marquis listened to this narrative with silent horror, and before Mademoiselle de Saulieu ceased speaking he rose. Balin threw open the doors. M. de Gandale bowed profoundly, and half sunk on one knee as if to ask pardon from one whom he had forced to make such an avowal; then he slowly withdrew.

As he disappeared, Mademoiselle de Saulieu perceived the pale face of Felise at the extremity of the saloon. The unhappy girl, concealed behind the folding-doors, had heard every word that was uttered. Her look of calm and settled despair was terrible to behold.

"Aunt," said she, placing Angela's letter on the reading-desk, "I must return to the Annonciades—my place is there. I have reflected since yesterday, and I have seen plainly that Mademoiselle de Chamerois loves the Marquis de Gandale, and since I am the daughter of a criminal he will marry her. Oh! aunt, restore me to the convent, for at this idea I feel my father's blood flowing in my veins!"

The same day Felise returned to the Convent of the Annunciation. When she crossed for the second time the formidable barrier of the cloister gate, she was received by the superior and Father Boinet.

"We were ever expecting you, my daughter," said the good father.

"Come, my child!" exclaimed the superior, with accents of tenderness and joy. "Oh! my poor bruised lamb, blessed be the good Shepherd who leads you hither, and the day which restores you to the fold!"



THE  
  
HAUNTED MARSH.

BY  
  
GEORGE SAND.

LONDON:  
SIMMS & MINTYRF, 13, PATERNOSTER ROW,  
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# THE HAUNTED MARSH.

## CHAPTER I.

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

“A la sueur de ton visaige,  
Tu gaigneras ta pauvre vie,  
Après long travail et usaige,  
Voicy la mort qui te convie.”

THIS old French *quatrain*, inscribed beneath a composition by Holbein, is deeply touching in its mournful simplicity. The engraving represents a labourer ploughing. A vast extent of open country stretches far away into the distance, dotted here and there with a few poor and miserable cabins, while the sun is sinking to rest behind a neighbouring hill. It is towards the close of a hard day's work. The peasant is an aged and decrepit man, covered with rags. The harness of the four horses which he is driving is rotten and scanty; the ploughshare delves into a harsh and rebellious soil. One object alone is lively and active amidst this scene of *sueur et usaige*. This is a fantastic personage, a skeleton armed with a whip, who runs along in the furrow beside the terrified horses, striking them at times with his lash, and thus serving as assistant to the old labourer. This figure is Death—that spectre which Holbein has introduced allegorically into the succession of philosophical and religious subjects, at once lugubrious and comic, entitled, *Les Simulachres de la Mort*, or *Dance of Death*.

In this collection, or rather in this vast composition, where Death, playing his part through every page, is the connecting tie and ruling thought, Holbein has introduced sovereigns, pontiffs, lovers, gamblers, drunkards, nuns, courtesans, brigands, beggars, warriors, monks, Jews, travellers—in short, every character of his time and of our own, and everywhere does the spectre of Death mock, threaten, and triumph. From one picture only is it absent. It is that in which the beggar

Lazarus, laid at the rich man's door, declares that he fears it not, doubtless because he has nothing to lose, and because his entire life has been one anticipated death.

But is this stoical idea of the half-pagan Christianity of the middle ages a very consoling one, and can religious minds find comfort from it? The ambitious man, the hypocrite, the tyrant, the debauchee—all those haughty sinners who abuse life, and over whom Death shakes his dart—will doubtless be punished; but the blind, the mendicant, the maniac, the poor peasant—are they indemnified for their long life of misery by the single reflection that for them Death has no sting? No! An air of the deepest sadness and gloom broods over the artist's work. It resembles a bitter malediction hurled at the lot of suffering humanity.

It is indeed a withering satire, a true picture of the society which Holbein had before his eyes. Crime and misery were everywhere its distinctive features; but we, artists of another age, what shall we depict? Shall we represent death as the sole reward of the present life, or shall we invoke it as the chastisement of injustice and the remuneration for suffering?

No, we have no longer to do with death, but rather with life. We no longer believe either in the annihilation of the tomb or the salvation purchased by a forced renunciation of the goods of this world. We desire that life may be good, because we wish that it may be fruitful. Lazarus must quit his filthy bed of straw, in order that the poor man may no longer rejoice at the death of his wealthy fellow-creature. All must be happy, in order that the prosperity of some be not criminal and accursed of God. The labourer, while sowing his wheat, must learn that labour is the work of life, and not rejoice because death stalks at his side. In short, death must no longer be considered either the chastisement of prosperity or the consolation of distress. God never intended it either as the punishment for, or the indemnification of, life; for he has blessed life, and the tomb ought not to be considered as a mere refuge for the unhappy.

Certain artists of our own times, casting a serious eye upon the persons and events which surround them, love to pict pain and sorrow, the abjectness of misery, the straw bed of Lazarus. This may be the domain of art and philosophy; but, while painting misery so hideous, so squalid, frequently so vicious and criminal, is their end attained, and is the effect produced as salutary as they should wish? We dare not pronounce an opinion upon this delicate question. We may be told that, by painting this gulf dug beneath the fragile soil of opulence, they terrify the wealthy sinner, as in

the times of the *danse macabre* they pointed out to him his yawning grave, and Death preparing to entwine him in his loathsome arms. Now-a-days they show him the robber breaking into his house, and the assassin stealing upon his sleep. • We confess that we cannot very clearly comprehend how they will reconcile him to that humanity which he despises—how they will render him sensible of the sorrows of the poor whom he dreads, by showing him one of this very class of poor under the form of the housebreaker and the midnight assassin. The frightful image of Death, grinding his teeth and playing his violin, in the pictures of Holbein and his predecessors, did not succeed in converting the wicked or consoling the victims of their day. And does not our literature proceed in this matter much after the manner of the artists of the middle ages and the *renaissance*?

Holbein's revellers filled their cups with a sort of fury, in order to banish the idea of death, which, although invisible to them, yet served them as cupbearer. The wealthy sinners of the present day demand fortifications and cannon in order to banish the idea of a *Jacquerie*, which art shows them working in the shade, step by step, awaiting the favourable moment to make an onslaught on social order. The church of the middle ages replied to the terrors of the powerful of the land by the sale of indulgences. The governments of the present day calm the anxieties of the rich by making them pay roundly for police and gaolers, bayonets and prisons.

Albert Durer, Michael Angelo, Holbein, Callot, Goya, have all in turn produced powerful satires upon the evils which afflicted their age and countries. These are certainly immortal works, historical pages of most incontestable value. We are far from denying to these artists the right of probing the wounds of society, and placing them in all their unveiled deformity before our eyes; but are there not more fitting tasks in the present day than the painting of terror and intimidation? In this literature of mysteries and of iniquity, which talent and imagination have brought into fashion, we love better the sweet and gentle creations than the villains of the tale, effective and dramatic though they be. The former can undertake and perhaps even succeed in converting some, the latter merely terrify; and fear never cures selfishness, but on the contrary invariably augments it.

We believe that the mission of art is a mission of feeling and of love, that the fiction of the present day ought to replace the parable and the apologue of primitive times, and that the artist should cherish a loftier and nobler aim than that of merely proposing certain measures of prudence and

conciliation, in order to weaken the fear inspired by his pictures. His aim ought to be to make the objects of his solicitude loved, and if necessary I would even excuse him for embellishing them a little. Art is not a study of positive, but a search for ideal truth, and the Vicar of Wakefield is, in my mind, a work both more useful and far healthier for the mind than either *Le Paysan perversi* or *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

Reader, pardon me these reflections, and deign to accept them in guise of preface. There will be none in the narrative that I am about to relate to you, and which will be so short and so simple that I found it necessary to apologise beforehand for these qualities by informing you what I think of tales of crime and terror.

It is *apropos* of a labourer that I have allowed myself to be drawn into this digression. Well, it was precisely the story of a labourer that I had intended to relate to you, and which I shall now proceed with.

I had been studying for a length of time with feelings of profound melancholy Holbein's picture of "The Labourer," and had strolled out into the fields, pondering on the nature of a rural life and the lot of the agriculturist. Without doubt it is a hard and ungrateful task to consume life and strength in turning up the clods of this jealous earth, which compels man to tear forcibly from its bosom its teeming treasures, when a crust of the hardest and blackest bread is, at the close of the day, the sole recompense and profit attached to so severe a toil. These riches, spread over the soil, these harvests, these fruits, these noble animals fattening on the rich herbage, are the property of the few, and the instruments of fatigue and slavery to the many. The man of ease and leisure loves not in general, for their own sakes, either the fields or the plains, the broad expanse of nature, or the superb animals which are to be converted into money for his use. The man of leisure comes to seek a little fresh air and renovated health in the country, after which he returns to spend in the great cities the fruit of his vassals' toil.

The labouring man, on his side, is too much oppressed, too unhappy, and too anxious for the future, to enjoy the beauties of the country and the charms of rural life. For him also the golden fields, the smiling plains, the noble animals, represent sacks of crown pieces, of which he will have but a scanty portion, almost insufficient for his needs, but which nevertheless he must replenish each year, in order to satisfy his master, and pay for the right of living parsimoniously and miserably upon his domain.

And yet nature is ever young, beautiful, and generous.

She sheds poetry and beauty over all beings and upon every plant that man permits her to develop at her will. She possesses the true secret of happiness, that treasure which no one has been able to ravish from her. The happiest of beings would be that man who, possessing a scientific and cultivated mind, working with his own hands and securing happiness and liberty from the exercise of his own intelligence and strength, would yet have leisure to devote to the improvement of his moral and intellectual qualities, to comprehend his own handiwork, and to adore that of his Maker. The artist possesses enjoyments of this kind in the contemplation and reproduction on his canvass of the beauties of nature; but on beholding the misery of the beings who people this terrestrial paradise, the humane and right-minded artist feels an emotion of sadness mingle with his pleasure. Happiness would exist there, where the mind, the heart, and the arms, working in concert under the eye of the Almighty, should produce a holy harmony between the munificence of God and the enjoyment of the human soul. It is then that in place of that piteous and frightful Death, stalking whip in hand along the furrow, the allegorical painter shall place by his side the radiant form of an angel of light, scattering with bounteous hands the blessed seed upon the smoking soil!

And the dream of an existence for the peasant, at once sweet, unfettered, poetic, laborious, and simple, is not so difficult of conception as to be peremptorily dismissed to the regions of empty speculation. That sweet but pensive ejaculation of Virgil—"O happy the countryman, if he but knew his happiness"—is a regret; but, like all regrets, it is also a prediction. A day will surely come when the labourer will also be an artist, if not to express, (a matter of small moment then) at least to feel, the beautiful. But will any one assert that this mysterious and intuitive feeling of poetry is not already germinating within him in the state of instinct and vague reverie? Amongst those protected from the pressing wants of the day, and in whom the excess of poverty does not stifle all moral and intellectual development, happiness—pure, heartfelt, and deeply appreciated happiness—is in the elementary state; and if, even amid pain, fatigue, and labour, the poet's voice has already been raised, why should it be said that the labour of the arms is incompatible with that of the mind? This incompatibility is doubtless the general result of excessive toil and extreme poverty; but let no one say that when a man shall labour usefully and in moderation we shall then have only bad workmen and inferior poets. He who finds elevated and lofty pleasures in the feeling of poetry is a

true poet, though he had never composed a line of verse in his entire lifetime.

My thoughts had by degrees taken this direction without my having perceived that this confidence in the improvement of the peasant was strengthened in me by the influences of outward objects. I was strolling along the hedge-row of a field which some peasants were in the act of preparing for seed-time. The arena was as vast as that of Holbein's picture. The landscape stretched away on every side in long lines of verdure, slightly tinged by the approach of autumn, and formed a sort of framework for the large freshly ploughed field of a rich brown, in some of the furrows of which the recent rains had left lines of water which sparkled in the sun's rays like so many slender silver threads. The day was clear and mild, and the newly-opened earth exhaled a light vapour. At the upper extremity of the field an old man, whose powerful frame and severe features recalled to mind Holbein's labourer, but whose garments gave no indication of poverty, gravely drove his *areau* or plough, of antique form, drawn by a pair of tranquil oxen with hides of a pale yellow colour, the true patriarchs of the fields. They were of lofty stature, rather thin, and with long and downward-curving horns, and belonged to that class of old labourers whom long habit has rendered *brothers*, as they are called in our plains, and who, if deprived of each other's society, refuse to work any longer and die of grief. People unacquainted with the country treat as a fable the alleged friendship of the ox for his companion in harness, but let these sceptics come and see in a farm stable a poor emaciated ox lashing with restless tail his meagre flanks, blowing with fear and disdain upon the fodder placed before him, and turning his eyes constantly towards the door, or else pawing with impatient hoof the empty stall by his side, snuffing over the yokes and chains which his companion has borne, and calling him unceasingly with plaintive lowings. The cowherd will tell you—"There's a pair of oxen lost: his brother is dead, and he won't work any longer. We would fatten him for the slaughter-house, but he won't eat, and he will soon die of hunger."

The old labourer worked slowly and in silence, without making any useless exertion. His docile team exerted themselves no more than he did, but, thanks to a continuous and undisturbed effort, and a careful husbanding of his strength, his furrow was as quickly turned as that of his son, who drove, at some distance off, four less robust oxen in a harsher and stonier vein of earth.

But what afterwards attracted my attention was in truth a beautiful sight, a noble subject for a painter! At the other

end of the field a young man of pleasing appearance was guiding a magnificent team, consisting of four pairs of young animals with hides of a dark colour mingled with streaks of golden brown. Their short and crisply curled heads and large fierce eyes displayed evidences of their descent from the savage race, while their sudden movements and nervous and impetuous bounds, showed them to be still irritated at the yoke and goad, obeying, yet burning to throw off, the newly-imposed dominion. A team of this description is what is called oxen newly-yoked. The man who drove them had to plough a corner used until recently only as pasture land and filled with stumps of trees, a task which required Herculean strength, and one for which his energy, his youth, and his eight almost untamed animals barely sufficed. A child of from six to seven years of age, lovely as an angel, and wearing on his shoulders, over his blouse, a lamb-skin, which gave him somewhat the appearance of an infant St. John the Baptist, walked in the furrow alongside the plough and pricked the flanks of the oxen with a long light pole armed with a blunted spike. The proud animals chafed under the little hand of the child, and made the yokes and harness rattle and clash under their impetuous efforts. Whenever a root stopped the ploughshare the labourer would cry out in a loud voice, calling each beast by name, but rather to calm than to excite them; for the oxen, irritated by this sudden resistance, plunged forward, throwing up the soil with their huge cloven feet, and would have started aside, carrying the plough after them across the fields, if the young man had not by voice and gesture kept in order the four first, while the child managed the others. The poor little fellow shouted also in a voice which he endeavoured to render terrible, but which ever remained as gentle as his own angelic features. The whole picture was beautiful in strength and grace—the landscape, the man, the child, the oxen under the yoke; and notwithstanding this powerful conflict in which the earth was conquered, there reigned an air of gentleness and profound calm over the scene. When the obstacle was surmounted, and the team resumed the staid and even tenor of its way, the labourer, whose feigned violence was only an exercise of his vigour and a sudden outbreak of activity, would all at once resume the serenity habitual to simple minds, and would throw a glance of fatherly pride and affection upon his child, who turned round to smile upon him in return. Then the manly voice of this young father would give utterance to the solemn and melancholy chaunt which the ancient tradition of the country transmits, not to all labourers indiscriminately, but to those best skilled



in the art of exciting and sustaining the ardour of the oxen under the plough. This song, the origin of which was probably considered as sacred, and to which certain mysterious influences were formerly attributed, is still reputed at the present day to possess the virtue of maintaining the courage of these animals, of appeasing their discontents, and of charming away the weariness of their arduous labour. It is not deemed sufficient to know how to drive a team well, so as to trace a perfectly straight furrow, or to lighten the animal's labour by elevating or depressing the ploughshare; he is not considered a perfect labourer who is unable to sing to his oxen—a peculiar talent which requires considerable taste and skill.

This song is in truth but a sort of recitative, interrupted and resumed at will. Its irregular form and false intonations judged by the rules of musical art, render it untranslatable. But it is not the less a pleasing song, and is so peculiarly appropriate to the nature of the labour for which it serves as accompaniment, to the gait of the oxen, to the calm which reigns over these rural scenes, and to the simple and artless character of the men who utter it, that no genius who was a stranger to the labours of the field could have invented it, and no singer save a skilled labourer of this country could possibly do it justice. At the periods of the year when there is no other work or movement going on in the country save agricultural labour, this chorus, at once so sweet and powerful, ascends like the voice of the breeze, to which its peculiar tone gives it some sort of resemblance. The concluding note of each phrase, sustained with a power and for a length of time absolutely incredible, ascends a quarter of a note systematically out of tune. This is wild, in truth, but its charm overpowers all criticism; and when the ear becomes accustomed to it, the listener cannot conceive that any other song could be raised at such hours and in such localities, without disturbing the harmony of nature.

It so happened therefore that I had before me a picture which formed a striking contrast to that of Holbein, although its component materials were similar. In place of an old man worn down with grief, a young and active peasant; in place of a yoke of lean and jaded horses, a double team of robust and spirited oxen; in place of death, a lovely child; and in place of an image of despair and the idea of destruction, a spectacle of energy and a dream of happiness.

It was then that the old French *quatrain*—

“A la sueur de ton visaige,” &c.

and the “*O fortunatos...agricolas*” of Virgil recurred simul-

taneously to my mind; and while gazing upon this handsome couple, the man and the child, accomplishing so poetically, with so much grace united to so much strength, a task full of grandeur and solemnity, I felt a deep sensation of pity mingled with involuntary respect. Happy the labourer! yes, doubtless I should be so in his place, if, my arm becoming all at once robust and my breast muscular, I could thus at the same time fertilize nature while I sang her charms, without my eyes ceasing to behold and my thoughts to comprehend the harmony of colours and sounds, the delicacy of tones, and the grace of outline—in a word, the mysterious beauty of the universe; and above all, without my heart ceasing to be in relation with the divine sentiment which presides over the immortal and sublime creation!

But, alas! that man has never understood the mystery of the beautiful—that child will never comprehend it. God preserve me from believing that they are not superior to the beasts they control, and that they have not at times a sort of ecstatic revelation which charms away their fatigue and lulls their cares to rest! I behold impressed upon their noble brows the seal of the Almighty, for they are born kings of the earth much more than those who, by right of purchase, possess it. And the proof that they feel it is, that one cannot remove them from their country with impunity; for they love this soil watered with the sweat of their brow, and the true peasant dies of nostalgia under the harness of the soldier when far from the fields which have witnessed his birth. But this man lacks a portion of the enjoyments which I possess—mental enjoyments which are indeed his due as the workman in that vast temple which the heavens alone are sufficiently wide to embrace. What he lacks is the knowledge of his own feelings. Those who have condemned him to servitude from his mother's womb, unable to deprive him of reverie, have robbed him of reflection.

Well, such as he is, imperfect, and condemned to eternal childhood though he be, he is yet a fairer spectacle than he in whose bosom science has stifled feeling. Raise not yourselves above him, ye who believe yourselves invested with the legitimate and inherent right of ruling over him, for this frightful error under which you labour proves that your understanding has destroyed your heart, and that you are at once the most imperfect and the blindest of men. I love far better the simplicity of his soul than the false lights of yours, and were I to recount his life I should have far more pleasure in bringing forward the gentle and touching portions of it, than you would have merit in painting the abject state into

which the rigour and the disdain of your social maxims have cast him.

I knew this young man and this lovely child; I knew their story—for they had a story, every one has his own, and would interest the world by the recital of the romance of their life, if they but understood it themselves. Although a peasant and a simple labourer, Germain was well instructed in his duties and affections. He had related them to me simply and clearly, and I had heard them with interest. After I had watched him labouring for some time, I asked myself why his history should not be written, although it was but a simple story, as straightforward and as unornamental as the furrow which he traced with his plough.

Next year this furrow will be covered and its place filled up with a new furrow, and thus the greater portion of men appear and vanish from the field of human life. A little earth obliterates all trace of them, and the furrows we have turned succeed each other like tombs in a cemetery. Is not the furrow of the labourer worth that of the idler, who has nevertheless a name, a name too which will remain, if by some singularity, some piece of eccentricity or absurdity he makes a little noise in the world?

Well then, let us endeavour to snatch if possible from the oblivion of forgetfulness the furrow of Germain the skilful labourer. He will know nothing of it and will never trouble himself about the matter; but I shall have enjoyed some pleasure in the attempt.

## CHAPTER II.

## GERMAIN, THE SKILFUL LABOURER.

"GERMAIN," said his father-in-law to him one day, "you must make up your mind to take a second wife. It is now two years since you became the widower of my daughter and your eldest child is seven years old. You are getting on towards thirty, my boy, and you know that in our country a man who is past that age is considered too old to marry again. You have three fine children, and up to the present time they have not been the least trouble to us. My wife and my daughter-in-law have taken the best care of them they could, and have loved them as they deserved. There's little Pierre almost reared; he can already goad the oxen very nicely, he is wise enough to be able to herd the beasts in the fields, and strong enough to take the horses to water. He therefore is no trouble to us; but the two others, whom God knows we love for all that, poor innocents! give us this year much anxiety. My daughter-in-law is near her confinement and she has still a little one in her arms. When the new-comer arrives she will no longer be able to look after your Solange and above all your Sylvain, who is scarcely four years old, and who never rests night or day. He has your lively temper and will make a good workman, but you must allow he makes a terrible child; and my old woman is not active enough to pursue and catch him when he runs near the ditch or rolls under the feet of the cattle. And then with this other that my daughter-in-law is about to bring into the world, the first must be thrown, during a year at least, upon my wife's arms. Your children therefore make us anxious. We do not like to see children badly taken care of, and when we think of the accidents which might happen for want of care, we are never at ease. You must therefore take another wife and give me another daughter-in-law. Think over this, my boy. I have already spoken to you on this subject several times; time flies, and the years will not wait. For your children's sakes, and for ours also, who like everything to go on smoothly in the house, you ought to marry again as soon as possible."

"Well, father," replied the son-in-law, "if you absolutely wish it, you shall be obeyed. But I cannot conceal from you that it will cost me much, and that I had almost as soon drown

myself as do your bidding. A man knows what he has lost, but he knows not what he shall find. I had a dear, good, kind wife; gentle, courageous, affectionate to her father and mother, kind to her husband, kind to her children, a good worker in the fields as well as in the house, clever at everything she put her hand to, good for all in short; and when you gave her to me, when I took her from you, we made no agreement that I should forget her if I had the misfortune to lose her."

"What you say shows your goodness of heart, Germain," rejoined Farmer Maurice; "I know that you loved my child, that you rendered her happy, and that if you could have satisfied death by going in her place, Catherine would have been alive at this present moment, and you in the grave. She well deserved being so truly loved by you, and if you were inconsolable at her death, we were so also, I am sure. But I speak not to you of forgetting her. The Almighty so willed that she should be taken from us, and we do not pass a single day without showing by our prayers, our thoughts, our words and actions, that we respect her memory and regret her death. But were she able to speak to you from the other world and make known to you her wishes, she would command you to seek a mother for her little orphans. The question then is to meet with a woman worthy of replacing her. This will not be an easy task, but it is not an impossible one; and when you shall have found her, you will love her as you did my daughter, because you are an honest fellow, and would be grateful to her for rendering us a service and for loving your children."

"Well, well, Father Maurice," said Germain, "I will do your will, as I have always done."

"It is but doing you justice, my son, to say that you have ever listened to the advice and instructions of the head of your family. Let us consult together then on the choice of your new wife. In the first place I am not of opinion that you should take a young girl. This is not what we want. Youth is giddy, and as the task of rearing three children is no inconsiderable burthen, especially when they are the fruits of a former marriage, you require a kind considerate soul, gentle with children and willing to work. If your wife is not of the same age, or nearly so, as yourself, she will not have good sense enough to undertake such a duty. She will think you too old, and your children too young. She will complain, and your children will pine away."

"That is precisely what makes me uneasy," said Germain. "Suppose these poor little innocents should be ill-treated, hated—beaten perhaps?"

"God forbid!" rejoined the old man. "Ill-tempered wo-

men are rarer in our country than kind ones, and one must be very silly not to be able to put one's hand on the woman likely to suit."

"That's true, father; there are some good girls in our village. There is Louise, Sylvaine, Claudine, Marguerite—in short, whatever one you wish."

"Gently, gently, my boy; all these girls are too young, or too poor, or too pretty; for, in fact, one must think of that also, my son. A pretty woman is not always so discreet as another."

"You want me to marry a fright then, do you?" said Germain rather uneasily.

"No, no! not a fright; for this woman you will choose will probably bring you a second family, and there is nothing so sad as having ugly, ill-formed, or unhealthy children. But a woman still in the prime of life, healthy, and neither very handsome nor yet a fright, would just suit your purpose."

"I see clearly," said Germain, smiling rather sadly, "that to procure such a one as you wish, it would be necessary to have one made on purpose; particularly as you do not wish to have a poor one, and the rich are not so easily obtained, especially by a widower."

"And supposing she should be a widow herself, Germain? There! a widow without children, and with a snug little property?"

"I know none at present in our parish."

"Nor I either; but there are some elsewhere."

"You have got some one in view, father; so come, tell me at once."

"Well, yes, I have some one in view: she is one of the Leonards, Guerin's widow, who lives at Fourche."

"I know neither the woman nor the place," replied Germain with a resigned air, though evidently growing more and more dejected.

"She is called Catherine, as was your former wife."

"Catherine? yes, that would please me, having to repeat that name. Catherine! and yet if I could not love her as well as the other Catherine it would be still more painful, for it would recall her still more frequently to my mind."

"I tell you that you will love her; she is a good creature, a kind-hearted woman. I have not seen her for a length of time, but she was by no means an ugly girl then; she is no longer young, however; I should say about two-and-thirty. She is descended from a good family, all decent, respectable people, and she has property to the amount of eight or ten thousand francs in land, which she would willingly sell to

purchase another in the spot where she would establish herself; for she also thinks of marrying again, and I know that if your character pleased her she would not consider your position a bad one."

"Then you have already arranged all that?"

"Yes, save and except the consent of the parties interested, and this is what you must ascertain by making each other's acquaintance. This woman's father is a sort of relation of mine, and he and I are intimate friends. You know Farmer Leonard well, do you not?"

"Yes, I have seen him speaking to you at the fairs, and at the last one you breakfasted together. Was that the subject that you had such a long chat about?"

"Certainly it was. He was looking at you selling the beasts and took a great fancy to you, thought you a good-looking fellow, and said you appeared active and clever; and when I had told him all about you, and how well you had conducted yourself with us during the eight years that we have lived and worked together, without ever having had an angry word with mortal, it occurred to him to get you to marry his daughter; a circumstance which suited me also, I confess, considering the good name she bears, the honesty of her family, and the comfortable circumstances in which I know they are placed."

"I see, Father Maurice, that you place a good deal of stress on good circumstances."

"Beyond question I do. And do not you also?"

"Yes, if you wish it, to please you; but you know that for my part I never trouble my head about what comes to me, or does not come to me, of our profits. I do not understand anything about divisions, and I have a poor head for matters of this sort. I understand the land, I understand the oxen, the horses, the teams, the sowings, the reapings, the fodder. As for the sheep, the vines, the garden, and fancy-work of that description, you know that is your son's business, and that I seldom meddle with it. As to money matters, my memory is short, and I would rather give up all than have any dispute about what is yours or mine. I should be afraid of being mistaken, and of demanding more than my due, and if affairs were not clear and simple I should never be able to get on at all."

"So much the worse, my son, and that is the reason why I should like you to have a good clear-headed woman as a wife to take my place when I shall be no more. You have never wished to look into our accounts, and that might lead to disagreements with my son, when you shall no longer have me

with you to regulate matters, and to tell you what comes to each."

"May you live a long time yet, Father Maurice! But do not be uneasy about what will take place after your death; I shall never dispute with your son. I trust in Jacques as I do in you; and as I have no property of my own, and as all that comes to me is derived from my marriage with your daughter and belongs to your children, I can rest contented, and so may you also. Jacques would never rob his sister's children for the sake of his own, since he loves them almost as dearly."

"You are right there, Germain. Jacques is a good son, a good brother, and a man who loves the truth. But Jacques might die before you, or before your children were grown up, and one ought always to think of not leaving minors in a family without a head to advise them and settle their differences; otherwise the lawyers would mix themselves up in the matter, set all parties by the ears, and get all the profits for themselves. So therefore we ought not to think of bringing another person into our family, whether man or woman, without reflecting that one day perhaps this person may have to direct the conduct and affairs of about thirty children, grandchildren, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law. One cannot tell to what extent a family may increase, and when the hive is too full, and it is necessary to swarm, each thinks of carrying off his own honey. When I took you for a son-in-law, although my daughter was rich and you poor, I did not reproach her for having chosen you. I saw that you were a good labourer, and I well knew that the best wealth for country people like us, consists in a pair of good arms and an honest heart like yours. When a man brings these into a family he brings enough; but with a woman it is a different affair: her labour in a house is directed to preserve, not to acquire. Besides, now that you are a father, and that you seek a wife, you must recollect that your new children, not having any right to share in the inheritance of those by the first marriage, would be in want if you were to die, unless your wife had some property of her own. And then, again, the children with which you are about to increase our little colony will cost something to feed them. If this charge should fall upon us alone, we would most certainly bring them up, and without complaining; but then the individual prosperity of each would be diminished, and the first children would have their share in these privations. Whenever families increase beyond measure, without property augmenting in proportion, poverty and misery surely come, no matter how great the courage with which one fights against them. These are my observations, Germain; weigh them



well, and endeavour to get yourself accepted by the widow Guerin, for her good conduct and her crown-pieces will bring present aid and future tranquillity."

"It is all settled, father; I shall endeavour to please her and will do my best to like her."

"For that purpose it is necessary that you should go and visit her."

"What! at her place? At Fourche? It is far from this, is it not? and we have scarcely any time to spare just at this season."

"When it is a question of a love-match, one must make up their mind to lose time; but when it is a marriage of reason between two persons who have no caprices and know exactly what they want, the matter is soon decided. To-morrow will be Saturday; you can make a short day's work, and start about two o'clock, after dinner. You will be at Fourche by night-fall; the moon is at the full now, the roads are good, and it is but three leagues off. It is near Magnier. Besides, you can take the mare."

"I would rather go on foot this weather."

"Yes, but the mare is a good animal, and a suitor who arrives well mounted has a better appearance. You shall put on your new Sunday clothes, and take a nice little present of game to Father Leonard. You can come as if from me; you can have a chat with him, pass Sunday with his daughter, and return with a Yes or No on Monday morning."

"That is settled then," replied Germain tranquilly.

And yet he was not altogether easy in his mind. Germain had always lived discreetly, as laborious peasants generally do. Married at twenty years of age, he had loved but one woman in his life, and since he had become a widower, although he was of an impetuous and lively temperament, had neither laughed nor romped with another. He had even borne faithfully in his heart true feelings of regret, and it was not without fear and misgiving that he yielded to his father-in-law's wish. But this father-in-law had always governed his family wisely, and Germain, who had devoted himself entirely to the common welfare, and consequently to him who personified it—the head of the family, could not conceive the possibility of rebelling against the reasonings and interests of all.

Nevertheless he was sad. A day seldom passed that he did not mourn in secret his lost wife, and although solitude began to weigh heavy upon him, he was more terrified at the idea of forming a new connection than desirous of escaping from his grief. He had a vague idea that love by surprising him might be able to console him; for love consoles not other-

wise. We find it not when we seek it. It meets us when we the least expect it. This cold project of marriage propounded by Farmer Maurice, this unknown bride, perhaps even all that had been said of her sense and virtue, furnished food for reflection and doubt. And he went on thinking, as men do who do not possess a sufficiency of ideas to combat each other, that is to say, not propounding to himself plausible theories to excuse forming in his own mind a system of reasonings for selfishness or resistance, but suffering a deep, gnawing pain, and not striving to contend against an evil which he felt himself bound in justice to endure.

Meanwhile old Maurice had returned to the farm, whilst Germain employed the last hours of daylight in closing the breaches made by the sheep in the enclosure of a neighbouring field. He stuck in branches of thorns, and strengthened them with clods of turf, whilst the magpies chattered in the adjoining thicket, and seemed to cry to him to make haste, as if curious to examine his work as soon as he should have left the spot.

## CHAPTER III.

## LITTLE PIERRE.

WHEN Farmer Maurice returned home, he found there an old neighbour who had come to chat with his wife while seeking a little coal to light her fire. Dame Guillette inhabited a very poor little cabin about two gunshots from the farm. But she was a discreet and orderly woman; her poor dwelling was neat and well kept, and her garments, patched with care, announced a feeling of self-respect amid distress.

"You have come to seek your evening fire, Dame Guillette," said the old man, addressing her. "Do you wish for anything else to-night?"

"No, Father Maurice, thank you," replied she; "nothing at present. I am not one that goes about begging, you know, and I never abuse the kindness of my friends."

"That's the truth; and for that reason your friends are always ready to render you a service."

"I have just been chatting to your wife, and I was asking her if Germain had made up his mind yet to marry again."

"You are not a gossip," replied Maurice, "and one can speak before you without fearing that it may be all over the neighbourhood the next moment: so I may tell my wife, and you too, that Germain has quite decided; he starts to-morrow for Fourche."

"So much the better," cried Dame Maurice; "poor fellow! God grant that he finds a wife as kind and as honest-hearted as himself!"

"Ah! he is going to Fourche?" observed La Guillette, "how things come about! That suits me well; and since you asked me just now if I wanted anything else, I will tell you, Farmer Maurice, in what way you can oblige me."

"Say on, say on—we are at your service."

"I should be very glad if Germain would be kind enough to take my daughter with him."

"Where! to Fourche?"

"No, not to Fourche, but to the Elms, where she is going to remain for the rest of the year."

"How's this?" said Dame Maurice, "are you going to part with your daughter?"

"Why, you see, it's time that she should enter service, and

earn something for herself. It has given me much pain, and her also, poor soul! We could not make up our minds to part at St. John's; but now Martinmas has come, and she has had the offer of a good place as shepherdess in the farms of the Elms. The farmer passed by this way the other day returning from the fair, and saw my little Mary herding her three sheep upon the common; 'you are scarcely occupied at all, my little girl,' said he to her; 'and three sheep for a shepherd-lass are hardly enough. Should you like to keep a hundred? I will take you. Our shepherdess has fallen ill, and is going home to her parents, and if you like to take her place in about eight days' time, you shall have fifty francs for the remainder of the year up to St. John's day!' The child refused, but she could not help thinking over the offer, and telling me when she came home at night, seeing me so sad and embarrassed about how we are to pass the winter, which will be a long and hard one, since we have seen the herons and wild geese passing over a full month earlier this year than usual. We wept, both of us; but at length courage came to us. We said to ourselves that we could not remain together, since it would be difficult for even one person to live upon our bit of land; and since Mary is old enough (she is now turned sixteen), it was necessary that she should do as others do and earn her bread, and help her poor mother."

"Dame Guillette," said the old labourer, "if fifty francs was all that was necessary to console you in your troubles, and keep you from sending your child so far away from you, in truth I would find them, although fifty francs for people like us is no small sum. But in all things one must consult reason as well as friendship. Even if you were saved from hardships this winter, you would not be insured against suffering want the following one, and the longer your daughter delays entering service, the more difficulty will you have in parting with her. Little Mary is getting tall and strong, and she has not sufficient occupation at your house. She might acquire habits of idleness—"

"Oh! as to that I am not afraid," said La Guillette. "Mary is as active as a rich girl at the head of a great house would be. She never remains an instant idle, and when we have no other work to do, she rubs up our poor chairs and tables until she makes them shine like glass. The child is worth her weight in gold, and I would much rather she entered her service as shepherdess than have to go so far away amongst people I know nothing of. You would have taken her at St. John's if we could have made up our minds; but now you have

hired all your people, and it will not be until next St. John's day that we can think of this again."

"And I consent to take her then with all my heart, Guillette! It will give me much pleasure to do so. But in the mean time she will do well to learn her business and get accustomed to serve others."

"Yes, yes, that is true enough; the die is cast. The farmer of the Elms came again about her this morning and we said yes; so she must go. But the poor child does not know the road, and I should not like to send her so far alone. Since your son-in-law is going to Fourche to-morrow, he might take her with him. It appears that where she is going to is close to Fourche; at least so they tell me, for I never made the journey in all my life."

"It is close to Fourche, and my son-in-law will take her. It is only his duty; he can even take her behind him on the mare, which will save her shoes. But here he is coming in to supper. Tell me, Germain; Dame Guillette's little Mary is going as shepherdess to the Elms. You will take her behind you on the mare, won't you?"

"Very well," replied Germain, who seemed thoughtful and anxious, but was ever ready to render service to a neighbour.

In our world such an idea would never have entered the mind of a mother, as that of confiding her daughter, sixteen years of age, to the care of a man of eight-and-twenty! For Germain was in reality but eight-and-twenty years of age, and although, according to the ideas of the country, he passed for an old man in a marriageable point of view, he was for all that the handsomest man in the neighbourhood. Work had not stamped its seal upon him as it does on most peasants who have had ten years' labour over their heads. He was strong and active enough to work ten years longer without looking old, and the prejudice of age must indeed have weighed heavily on a young girl's mind to prevent her seeing that Germain had a healthy florid complexion, eyes as clear and blue as the heavens in May, a handsomely formed mouth, superb teeth, and a form, light and active as that of a young horse that has not yet quitted its native pastures.

But purity of morals is a sacred tradition in certain rural districts far removed from the bustle and corruption of large towns, and among all the families of Belair that of Farmer Maurice was reputed as honest and serving the truth. Germain was going to seek a wife; Mary was too young and too poor a child to be thought of in this point of view, and unless he were a bad and heartless man, it was impossible for him to

harbour a culpable thought respecting her. Farmer Maurice was therefore nowise uneasy at seeing him take this pretty girl behind him on horseback, and La Guillette would have considered it as offering an insult to Germain if she had recommended him to respect her as his sister. Mary, after having twenty times embraced her mother and her young friends, mounted on horseback weeping bitterly. Germain, who was sad upon his own account, felt all the more compassion for her grief, and started with a serious air, whilst the neighbours waved their hands in sign of adieu to poor Mary without harbouring a thought of harm.

La Grise was young, handsome, and active. She bore without effort her double burthen, laying back her ears, and champing her bit like a proud and spirited animal as she was. While passing the long meadow, she perceived her dam—who was called old Grise, as she was young Grise—and she neighed in token of adieu. Old Grise approached the hedge, her hoofs resounding on the soil, and endeavoured to gallop along the field-side to follow her daughter; then, seeing her depart at a round trot, she neighed in her turn, and remained pensive and uneasy, her head in the air and her mouth full of grass which she no longer thought of swallowing.

"This poor beast always knows its mother," said Germain, in order to prevent little Mary's thoughts from dwelling on her grief; "and that reminds me that I did not kiss my little Pierre before I started. The naughty little fellow was not there! He wanted yesterday evening to make me promise, right or wrong, that I would take him with me, and he cried for an hour in his bed. This morning again he tried all he could to persuade me. Oh! he is a cunning boy! But when he saw that it was of no use, my gentleman got angry, started off into the fields, and I have not seen him all day."

"I saw him though," said little Mary, making an effort to restrain her tears. "He was running with Soulas' children by the roadside, and I fancied that he must have been out some time, for he was hungry, and was eating sloes and mulberries out of the hedge. I gave him the piece of bread I had for my lunch, and he said to me: 'Thank you, my sweet Mary: when you come to see us I will give you some cake.' He is a dear engaging child that boy of yours, Germain!"

"Well yes, he is engaging," replied the labourer, "and I do not know what I wouldn't do for him! If his grandmother had not been more prudent than I, I could not have resisted taking him with me, when I saw him crying so that his little heart was ready to break."

"Well, why did you not bring him, Germain? He would not have been in the way at all, and he is so good when he gets his own way!"

"It seems that he would have been in the way where I am going. At least that was Father Maurice's opinion;—for my part I should have thought that, on the contrary, it would have been a good plan to see how they would have received him, and such a well-behaved child could not but be received kindly. But they said at home that I ought not to begin by showing the troubles of housekeeping. I don't know why I talk to you about such things, little Mary; you don't understand them, do you?"

"Oh yes, Germain, I know that you are going to get married; my mother told me about it, only charging me not to speak of it to any one, neither at your house nor where I am going; and you may rest assured I shall not say a word to mortal."

"You will act wisely, for it is not settled; perhaps I shall not suit the person in question."

"You must hope you may, Germain; why should you not suit her?"

"Who knows? I have three children, and that is a heavy burthen for a woman who is not their mother."

"That is true, but then your children are not like other children."

"Do you think so?"

"They are beautiful as little angels, and so well brought up that it would be impossible to find children better behaved."

"There is Sylvain, who is not too quiet."

"He is so little! he cannot be otherwise than stirring; but then he has such a spirit!"

"He certainly has a spirit: and such courage! He fears neither cows nor bulls, and if they were to let him have his own way, he would climb already upon the horses' backs with his eldest brother."

"If I had been in your place, I would have taken the eldest. You might be certain of being loved at once for having such a beautiful child."

"Yes, if the person loves children: but suppose she does not?"

"Are there any women who don't love children?"

"Not many, I think; but there are some, and it is that which torments me."

"Then you do not know anything of this woman?"

"No more than you do, and I fear I shall not know her any better after having seen her. I am not distrustful. When

people speak fair to me, I believe them; but I have more than once had to repent doing so, for words are not actions."

"They say that she is a very excellent woman."

"Who says so? Father Maurice?"

"Yes, your father-in-law."

"That is all very well, but he knows no more about her than I do."

"Well, you will see her yourself soon, you can observe her closely, and it is to be hoped that you will not be deceived."

"Look here, little Mary, I should be very glad if you would accompany me to the house for a short time before going to the Elms; you are a quicksighted girl, you have always shown cleverness, and you pay attention to everything; if you see anything you consider wrong, you will tell me quietly."

"Oh! no, Germain, I would not do that; I should be afraid of being mistaken. And besides, if a light word uttered in an unguarded moment were to disgust you with this marriage, your relations would blame me, and I have plenty of cares already without bringing others upon my poor dear mother."

As they were thus chatting together, La Grise suddenly shied at some object in the hedge, which, when she again approached it, she seemed to recognise. Germain cast a glance towards the roadside, and saw in the ditch, under the dense and still fresh branches of a felled oak, what he at first took for a lamb.

"It is either a stray or a dead sheep," said he, "for it does not stir. Perhaps some one may be in search of it; we must see."

"It is not a lamb," exclaimed little Mary; "it is a sleeping child—it is your little Pierre!"

"Well to be sure!" said Germain, dismounting from his horse; "just look at this little rascal sleeping there, and in a ditch too, where some serpent might easily bite him!"

He lifted the child in his arms, who smiled as he opened his eyes, and throwing his arms round his father's neck, exclaimed:

"My dear papa, you will bring me with you?"

"Yes! yes! always the same song! What were you doing there, naughty Pierre?"

"I was waiting until papa should pass," said the child. "I kept looking and looking along the road, until at last I fell asleep."

"And if I had passed without seeing you, you would have remained out all night, and the wolves would have eaten you."

"Oh! I knew you would see me," replied little Pierre confidently.



"Well now, my boy, kiss me, bid me good-bye, and make haste home if you don't want to miss your supper."

"So you won't take me with you then?" exclaimed the child, beginning to rub his eyes in order to show that he intended to cry.

"You know very well that your grandfather and grandmother do not wish it," said Germain, entrenching himself behind the authority of his elderly relations, as if he thought that his own was not much to be depended on.

But the child would listen to nothing. He began to cry bitterly, saying that since his father took little Mary, he might very well take him also. In vain his father urged that they should have to pass the great woods infested with wicked beasts which devoured little children; that La Grise would not carry three persons; that she had said so before starting; and that in the country they were going to, there were neither beds nor supper for little boys. All these excellent reasons failed to persuade little Pierre; he threw himself on the grass, rolled over and over, crying that his papa loved him no more, and that if he would not take him with him, he would not return to the house day or night.

Germain had a father's heart, as tender and as weak as a woman's. The death of his wife, the cares and attentions he had been obliged to lavish himself on his children, the reflection also that these poor little motherless ones required all his love, had contributed to render him thus, and now there took place so severe a conflict within his breast that, though blushing at his own weakness, the perspiration stood upon his brow, in his endeavours to hide his uneasiness from little Mary, and his eyes were bordered with red and almost overflowing with tears. At length he endeavoured to get angry, but turning towards little Mary as if to take her as witness of his firmness, he saw that the sweet girl's face was bathed in tears, and all his courage abandoning him, he felt it impossible to restrain his own, although he still grumbled and threatened as well as he could.

"You have really too hard a heart," said little Mary at length; "and for my part I never could resist, as you have done, a child who is in such trouble. Come, Germain, take him. Your mare is well used to carrying two persons and a child, as your brother-in-law and his wife, who is heavier by a good deal than I am, go to market every Saturday with their boy upon the back of this good animal. You can set him on horse-back before you, and, besides, I would rather go all alone on foot than give this little fellow so much pain."

"Do not let that disturb you," replied Germain, who was dying to be convinced. "La Grise is strong, and would carry two more if there was room upon her back. But what shall we do with this child on the road? He will be cold and hungry, and who will take care of him this evening and to-morrow, put him to bed, and wash and dress him? I dare not give this trouble to a woman I know nothing of, and who would most probably think that I was rather too free and easy with her at the commencement."

"According to the kindness or ill-humour that she shows, you will know her disposition at once, Germain, believe me. And besides, if she repulses your Pierre I will take charge of him. I will walk over to the house to-morrow, I will amuse him all the day, and see that he wants for nothing."

"But he will annoy you, my poor girl! He will weary you. A whole day is so long!"

"On the contrary, he will amuse me. He will keep me company, and prevent me from feeling lonely and sad the first day I have to pass in a strange place. I shall fancy that I am still at home."

## CHAPTER IV

## UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.

"~~BY-THE-BYE~~," said Germain, after they had proceeded a short distance, "what will they say at the house when they find that this little gentleman does not come home? The old people will be uneasy, and will be looking everywhere for him."

"You can mention to the cantonnier, who works further on on the road, that you have taken him with you, and ask him to let your people know."

"That is true, Mary; you think of everything! For my part I hadn't a thought that Johnny would be working up this way."

"And, as it happens, he lives close to the farm, and will not fail to give your message."

After this precaution had been taken, Germain put the mare to a round trot, and little Pierre was so delighted that he did not immediately recollect he had not dined; but the movement of the horse producing a corresponding action of the stomach, after they had proceeded about a league he turned pale, began to yawn, and at length confessed that he was dying of hunger.

"Ah! that's the commencement," said Germain. "I knew well that we should not go far without my gentleman crying out that he was either hungry or thirsty."

"I am thirsty, too," said little Pierre.

"Well then, we shall pull up at Dame Rebec's inn at Corlay, the Rising Sun—a fine sign but a very bad hostelry. Come, Mary, you will drink a glass of wine also, won't you?"

"No, no, I don't want anything," said she; "I will hold the mare while you go in with the child."

"But I have been thinking, my good girl, that you gave your lunch this morning to my Pierre, and that you yourself are fasting. You would not dine with us either at the house; you did nothing but cry."

"Oh! I am not hungry, I am too sorrowful; and I assure you that I do not at the present moment feel the least wish to eat."

"I must force you then, my little woman; otherwise you will be ill. We have a good way to go yet, and it wouldn't

do to arrive at our journey's end like a party of half-famished travellers, calling out for something to eat before saying good-day. For my part, I will set you an example, although I have no great appetite; but it will come sooner or later, seeing that I have not dined any more than yourself. I saw you and your mother weeping, and that vexed me. Come, come, I shall fasten La Grise to the door; so jump down, there's a good girl."

They all three entered Dame Rebec's hostelry, and in less than a quarter of an hour the hostess succeeded in serving up a very tolerable looking omelette, a loaf of household bread, and a couple of bottles of claret wine.

Peasants do not eat quickly, and Master Pierre had so huge an appetite that a full hour passed before Germain could think of getting off again. Little Mary had at first eaten to oblige Germain; then by degrees hunger came, for at sixteen years of age one cannot fast long, and country air is imperious. The kind efforts of Germain, who did his utmost to console her and give her courage, produced also their good effect; she made an effort to persuade herself that seven months would soon pass away, and endeavoured to fix her thoughts on the happiness she should feel in finding herself once more with her family and in her native village, since both Farmer Maurice and Germain had agreed to take her into their service at the expiration of that time. But just as she was beginning to jest and play with little Pierre, Germain conceived the unfortunate idea of asking her to look out of the inn window at the beautiful view of the valley, which from this height could be seen to its fullest extent, stretched out so smiling, and green, and fertile, beneath them. Mary looked out and asked, if, from where they were, they could see the houses of Belair.

"To be sure you can," replied Germain, "and the farm, and even your mother's house. Stay! look there, that little grey spot, not far from the great poplar at Godard, just below the steeple!"

"Ah! I see it," replied the young girl.

And thereupon she began to weep again.

"I was wrong to make you think of this," said Germain. "I have been doing nothing but committing blunders to-day. Come, Mary, let us be off, my girl; the days are short now, and in another hour, when the moon is up, it will be no longer warm."

They accordingly started again, crossed the great heath, and, as Germain could not let La Grise go very fast, for fear

of fatiguing the girl and child by too hard a trot, the sun had set when they turned off from the high road to gain the woods.

Germain knew the road as far as Magnier; but he imagined that he could shorten the distance by avoiding the avenue of Chanteloube, and descending by Presles and La Sepulture, a direction which he had not been accustomed to take when he went to the fair. He mistook his way, and lost, a little more time before entering the woods; again he did not enter at the right side, and, not perceiving his error, he was, unwittingly, turning back upon Fourche, and getting higher up towards Ardentes.

What now prevented him from setting himself right was a mist which began to rise with the approach of nightfall—one of those autumnal evening mists which the moonlight only renders still more vague and deceitful. The large sheets of water with which the open glades were partly covered, exhaled vapours so dense, that when La Grise crossed them they could be discovered only by the splashing of her hoofs and the difficulty which she had to extricate them from the marshy ground.

When they had at length discovered a smooth, straight alley, and, having traversed it, Germain sought to discover where he was, he perceived clearly that he had lost his way; for old Maurice, when explaining the road, had told him that on leaving the woods he would have to descend a very rugged hill side, cross an immense plain, and pass the river twice by fording. He had even charged him to enter this river carefully, as at this time of the year, after the heavy rains, the water was frequently very high. Seeing neither descent, nor plain, nor river, but a flat expanse, smooth and white as a carpet of snow, Germain stopped, looked around for a house, waited in expectation of some one passing, but saw nothing animate or inanimate which could afford him any information. Then he retraced his steps, and once more entered the wood. But the mist had now become even more dense; the moon was completely veiled, the roads were frightful, and the sloughs deep. Twice La Grise nearly fell; laden as she was, she lost courage, and although she still preserved sufficient discernment to avoid running against the trees, she could not prevent those on her back from frequently coming in contact with the huge branches, which, at the elevation of their heads, barred the passage, placing them in considerable danger. Germain lost his hat in one of these encounters, and had great difficulty in

finding it again. Little Pierre had fallen asleep, and lying like a sack in his father's arms, he clung to him so closely that the latter could no longer either support or direct the horse.

"I do verily think we are bewitched!" said Germain, pulling up; "for these woods are not so large that a man should lose himself in them, unless indeed he were drunk; and yet here we have been for the last two hours turning and twisting about without being able to get out. La Grise has but one idea in her head—that of returning home, and it is she that puts me astray. If we wanted to go home we could do nothing better than give her her head; but when we are perhaps but two or three steps from where we are to sleep to-night, it would be ridiculous to give it up and return such a long way home. And yet I do not know what is to be done. I can see neither sky nor earth, and I am afraid of the child catching a fever if we remain in this vile fog, or being crushed by our weight if the horse should stumble."

"You must not try any longer," said little Mary. "Dis-mount, Germain, and give me the child; I will carry him very carefully, and can manage better than you to prevent the cape from coming loose and so leaving him uncovered. Do you lead the mare by the bridle, and we shall perhaps see clearer when we are nearer the ground."

This plan succeeded only so far as to preserve them from the risk of the horse falling, for the mist crept along, seeming to cling to the humid earth. They found walking in this manner very fatiguing, and were soon so harassed that when at length they found a dry spot under some huge oak-trees they called a halt. Little Mary was wet to the skin, but did not utter a word of complaint or vexation. Occupied solely with the child, she seated herself upon a gravelly bank and nestled him in her lap, whilst Germain proceeded to explore the neighbourhood, after having first taken the precaution of passing the mare's bridle round a branch of a tree.

But La Grise, heartily tired of this journey, gave a sudden jerk to the reins, disengaged the bridle, burst the girths, and giving two or three flings higher than her head by way of leave-taking, started off through the wood at a pace which clearly demonstrated that she stood in need of no one to show her the way.

"There!" said Germain, after a vain effort to overtake her, "now we are completely nonplussed; and it would be of no use for us now to find the right road, for even if we did we should be obliged to cross the river on foot, and, judging by

the state of these roads, we may be very sure that it has risen far above its banks and is spread over the plain. We are unacquainted with the other routes, so we must even wait until this mist disperses, which cannot be longer than an hour or two. When we are able to see about us we will look for a house, the nearest we can find to the outskirts of the wood; but for the present we cannot stir from this spot. There is either a ditch or a pond or something of that kind in front of us; and behind I cannot say what there is, for I no longer know by which way we came."

"Well, let us have patience, Germain," said little Mary. "We are not so badly off upon this little bank. The rain cannot penetrate the foliage of these thick oaks, and we shall be able to light a fire, for I can feel some old roots lying about which are not attached to anything and are dry enough to burn. You have the means of striking a light, Germain, have you not? You were smoking your pipe a little while ago."

"I had it, but I have it no longer. My steel was in the saddle-bag along with the game I was taking as a present to my future bride; but the cursed mare has carried off all with her, even your mantle, which will be torn to pieces and lost among the trees."

"No, Germain; the saddle, saddle-bags, and my mantle are on the ground there at your feet. La Grise burst the girths and threw all off on one side when she ran away."

"Faith! that is true enough," said the labourer; "and now if we could but happen upon a little rotten wood by feeling about, we should be able to dry and warm ourselves."

"That won't be difficult," said little Mary, "the dry sticks are crackling everywhere under my feet; but first of all give me the saddle here."

"What do you want the saddle for?"

"To make a bed for the little fellow. No! not that way, on the outside; he will lie so snugly in the inside, and it is still warm from the horse's back. Now prop up the saddle on each side with the stones you see there."

"I don't see any stones. Can you see in the dark like a cat?"

"Stay! there, that's done, Germain! Now give me your cloak till I wrap up his little feet, and then I shall throw my cape over him. See! if he is not fixed there as snugly as if he were in his bed! and feel him—how warm he is!"

"True enough! Why, Mary, you understand the management of children!"

"That doesn't require much magic. Now then, search for your flint and steel in your saddle-bag, while I go and pick up some wood."

"That wood will never light; it is too damp."

"You doubt everything, Germain! Do you not remember, when you were herding sheep, making great fires in the fields in the very middle of the rain?"

"Yes, that is a talent peculiar to shepherd children; but, for my part, I was a plough-driver as soon as I was able to walk."

"And that is the reason why you are stronger in your arms than nimble with your hands. There! our bonfire is ready; you'll soon see if it won't burn! Give me a light now, and a handful of dry fern. That's right!—now blow!—there is nothing wrong with your lungs, is there?"

"Not that I know of," said Germain, blowing like a pair of forge bellows.

In another instant the fire sparkled up, throwing at first a reddish light around, but at length, rising in blue jets of flame, it illuminated the dark foliage of the oak, contending with the mist, and by degrees drying the atmosphere within a circumference of ten feet.

"Now I am going to sit down beside the child to watch that the sparks do not fall upon him," said the young girl; "and do you put on some more wood and keep up the fire, Germain. We shall catch neither fever nor cold here, I'll answer for it."

"By my faith, you are a girl of rare sense!" said Germain, "and you know how to make a fire as well as a Spirit of the Night. I feel a different person already, and am getting some heart again; for what with limbs wet up to the knees, and the idea of remaining here till daybreak, I was in a very bad humour just now."

"And when people are in a bad humour they can do nothing," replied little Mary.

"You are never in a bad humour then, eh?"

"Oh, no—never! What would be the use of that?"

"Oh! there is no use in it, certainly; but how can people help it when they are annoyed? God knows you have not been free from annoyances, my poor little woman, for you have not always been happy!"

"That is true enough! My poor mother and myself have suffered a good deal: we have had our troubles; but then we never lost courage."

"I should never lose courage for any work that was to be done, no matter what; but poverty would upset me, for I have



never wanted for anything. My wife made me rich and I am so still, and shall be so long as I work at the farm. That will be always, I hope. But all have their troubles; I have suffered in other respects."

"Yes, you lost your wife, and that was a great pity!"

"Was it not?"

"Oh! I cried heartily—I felt so sorry for her, Germain!—she was so good! But let us not speak of it any more, for I should weep again; all my sorrows are coming back to me again to-day, I think."

"It is true she loved you dearly, little Mary! She was very fond both of you and your mother. Come, come—you are crying! Come, my child—I do not wish to cry myself—"

"And yet you are weeping for all that, Germain! You are crying too! and where is the shame in a man crying for his wife? Do not mind me—I share your grief."

"You have a kind heart, Mary, and it does me good to weep with you. But put your feet to the fire; your petticoats are wringing wet, my poor little girl! Stay! I will take your place beside the little fellow, and then you can warm yourself better."

"I am quite warm enough," said Mary; "and if you wish to sit down, take a corner of the cloak. I am very well where I am."

"The fact is, we are not badly off here," said Germain, seating himself beside her. "There is nothing but hunger now which torments me. It must be nearly nine o'clock, and I had so much difficulty in getting along in those vile roads that I feel quite knocked up. Are you not hungry too, Mary?"

"I? not at all! I am not accustomed like you to make four meals a-day; and I have so often gone to bed supperless that once more does not astonish me."

"Well! a wife like you is a perfect treasure!" said Germain smiling; "she does not cost much."

"I am not a wife," said Mary innocently, without perceiving the turn which the ideas of the Skilful Labourer were taking. "Are you dreaming?"

"Yes, I think I am dreaming," replied Germain. "It is hunger which makes me wander a little perhaps."

"Why, what a glutton you must be!" rejoined she, brightening up a little in her turn. "Well, if you cannot exist five or six hours without food, have you not got some game in your saddle-bags, and fire to cook it with?"

"*Diantre!* that's a good idea of yours! but then it is a present to my future father-in-law."

"You have three brace of partridges and a hare. I presume it will not take all that to satisfy your appetite?"

"But how can we cook them here, without a spit or andirons? They would be burnt to a cinder."

"Not in the least," said little Mary. "I'll engage to cook them under the ashes without giving them the least flavour of the smoke. What! have you never caught larks in the fields and cooked them between two stones? Ah! that's true! I forgot you have never been a shepherd. Come, pluck this partridge. Not so roughly! you will tear all the skin."

"You might pluck another, just to show me."

"Then you are going to eat two? What an ogre! There they are plucked; now I am going to cook them."

"You would make a perfect landlady, little Mary! But unfortunately you have no canteen, and I shall be obliged to put up with the water of yonder marsh."

"You would prefer a bottle of wine, would you not?—and perhaps you would like coffee afterwards? You fancy yourself in one of the booths at a fair! Call the innkeeper!—some wine here for the Skilful Labourer of Belair!"

"Ah! you little gipsy, you are laughing at me, eh? You wouldn't drink some wine if you had it, would you not?"

"I?—I drank some this evening with you at Rebec's, for the first time in my life! But if you are very well behaved I will give you a bottle almost full, and of good wine too."

"What! Mary, are you then positively a little witch?"

"Were you not silly enough to call for two bottles of wine at Dame Rebec's? You drank one of them along with your little boy, and I scarcely swallowed three drops of the one you placed before me; yet you paid for both without looking."

"Well?"

"Well, I put into my basket the one that was scarcely touched, because I thought that either you or your little one would be thirsty on the road; and here it is."

"Well you are certainly the most considerate creature I ever met with. Only to think now that the poor girl was crying as we left the inn! But that did not prevent her thinking of others more than of herself. Little Mary, the man who marries you will be no fool!"

"I hope not, for I should not like a fool. Come, eat your partridges—they are done to a turn; and for want of bread you must content yourself with chestnuts."

"And where the deuce did you manage to get chestnuts also?"

"That is most wonderful now—is it not? Why, all along the road, to be sure; I plucked them from the branches as we went along, and filled my pockets."

"And they are cooked too?"

"Why, where do you think my wits would have been if I had not put them into the fire as soon as it was lighted? We always do that in the fields."

"Come now, little Mary, we are going to sup together! I will drink your health, and wish you a good husband—just such a one as you should like yourself. Come, tell me who you would prefer."

"That would be a very difficult matter, Germain, for I have never yet thought of such a thing."

"How! not at all?—never?" said Germain, beginning to eat with a labourer's appetite, but for all that cutting the choicest morsels and offering them to his companion, who obstinately refused the game, contenting herself with a few chestnuts.

"Tell me then, little Mary," continued he, seeing that she did not think of answering him, "do you mean to say that you have not yet had an idea of marriage? You are old enough at all events."

"Perhaps so," said she; "but I am too poor. It would require at least a hundred crowns to commence housekeeping, and I must work for five or six years to accumulate such a sum."

"Poor girl! I wish old Maurice would give me a hundred crowns, that I might make them a present to you."

"Many thanks, Germain! But then what would people say of me?"

"What would you have them say of you? They know very well that I am old, and that I cannot marry you, and they would not suppose that I—that you—"

"There! Master Germain—look! your child is awake," said little Mary.

## CHAPTER V.

## DESPITE THE COLD.

LITTLE Pierre had risen and was gazing around him with a pensive air.

"Ah! that's just like him when he hears any person eating!" said Germain; "the report of a cannon would not awake him, but as soon as ever any one begins to move his jaws near him, he opens his eyes in a minute."

"I should think you must have been like him at his age!" said little Mary with a mischievous smile. "Ha! my little Pierre, you are looking up at the top of your bed? It is made of leaves this evening, my child; but yet your father is taking his supper for all that. Will you sup with him? I have not eaten your share; I thought you would soon come for it."

"Mary, I wish you would eat," cried the labourer; "I shall eat no more. I am a ravenous monster—a glutton—while you deprive yourself of everything for our sakes. That is not right; I am quite ashamed of myself. There—that takes away all my hunger—my son shan't sup unless you sup also!"

"Leave us alone," replied little Mary; "you have not the key of our appetites. Mine is locked up to-day, but that of your Pierre is as open as a little wolf's. Stay—just look how he takes to it! Oh! he will be a stout labourer too!"

In fact, little Pierre soon showed whose son he was; and although scarcely awakened, and comprehending neither where he was nor how he had got there, he began to eat with might and main; then, when he had satisfied his appetite, excited as children always are by any change in their usual habits, he displayed more spirit, more curiosity, and more intelligence than usual. He first inquired where he was, and when he learned that he was in the middle of a wood he became rather frightened.

"Are there no wicked animals in this wood?" asked he of his father.

"No," said his father, "none at all. Do not be afraid."

"Then you told me a story just now when you said that if

I went with you into the great woods, the wolves would carry me away?"

"Do you hear this reasoner?" said Germain, rather embarrassed.

"He is right," rejoined little Mary; "you told him so. He has a good memory and he recollects it. But learn, my little Pierre, that your father never tells stories. We passed the great woods while you were asleep, and we are now in the little woods where there are no wild beasts."

"Are the little woods very far from the great woods?"

"Quite far enough. Besides the wolves never leave the great woods; and even if they were to come this way your father would kill them."

"And would you kill them too, little Mary?"

"Yes, we both would kill them, for you would help us stoutly, my Pierre—wouldn't you? You are not afraid, are you? You would lay about you bravely!"

"Yes, yes!" said the child proudly, assuming a heroic attitude, "we would kill them!"

"There is no one like you for being able to speak to children, and make them understand," said Germain to little Mary. "It is true it is not long since you were a child yourself, and you recollect what your mother used to say to you. I believe the younger one is the better one gets on with young people. I am very much afraid that a woman of thirty, who does not yet know what it is to be a mother, will have great difficulty in learning how to chatter and reason with youngsters."

"Why so, Germain? I know not why you have taken a bad idea into your head respecting this woman; you must think better of her."

"Devil take the woman!" said Germain. "I wish I were safe back at home again, never more to return. What need have I for a wife? A woman, too, that I know nothing of!"

"Papa," said the child, "why are you always speaking of your wife to-day, since she is dead?"

"Alas! my boy, you have not forgotten your poor mother then?"

"No, for I saw her put into a beautiful white wooden box, and my grandmother took me up to kiss her and bid her good-bye. She was all white and cold—oh! so cold; and every evening my aunt makes me pray that she may be with God in heaven. Do you think she is there now?"

"I trust so, my child. But you must always pray; that shows your mother that you love her."

"I am going to say my prayers," continued the child; "I quite forgot to say them this evening before. But I cannot repeat them all alone, I always forget some. You must help me, little Mary."

"Yes, my Pierre, I will help you," said the young girl "Come and kneel beside me."

The child knelt on the young girl's lap, clasped his little hands, and began to recite his prayer, at first with attention and fervour, for he knew the beginning very well, then slowly and with hesitation, and at length repeating word for word as little Mary dictated it to him; for when he had reached a certain point in his evening devotions, sleep every night overpowered him and he had never been able to learn it to the end. On this occasion also, the labour of attention and the monotony of his own voice produced their accustomed effect; he pronounced the last syllables with great difficulty, and only after they had been repeated to him three or four times. At length his head grew heavy, and he fell forward upon Mary's bosom: his little hands became loosened, separated from each other, and fell open upon his knees. By the light of their bivouac fire Germain gazed upon his little angel slumbering upon the bosom of the young maiden, who nestling him in her arms, while her warm breath played amid his fair tresses, had fallen into a pious reverie, and uttered a mental prayer for the soul of their lost Catherine.

Germain was touched, and sought for words to express to little Mary the esteem and gratitude she inspired him with, but could find none able to convey his thoughts. He approached to kiss his son, whom she still held pressed to her bosom, and he had much difficulty in detaching his lips from little Pierre's forehead.

"You kiss him too roughly," said Mary, gently repulsing the labourer's head; "you will awake him. Let me put him to bed again, since he has once more departed for dreams of Paradise."

The child permitted himself to be laid down again, but when stretched upon the goat's-skin of the saddle, he asked if he was upon La Grise's back. Then opening his large blue eyes, and fixing them for a moment or two upon the branches above his head, he appeared to be in a waking dream, or to be struck with some idea which might have glided into his mind during the day and now found words for itself at the approach of

"Papa," said he, "if you intend to give me another mother, I hope it will be little Mary."

And without waiting for a reply, he closed his eyes and fell over again asleep. Little Mary appeared to pay no other attention to the strange words of the child than to regard them as a proof of his affection; she carefully wrapped him up, heaped fresh fuel on the fire, and as the mist that hung over the neighbouring marsh appeared not at all likely to clear off, she advised Germain to settle himself beside the fire and endeavour to take a nap.

"I see you are half asleep already," said she to him, "for you don't say a word, and you are looking at the embers just as your little boy did just now. Come, sleep; I will watch over the child and the fire too."

"'Tis you that must sleep," replied the labourer, "and I will guard you both, for I never felt less desire to sleep in my life; I have fifty ideas running through my head."

"Fifty! that's a great many," said the maiden, half ironically; "there are so many people who would be glad to have one."

"Well, if I am not capable of having fifty, I have at least one which hasn't left me for the last hour."

"And I will tell it to you, as well as the one you had before."

"Well, yes, tell it me if you have found it out, Mary, tell it to me yourself; that would please me much."

"An hour ago," replied she, "you had an idea of eating, and now you have an idea of sleeping."

"I am but a ploughman, Mary, I know, but in truth you take me for an ox. You are a naughty girl, and I see plainly that you do not wish to talk to me. Go to sleep then; that will be better than making fun of a man because he is not gay."

"If you want to talk, talk," said the little girl, placing herself in a reclining attitude beside the child and leaning her head against the saddle. "You are in the humour of tormenting yourself, Germain, and that does not show much courage for a man. What should I do, if I were not to struggle my best against my own troubles?"

"Yes, certainly; and it is just that which occupies my thoughts, my poor child! You are going to live far away from your friends, and in a villainous country of sandy plains and marshes, where you will catch the autumnal fever, and where the sheep do not thrive, which always annoys a well-intentioned shepherd; and besides you will be among strangers who perhaps will not be kind to you, and who will not comprehend your worth. I tell you what it is, that gives me more trouble and regret than I can express, and I have a great mind to take you back to your mother's instead of going to Fougere."

"You speak very kindly, but not very sensibly, my poor Germain; one ought not to be cowardly for one's friends, and in place of showing me the bad side of my lot, you ought rather to show me the good side, as you did when we stopped to dine at Rebec's."

"What would you have? Matters appeared to me in one light then, and now they appear in a very different one. You would do better to take a husband!"

"I have already told you that cannot be, Germain; and as it cannot be, I think no more about it."

"But in short if such a thing were to be found? Perhaps if you were to tell me what sort of a person you would fancy for a husband, I might be able to imagine some one."

"To imagine is not to find. For my part I imagine nothing, since it is useless."

"You have never thought of finding a rich husband?"

"No, most certainly not, since I am myself as poor as Job."

"But supposing he were in easy circumstances, you would not dislike being well lodged, well fed, well clothed, and amongst a family of honest kind-hearted people who would allow you to help your mother?"

"Oh! as for that, yes! To help my mother is my whole desire."

"And if such a person were to be met with, even supposing the man were not in the prime of youth, you would not refuse him on that account?"

"Ah! pardon me, Germain! That is the very thing I should place great stress on. I should not like an old man."

"An old man, no, certainly not; but, for example, a man of my age?"

"Your age is old for me, Germain; I should prefer Bastien's age, although Bastien is not such a handsome man as you."

"You would like Bastien the swine-herd better than me?" exclaimed Germain angrily. "A fellow that has eyes like the animals he tends!"

"I would pass over his eyes on account of his eighteen years."

Germain felt himself horribly jealous.

"said he, 'I see that you are all for Bastien. It is a droll idea of yours certainly.'"

"Yes, it certainly would be a droll idea indeed," replied little Mery bursting into a hearty fit of laughter; "and he would make a droll husband too. One can make him believe anything they please. The other day, for example, I picked up a toad in the cur's garden, and told him it was a



beautiful rosy-cheeked apple, and he attacked it like a shar! If you had seen what a face! Gracious! how ugly he was!"

"You don't love him then, since you laugh at him?"

"That would be no proof. But I don't love him, for he is brutal with his little sister, and he is slovenly and dirty himself."

"Well then, you do not feel an inclination towards any other?"

"What is that to you, Germain?"

"Oh! nothing in the world; it was only for the sake of conversation. I see plainly, my little woman, that you have already a lover in your eye."

"No, Germain, you are mistaken; I have nothing of the kind yet. Such an idea might come some of these days, but since I shall not marry until I have saved a little money, I am destined to marry late in life and with some old man."

"Well then, take an old man at once."

"No, no, when I am no longer young, it will be all the same to me then; now it would be a different affair."

"I see how it is, Mary; I do not please you, that's clear," said Germain in a tone of vexation, and without thinking of what he was saying.

Little Mary did not reply. Germain leaned over towards her. She was asleep; she had fallen back quite overcome by drowsiness, like children who fall asleep while they are still talking.

Germain was glad she had not heard his last words; he felt that they were indiscreet, and he turned away as if to distract his attention from the subject and direct his thoughts into another channel.

But his endeavours were vain, he could neither sleep nor yet think of anything save what he had been talking about. He changed his position twenty times round the fire, moved away, returned again; and at last, feeling as agitated as if he had swallowed gunpowder, he leaned against the tree which sheltered the two children and contemplated them as they slept.

"I know not how it is," thought he, "that I never perceived that this little Mary is the prettiest girl in the country. She has not much colour certainly, but she has a little face as fresh as a wild rose. What a sweet little mouth, and what a delicate little nose! She is not tall for her age, but she is as plump as a partridge and as light and as gay as a lark. I don't know why our people place such a value on great, tall, stout, red-faced women;

my wife was rather slender and pale, yet she pleased them all. This little one here is very delicate looking, but she hasn't the worse health for that, and she is as fair to look upon as a snow-white kid. And then what a gentle and honest expression! How one can read her amiable disposition in her eyes, even when they are closed in sleep! As to her understanding, she has more of that, it must be confessed, than my poor dear Catherine had, and one certainly would never feel weariness in her company. She is gay, discreet, kind-hearted, laborious, and so droll! I really do not see what one could require more.

"But what right have I to think of these things?" resumed Germain, endeavouring to look another way; "my father-in-law would not hear of such a thing, and the entire family would treat me as a madman. Besides, she herself would not have me, poor child! She considers me too old, she has told me so. She has no interested motives, she cares little about enduring poverty and labour, wearing poor clothes, and suffering hunger during two or three months of the year, provided one day she can gratify her heart, and take a husband that pleases her. Well, she is in the right; I would do the same were I in her place, and at this present moment, if I could follow my own inclination, in place of contracting a marriage that seems so uninviting, I would look out for a girl of my choice."

The more Germain sought to reason himself out of this train of thought into which he had fallen, the more difficulty did he experience in attaining his end. He walked away into the wood and lost himself in the mist, and then all at once he would find himself on his knees beside the two sleeping children. Once even he felt an uncontrollable desire to kiss his little Pierre, who had one arm passed round Mary's neck; and so far deceived himself in the direction, that Mary, feeling a warm breath passing over her lips, started up in affright, not understanding in the least what was passing in his mind.

"I did not see you, my poor children," said Germain retiring quickly; "I had almost fallen upon you and hurt you."

Little Mary was good-natured enough to believe this explanation, and fell asleep again. Germain moved round to the other side of the fire and vowed he would not stir until she should awake. He kept his word, but not without infinite difficulty. He fancied that he should have gone mad.

At length, towards midnight, the mist dispersed, and Germain

also began to struggle through the vapours which had hitherto concealed her, and began to scatter sparkling diamonds upon the humid moss. The trunks of the huge oaks remained in majestic obscurity, while a little further off the white birch-trees seemed like a row of phantoms in their funeral shrouds. The fire began to be reflected in the mere, and the frogs, getting accustomed to the light, hazarded a few shrill timid notes. The gnarled branches of the old trees, overgrown with the pale lichen, stretched aloft and interlaced their boughs like great fleshless arms over our travellers' heads. It was a beautiful spot, but so lonely and sad that Germain, finding his sensations no longer endurable, began to sing aloud and to throw stones into the water in order to get rid of the frightful weariness of this solitude. He wished also by this means to awake little Mary, and when he saw that she was sitting up and looking round her, he proposed that they should continue their journey.

"In the course of two hours," said he, "the approach of day will render the air so cold that in spite of our fire we shall no longer be able to remain here. We can now see before us, and we shall in all probability discover some house where the people will open their door to us, or at least some barn where we can pass the remainder of the night under cover."

Mary was not in the least self-willed, and although she felt a strong desire to sleep a little longer, she prepared to follow Germain. The latter took his son up in his arms without awaking him, and as Mary would not resume her own mantle which she had wrapped round little Pierre, he made her get under his cloak and walk beside him.

When Germain, who had for an instant succeeded in diverting his thoughts from the former painful channel, felt the young girl so close to him, he began again to lose his self-possession. Two or three times he broke away suddenly from his companion, and left her to walk alone; then, seeing that she had great difficulty in following him, he would await her approach, draw her quickly towards him, and press her so strongly to his side that she felt astonished and even angry without daring to say so.

As they had not the least idea in what direction they had started, as their present route was equally unknown to them. In this manner then they once more pierced through the recesses of the wood, found themselves again in front of the desert heath, retraced their steps, and after having twisted and turned for a length of time, they perceived at length a glimmering light shining through the branches.

"That's well! here's a house at last," exclaimed Germain,

"and the people already up and stirring, since the fire is lighted. Is it then later than we supposed?"

But it was not a house; it was their bivouac fire which they had covered over when starting and which the breeze had rekindled. They had therefore walked for two hours only to find themselves once more at the point from which they had started.

## CHAPTER VI.

### • THE LIONESSE OF THE VILLAGE.

"I give it up!" said Germain, stamping his foot on the ground with an air of vexation. "Our lot is cast for a certainty, and we shall not leave this until daylight. This spot must surely be bewitched."

"Come, come, don't let us be angry," said Mary; "we must make the best of it. We will make up a larger fire, the child is so well wrapped up that he runs no risk of catching cold, and passing one night out of doors will not kill us. Where have you hidden the saddle, Germain? In the middle of the holly-bush, you great stupid man? That is a handy place to get at, isn't it?"

"Hold the child, while I get his bed out of the briars. I don't want you to scratch your hands."

"It's done; here is the bed, and a few scratches are not sabre cuts," continued the brave little girl.

She proceeded to put little Pierre to bed anew, who this time had slept so soundly that he had been entirely unconscious of his recent journey. Germain piled up so much wood on the fire, that all the forest round shone again; but little Mary was now fairly done up, and although she did not complain, she could no longer support herself upon her limbs. She was deadly pale, and her teeth chattered with cold and exhaustion. Germain took her in his arms to warm her; and anxiety, compassion, and a feeling of irresistible tenderness taking possession of his heart, dulled the fire of the senses. His tongue became loosed as if by a miracle, and all embarrassment ceasing:—

"Mary," said he, "you please me, and I am very unhappy at the thought that I do not in return please you. If you were willing to take me for your husband, neither father-in-law, nor relations, nor neighbours, nor advice of any kind would prevent me from marrying you. I know that you would make my children happy, that you would teach them to respect the memory of their mother, and, my own conscience being at rest, I should be easy in my mind. I have always had a feeling of friendship for you, and now I feel so much in love

with you, that were you to ask me to spend my whole life in gratifying your slightest whims, I would swear to do so. Only think how dearly I love you, and endeavour to forget my age. Believe me it is false to imagine that a man of thirty is old. Besides, I am but eight-and-twenty! A young girl fears she will be talked about when she marries a man ten or twelve years older than herself, because it is not the custom of the country; but I have heard it said that in other countries people do not mind that; and that on the contrary, they prefer giving a reasonable man of well-tryed courage as a support to a young girl, rather than a stripling who may be likely to go astray, and, from the steady youth that they believed him to be, turn out a worthless scamp. Besides, years do not always make age. That entirely depends upon the strength and health that accompany them. When a man is worn out by too much labour and poverty, or by dissipation, he is old before he is five-and-twenty. Now with me—but you are not listening to me, Mary?”

“Yes, Germain, I hear every word you say,” replied little Mary; “but I was thinking of what my mother often said to me; that a woman of sixty is much to be pitied when her husband is seventy or seventy-five, and can no longer work for her support. He becomes infirm, and she has to look after and tend him at the very time when she herself has most need of care and repose. It is in this way that people come to end their days upon straw.”

“Parents are right in saying that, I confess, Mary,” rejoined Germain; “but after all, such people sacrifice the season of youth, which is the best, in planning beforehand what is to become of them at an age when they are no longer good for anything, and when it is a matter of perfect indifference to them whether they end their days in one manner or another. But I am not in danger of dying of hunger in my old days. I am even in a position to be able to lay by something, since, living with my late wife’s relations, I work hard and spend nothing. Besides, I love you so dearly, look you, that that alone would prevent me from growing old. They say that when a man is happy, he takes care of himself, and I feel assured that I am in reality younger than Bastien; for he does not love you, he cannot love you—he is too stupid, too great a child to comprehend how pretty and good you are, and how formed to be loved. Come, Mary, do not hate me, I am not an ill-natured man. I made my Catherine happy; she declared before God, upon her death-bed, that she had never passed an unhappy hour with me, and she begged of me that I

would marry again. It would seem as though her spirit spoke this evening to her child, at the moment when he was falling asleep. Did you not hear what he said, and how his little lips trembled, whilst his eyes seemed to gaze on something in the air invisible to us? He saw his mother then, rest assured, and it was she who made him say that he should like you to replace her."

"Germain," replied Mary, astonished and pensive, "you speak honestly and straightforwardly, and all that you say is true. I am sure that I should do well to love you, if my so doing would not annoy your relations too much: but what would you have me do? My heart does not plead for you. I have a sincere friendship for you, but although your age does not render you disagreeable in my eyes, it terrifies me. It seems to me that you are something like an uncle, or a god-father towards me; that I owe you respect, and that there would be times when you would treat me as a little girl, rather than as your wife and equal. In short, my comrades would perhaps laugh at me, and although it would be silly of me to mind that, still I think I should feel ashamed and rather sad upon my wedding-day."

"These are childish reasons; you speak like a child, Mary!"

"Well, yes, I am a child," said she, "and it is for that very reason that I fear having too sensible a man for a husband. You see plainly that if you are not too old for me, I am too young for you, since you already reproach me with speaking unreasonably. I cannot have more sense than is natural to my age."

"Alas! how much I am to be pitied for being so stupid as to express so badly what I think!" cried Germain. "Mary, you do not love me, that's the fact; you think me too simple, and heavy, and stupid for you. If you loved me, were it ever so little, you would not perceive my defects so clearly. But you do not love me; that's all about it."

"Well, that is not my fault," rejoined she, a little hurt that he had dropped the familiar tone in which he had first addressed her; "I did my utmost when listening to you, but the more I tried, the less I was able to persuade myself that we ought to be man and wife."

Germain did not reply; he leaned his head upon his hands, and it was impossible for little Mary to discover whether he wept, or sulked, or slept. She felt rather uneasy at seeing him so mournful and at not being able to guess what was passing in his mind; but she dared not speak to him again, and she was too much astonished at what had passed to feel

any further desire for sleep. She waited impatiently for the approach of day, constantly attending to the fire, and watching over the child whom Germain appeared no longer to remember. Meanwhile, Germain did not sleep; he neither reflected upon his lot nor formed projects of daring or plans of seduction. He suffered; he had a mountain-load of care upon his heart; he wished he were dead. All appeared to be turning out badly for him, and if he had been able, he would have taken a hearty fit of crying. But there was a little anger with himself mingled with his trouble, and he felt as it were suffocating, without the power, or even the wish to complain.

When daylight was come, and the various sounds of the country announced its advent to Germain, he raised his face from his hands and stood up. He perceived that little Mary had not slept any more than himself, but he knew not what to say to her to mark his anxiety. He was completely discouraged. He again hid La Grise's saddle in the thicket, threw the saddle-bags over his shoulder, and taking his son by the hand:—

"Now, Mary," said he, "we are going to try and finish our journey. Should you like me to take you to the Elms?"

"We will leave the wood together," replied she, "and when we have found out where we are, we will each go our own way."

Germain did not answer, he felt hurt that the young girl did not ask him to take her to the Elms, not perceiving that he had made the offer in a tone which seemed to provoke a refusal.

A woodcutter whom they fell in with after they had gone about two hundred paces, put them on the right road, and told them that after crossing the plain they had only to take, the one the right, the other the left hand road to gain their destinations, which were besides so near to each other that the houses of Fourche could be distinctly seen from the farm of the Elms, and *vice-versa*.

After they had thanked the woodcutter for his information, and had proceeded a short distance on their road, the latter called them back to know if they had not lost a horse.

"This morning, I found," said he, "a beautiful grey mare in my farm-yard, whither most likely the wolves forced her to seek a refuge. My dogs barked all night, and at daylight I saw the animal under my cart-shed; she is there still. You had better go, and if you recognise her take her with you."

Germain having previously described La Grise to the woodcutter, and being convinced that it really was she, prepared to

return to where they had passed the night in order to fetch his saddle. Little Mary then offered to take his child with her to the Elms, where he might come for him after he had paid his visit at Fourche.

"He is rather untidy after the night we have passed," said she. "I will put his clothes in order, wash his pretty little face, and comb his hair, and when he is nice and clean and handsome you can present him to your new family."

"And who told you that I intend going to Fourche?" replied Germain, out of temper. "Perhaps I shall not go at all."

"Oh yes, Germain, you ought to go—you will go," rejoined the young girl.

"You are in a great hurry to have me married to another, in order that I may not trouble you any more—is that it?"

"Come, Germain, think no more of this, it is but an idea which came into your head last night, because this unfortunate journey had put you a little out of sorts. But your good sense must return to you again now; I promise to forget what you have said to me, and not to speak of it to any one."

"Oh! speak of it as much as you please. I am not accustomed to deny my words. What I said was true and honest, and I would not blush to repeat it before any one."

"Yes, but if your future wife were to know that at the moment you were about to pay your addresses to her you had thought of another, it would predispose her against you. So pay attention to what you say, and do not look at me before people in that odd way. Recollect that Farmer Maurice reckons upon your obedience, and would be very much annoyed indeed with me if I was the means of inducing you to act contrary to his wishes. Good day, Germain, I am going to take little Pierre with me, in order to force you to go to Fourche. I shall keep him as a pledge for your good behaviour."

"Do you wish to go with her then?" said the labourer to his son, observing that he clung resolutely with both hands to little Mary, and seemed determined to follow her.

"Yes, father," replied the child, who had overheard, and comprehended in his own way, what had been said so unsuspectingly before him; "I shall go with my dear little Mary. You can come for me when you have done marrying; but I shall have little Mary for my mother."

"You see he wishes it too," said Germain to the young girl. "Listen, my little Pierre," added he, "I also wish that she should be your mother, and remain always with you. 'Tis she that refuses. Try and persuade her to grant you what she refuses me."



"Be easy, father, I'll make her say yes; little Mary always does what I wish."

So saying he trotted off with the young girl. Germain remained alone, more dejected, more irresolute, than ever.

However, when he had repaired the disorder caused by the journey in his garments and in the equipage of his steed, when he had mounted *La Grise*, and had been pointed out the road to *Fourche*, he felt that he could not now go back, and that it was absolutely necessary he should forget that night of agitation as if it had been merely a dangerous dream.

He found Farmer Leonard at the door of his white house, seated upon a handsome wooden bench painted bright green. There were six stone steps leading up to the entrance, showing that the house possessed an underground story. The wall enclosing the garden and hempfield was roughcast with lime and sand, and altogether it was a very pretty abode, and wanted but little to make a spectator imagine that it was the habitation of some wealthy citizen.

The future father-in-law advanced to meet Germain, and after having talked to him for about five minutes respecting the health of his family and similar topics, he added, in the phrase usually applied by the country people to question politely any one whom they may chance to meet upon the object of their journey—

"You were passing this way then, I suppose?"

"I came to see you," replied the labourer, "and to present you with this little present of game from my father-in-law; informing you also from him, that you must of course know with what intentions I have visited your house."

"Ah! ha!" said old Leonard, laughing heartily, and striking his open palm upon his capacious stomach, "I see, I understand, I am awake!"

And with a knowing wink he added—

"You will not be the only one paying your respects, my young man. There are already three in the house waiting like yourself. For my part I send no one away, and I should be very much embarrassed which party to dismiss and which to accept, for they are all good matches. Nevertheless, on account of my old friend Maurice, and of the quality of the land you cultivate, I would rather it were you. But my daughter is of age, and mistress of her own property, and will therefore act according to her own wishes. Come in, make yourself known, and I hope you may have a lucky number!"

"Excuse me," stammered Germain, much surprised at

finding himself a supernumerary where he had reckoned upon being alone; "I was ignorant that your daughter was already provided with suitors, and I did not come to dispute her hand with others."

"If you fancied because you were late in coming," replied old Leonard, without losing his good humour, "that my daughter would pine away alone, you were greatly deceived, my boy. Catherine has the wherewithal to attract suitors, and she will only be embarrassed to choose among them. But come in, I tell you, and don't lose courage. She is a woman well worth the trouble of fighting for."

And, pushing Germain by the shoulders before him with boisterous gaiety—

"Come, Catherine," cried he, entering the house, "here's one more for you!"

This jovial but rather indelicate manner of being presented to the widow, in the presence of her other sighing swains, completed the embarrassment and discontent of the labourer. He felt awkward and ill at ease, and remained for an instant without daring to raise his eyes towards his fair one and her court.

The widow Guerin was tolerably good-looking, and wanted not for comeliness. But her expression of countenance and even her dress displeased Germain at the very first glance. She had a bold and self-satisfied air, and her cap, garnished with a triple row of lace, her silk apron, and her neckerchief of black blonde, were but little in keeping with the idea which he had formed of a discreet and serious widow. This style of costume and these girlish airs made her seem old and ugly, although in reality she was neither the one nor the other. It occurred to him that so showy a style of dress, and manners so gay and joyous, might have suited the age and buoyant spirits of little Mary, but that the widow's pleasantry was heavy and somewhat broad, and that she wore her rich dress without taste or elegance.

The three aspirants to the widow's hand were seated at a table covered with bottles of wine and viands, which were regularly laid out for them every Sunday morning; for old Leonard loved to display his wealth, and the widow was not sorry either to have an opportunity of showing off her plate, and of keeping table like a rich dame. Germain, simple and unsuspecting as he was, had sufficient penetration to observe these particulars, and for the first time in his life he held himself upon the defensive when drinking with the rest. Old Leonard had forced him to take a place at the table with his

rivals, and, seating himself opposite to him, he treated him with his best and conversed with him in preference to the others. The present of game, despite the breach which Germain had made in it on his own account, was still handsome enough to produce an impression. The widow appeared sensible of the attention, and the suitors cast upon it a glance of disdain.

Germain felt himself ill at ease in this company, and did not eat heartily. Farmer Leonard jested with him on the subject.

"You are very melancholy looking to-day," said he, "and you quarrel with your glass. You must not allow love to take away your appetite; for a fasting gallant cannot find pretty words, like him whose ideas are enlivened with a thimbleful of wine."

Germain was mortified they should suppose him already in love; and the affected air of the widow, who lowered her eyes with a smile, like a person sure of the conquest, almost tempted him to protest against his pretended defeat; but he feared to appear uncivil, smiled, and took patience.

The widow's gallants appeared to be three rustics, and they must have been very rich since their pretensions were tolerated by her. One was upwards of forty, and was as stout as old Leonard; the second was blind of an eye, and drank so hard that he was already intoxicated. The third was a tolerably good-looking young man, but he endeavoured to pass off for a wit, and perpetrated witticisms so utterly wretched that it was lamentable to hear him. The widow laughed heartily however as if she admired his stale jokes, and in so doing gave no very great proof of her taste. Germain fancied at first that she was caught by this suitor; but he soon perceived that he was himself encouraged in a particular manner, and that the widow seemed evidently to desire that he should become warmer in his attentions. This was only another reason for his showing himself colder and more distant.

The hour for mass arrived, and they rose from table to proceed to church together. They were obliged to go to Mers, a good half league distant, and Germain felt himself so fatigued that he longed to take a nap before his walk. But he was not accustomed to absent himself from church, and he accordingly prepared to set out with the rest.

The roads were thronged with people, and the widow marched along proudly, escorted by her three gallants, giving her arm sometimes to one, sometimes to another, and bridleing and carrying her head high. She would have been charmed to

produce the fourth before the eyes of the villagers; but Germain found it so ridiculous to be thus dragged along after a petticoat, in sight of every one, that he remained behind at a suitable distance, conversing with old Leonard and exerting himself to amuse him and occupy his thoughts, so that they might not have the appearance of forming part of the band.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MASTER.

WHEN they reached the village the widow paused to await their approach. She was determined to make her triumphal entry into church accompanied by all suitors; but Germain, disappointing her of this satisfaction, left old Leonard, accosted several persons of his acquaintance whom he met in the crowd, and entered the church by another door, much to the vexation of the fair widow.

After mass, however, she showed herself triumphantly upon the village green where the peasant lads and girls were dancing, and opened the ball with her three lovers in succession. Germain watched her performance, and thought that she danced well though affectedly.

"Well!" said old Leonard, striking him upon the shoulder, "you don't ask my daughter to dance? You are too timid by half."

"I have not danced since I lost my wife," replied the labourer.

"But since you are seeking another, the mourning is over in the heart as well as in the dress, eh?"

"That's no reason, Farmer Leonard; besides, I consider myself too old—I no longer like dancing."

"Listen to me," continued Leonard, drawing him apart; "you were annoyed when you entered my house to see the place already invested by besiegers, and I can perceive that you are very proud. But this is not reasonable, my boy. My daughter is accustomed to be admired and courted, especially during the two years which have elapsed since the expiration of her mourning, and it is not her place to solicit you."

"Have two years elapsed since your daughter was thinking of marrying again, and has she not yet made her choice?" said Germain.

"She is in no hurry, and she is in the right. Although she may appear to you sprightly in her manners, and not much given to reflection, she is a woman of great sense, and one who knows right well what she is about."

"It does not seem so," replied Germain frankly; "she has

three lovers in her train, and if she knew what she wanted there would be at least two too many, whom she might request to stay at home."

"Why so? You know nothing, Germain! She wants neither the old man nor the one-eyed one, nor yet the young one, I am almost certain; but if she were to dismiss them, people would imagine that she wished to remain a widow, and no other suitor would come forward."

"Ah! I see; these serve as a sort of sign?"

"Exactly so. And where is the harm, if that suits them?"

"Every one to his taste!" said Germain.

"I see that would not be yours; but come, let us understand each other! Supposing you were preferred, they would leave you the place."

"Yes, supposing! And in the mean time until this fact is ascertained, how long am I to stand on the tenterhooks?"

"That depends very much upon yourself, I fancy! If you know how to talk and persuade! Up to the present my daughter has perfectly well understood that the fairest time of her life is that in which she should be courted, and she is consequently in no hurry to become the servant of one man when she can command several. So long as the game pleases her she can amuse herself; but if you please her more than the game, the game can cease. There is nothing to discourage you. Return every Sunday, ask her to dance, make it known that you place yourself in the ranks of her suitors, and if she finds you more to her taste than the others, doubtless some day she will tell you so."

"Pardon me, Farmer Leonard; your daughter is at liberty to act as she pleases, and I have no right to blame her. Were I in her place I should act differently. I should use more frankness, and not induce men to lose their time in this way, who have doubtless something better to do than running after a woman who is only laughing at them all the time. But however if she finds her amusement and happiness in so doing, it is no business of mine. Only it is time that I should put you right in a matter which I have been a little embarrassed about confessing to you ever since morning, seeing that at the outset you deceived yourself in regard to my intentions, and did not give me time to reply, so that you imagined what was not the fact. You must know then that I have not come here with the intention of asking your daughter in marriage, but merely to purchase a yoke of oxen that you intend taking to the fair next week, and which my father-in-law supposes would suit him."

"I understand, Germain," replied old Leonard, very quietly; "you changed your mind when you saw my daughter with her lovers. As you please. It would appear that what attracts some repels others, and you are at perfect liberty to retire since you have not yet spoken. If you seriously think of purchasing my oxen, come and see them in the field; we will talk the matter over, and whether we strike a bargain or not, you will come and dine with us before you return home."

"I do not wish to disturb you," replied Germain, "you have perhaps something to do here; for my part I am tired of seeing people dance and remaining idle myself. I shall go and see your animals, and return by-and-bye to your house."

Thereupon Germain moved away, and directed his steps towards the field where Leonard had pointed out to him his cattle grazing. It was true that Farmer Maurice really wished to purchase a yoke, and Germain thought that if he were to bring him back a fine pair of oxen at a moderate price, he would the more readily pardon him for having voluntarily failed in the real object of his journey.

He walked quietly, and soon found himself at a short distance from the Elms. He was then suddenly seized with a strong desire to go and kiss his son, and even to see little Mary again, although he had lost all hopes, and endeavoured to banish the thought of ever owing his happiness to her. All that he had just seen and heard—this vain and coquettish woman; this father, at the same time tricky and shallow-minded, encouraging his daughter in habits of pride and insincerity; this luxury of towns, which appeared to him an infraction of the dignity which characterises rural manners; this time lost in idle and silly conversation; this household so different from his own; and, above all, that profound uneasiness which a countryman ever feels when he leaves his laborious habits—in short, all the weariness of mind and confusion of ideas which Germain had undergone for the last few hours, made him long to be once more with his child and his little neighbour. Even had no love existed in his heart for Mary, he would still have sought her, in order by her society to collect and soothe his scattered and confused thoughts, and to enable him to direct them into their accustomed channel.

But he looked in vain through the surrounding fields; he could discover neither Mary nor little Pierre, although it was the hour when the shepherds are in the fields. He perceived a large flock in an adjoining paddock, and asked a little-boy who was tending them if those sheep belonged to the farm of the Elms.

"Yes," replied the child.

"And are you the shepherd? Do boys keep the sheep in this part of the country?"

"No, I am keeping them to-day because the shepherdess left us. She was ill."

"But did not a new shepherdess arrive this morning?"

"Oh yes, to be sure! But she has already gone away too."

"How? Gone away? Had she not a child with her?"

"Yes, a little boy who was crying. They both went away two hours after they had come."

"Went away! Where?"

"To the place they came from, I suppose. I did not ask them."

"But what made them go away?" said Germain, growing every instant more and more uneasy.

"How do I know?" replied the boy.

"Could they not come to terms about wages? And yet all that must have been settled beforehand."

"I can't say anything about that; I saw them come in and go out, that's all I know about the matter."

Germain proceeded towards the farm and questioned the work-people. No one could explain the matter, but they all agreed that after conversing with the farmer, the young girl had gone away without saying a word to any one, taking with her the child who was crying.

"Did any one dare to maltreat my son?" cried Germain, his eyes darting fire.

"Was he your son, then? How came he in company with the girl? Where do you come from, and what is your name?"

Germain, seeing that, according to the custom of the country, they were about to reply to his questions by asking others, stamped impatiently on the ground and requested to speak to the master.

The master was not there. He seldom remained during the entire day when he came to the farm. He had mounted his horse and gone in all probability to visit some other of his farms.

"But after all," said Germain, a prey to the deepest anxiety, "can you not imagine the reason of the young girl's sudden departure?"

The labourer exchanged a meaning smile with his wife, and replied that he knew nothing of the matter, that it was no affair of his. All that Germain could learn was that the young girl and the child had gone towards Fourche. He hastened to Fourche; neither the widow and her lovers nor old Leonard had yet returned. The servant told him that a young

girl and a child had come to inquire for him, but that, being strangers to her, she had not let them in and had advised them to go to Mers.

"And why did you refuse to let them in?" said Germain angrily; "you are very suspicious in this part of the country not to open your doors to your fellow creatures?"

"Ah! *dame!*" replied the servant, "in a rich house like this it behoves one to take care! I am responsible for all when the master is from home, and I cannot open to the first comers."

"It is a vile custom," said Germain, "and I would rather a hundred times be poor than live in constant terror this way. Good-bye, my girl; adieu to your villanous country!"

He pursued his researches in the neighbouring houses. They had all seen the shepherdess and the child. As the little boy had left Belair unexpectedly, and was dressed in his everyday clothes, with his blouse rather torn and his lambskin over his shoulders, and as Mary was from necessity very poorly clad in all seasons, they had taken them for beggars. At one house they had offered them some bread. The young girl had accepted a piece for the child who was hungry, and had then left the place with him as quickly as possible, and proceeded in the direction of the woods.

Germain reflected for an instant; then he inquired if the farmer of the Elms had not come to Fouché.

"Yes," replied a man, "he passed by on horseback very shortly after the girl."

"Could he have been in search of her?"

"Ah! you know him then?" said the public-house keeper, whom he had spoken too, laughing; "yes, certainly, he is a devil of a fellow after the girls. But I do not think he had tricked this one—although, after all, if he had seen her—"

"That will do; thank you!" said Germain.

And he flew rather than ran to old Leonard's stable, threw the saddle on La Grise's back, leaped into it, and departed at full gallop in the direction of the woods of Chantelonbe.

His heart throbbed with anxiety and rage—the perspiration stood in large drops upon his forehead. He drove his spurs into La Grise's sides, who finding herself on the road to her own stable, did not require much inducement to exert her utmost speed.

Germain soon reached the spot where he had passed the night on the banks of the mere. The fire was still smouldering, and an old woman was engaged in picking up the remains of the store of dead wood which little Mary had collected in the



night. Germain stopped to question her. She was deaf, and, misunderstanding his queries:—

"Yes, my lad," said she, "this is the Haunted Marsh. It is a bad spot—oh! a very bad spot, and no one ought to approach it without casting three stones into the water with the left hand and making the sign of the cross with the right. That keeps off evil spirits. Otherwise all sorts of misfortune happen to those who make the circuit of it." \*

"I did not speak to you of that," said Germain approaching close to her and bawling in her ear; have you not seen a young girl and a child passing through the wood?"

"Ah yes," mumbled the old crone, "a little child was drowned there!"

Germain trembled from head to foot, but happily the old woman added:—

"But that happened a long time ago—oh! a long time. In memory of the accident some of the country people planted a beautiful cross on the spot, but one stormy night the evil spirits cast it into the water. You can still see the stump of it. If any one is so unfortunate as to stop here at night, he is very sure of not being able to get away before morning. He might walk, walk, as much as he liked—he might travel two hundred leagues through the woods, and yet always find himself at the place where he started."

The imagination of the labourer was struck in spite of himself at what he had heard, and the idea of the misfortune which must happen to justify fully the old crone's assertions, so completely took possession of his mind, that he shivered from head to foot. Despairing of gaining any further information, he remounted his horse and pursued his search through the wood, calling Pierre with all his might, whistling, cracking his whip, and breaking the branches over his head in order to let his progress be heard at as great a distance as possible. He listened at intervals to ascertain if any voice replied to his own, but he could hear only the tinkling of the bells belonging to the cattle scattered through the neighbourhood, and the wild cries of the hogs who fought with each other for the acorns.

At length Germain heard behind him the sound of a horse's hoofs rapidly advancing, and a man of about the middle age, dark, robust, and dressed like a respectable citizen, shouted aloud to him to stop. Germain had never seen the proprietor of the Elms, but an instinct of rage whispered to him at once that the stranger was none other. He turned round, and, glancing at him from head to foot, awaited what he had to say.

"Did you not see a young girl of about fifteen or sixteen, with a little boy, pass this way?" said the farmer, affecting an air of indifference although he was visibly agitated.

"And what do you want with her?" replied Germain, without seeking to disguise his anger.

"I might reply that that is no business of yours, comrade; but as I have no reasons for concealing it, I may tell you that this young person is a shepherdess whom I hired for the year without knowing her. When she arrived she appeared to me too young and too weak for the labour of the farm. I thanked her; but when I wished to repay her the expenses of her little journey, she went off in a huff during my absence. She was in such a hurry that she forgot some of her things, and amongst others her purse, which doesn't contain much certainly—probably a few sous. But after all, as I had to pass this way, I thought I might very likely fall in with her and return her what she had forgotten, and also pay her what is due to her."

Germain was too open and honest-hearted not to hesitate on hearing this, if not probable, at least possible, story. He fastened a piercing glance upon the farmer, who bore the investigation either with great impudence or candour.

"I must know the truth of the matter," said Germain to himself; and, concealing his agitation, he said:—

"The girl belongs to our part of the country; I know her well. She must be somewhere herabouts; let us proceed on together and we shall be sure to find her."

"You are right," said the farmer, "let's on; but if we do not discover her at the end of the avenue I shall give up the chase, for I must turn off on the Ardentes road."

"Oh, ho!" thought the labourer, "you shall not escape me so easily, my fine fellow, though I were obliged to follow you round the Haunted Marsh for the next four-and-twenty hours."

"Stop a bit!" exclaimed Germain suddenly, fixing his eyes upon a neighbouring thicket, which seemed agitated in a singular manner, "Hola, ho! little Pierre! is that you, my child?"

The child, recognising his father's voice, sprang like a little kid from the thicket; but when he perceived him in company with the farmer, he paused as if terrified, and seemed uncertain whether to advance.

"Come, my Pierre! come, 'tis I!" cried the labourer, running towards him, and jumping off his horse to take him in his arms. "And where is little Mary?"

"She is hiding there, because she is afraid of that naughty, dark man; and I also."

"Oh! don't be frightened; I am here. Mary—Mary, it is I!"

Mary approached timidly, and the moment she beheld Germain, whose steps the farmer followed closely, she ran to throw herself in his arms, and, clinging to him like a daughter to her father, she exclaimed:—

"Ah! my brave Germain, you will defend me; I am not afraid when you are with me!"

Germain trembled. He looked at Mary; she was pale, and her clothes were torn by the brambles through which she had forced her way, seeking a hiding-place like a hind tracked by the sportsman. But there was neither shame nor despair on her features.

"Your master wishes to speak to you," said he, scrutinizing the countenance of the farmer as he spoke.

"My master?" said she proudly; "that man is not my master, and never will be. 'Tis you, Germain, who are my master! You shall take me back with you. I will serve you for nothing."

The farmer had now advanced, and pretended to be perfectly at ease.

"Here, my little girl," said he, "you forgot something at our place which I have followed you with."

"No, monsieur," replied little Mary, "I have forgotten nothing, nor have I any claim upon you whatever."

"Listen to me for a moment," continued the farmer; "I have something to say to you. Come this way; don't be afraid—two words only!"

"You can speak aloud; I have no secrets with you."

"Come and take your money at least."

"My money? You owe me nothing, God be praised!"

"I suspected the fellow all along," said Germain in a low voice; "but no matter, Mary, go and hear what he has to say to you, for I am curious to learn myself; you can tell me afterwards. I have my reasons for this. Go up to his horse—I shan't lose sight of you."

Mary advanced three steps towards the farmer, who, leaning over the pommel of his saddle, whispered in her ear:—

"Here's a shining louis-d'or for you, little one: you will mention nothing about this business, you understand? I'll say that I considered you too weak for the work of my farm, and let nothing more be said about it! I shall be passing by

your house one of these days, and if I find you have said nothing I will give you something more; and then, if you are more reasonable, you have only to speak—I will take you back with me, or rather I will come in the evenings and talk to you in the fields. What present should you like me to bring you?"

"There, monsieur, is the present that I make you!" replied little Mary in a loud voice, throwing the louis-d'or he had given her violently in his face. "I thank you heartily, and I beg that when you intend passing our way you will let me know. All the young men of the neighbourhood will go out to meet you, for the people of our part of the country have a particular affection for *bourgeois* who go about telling tales to poor girls. You shall see that—they will be in waiting for you."

"You are a liar and a mischief-maker!" said the farmer in a rage, at the same time raising his stick with a threatening gesture; "you would wish to make people believe what is not the case. But you shall not succeed in extorting money from me in that way: we know your sort well!"

Mary had stepped back in terror, but Germain darted forward and seized the bridle of the farmer's horse, which he shook violently.

"I understand now," said he, "and can see clearly enough how the matter stands. Jump down, my man!—jump down! and let us have a few words together."

The farmer, by no means anxious for battle, spurred his horse in order to disengage himself, and endeavoured to strike the labourer's hands with his stick so as to force him to let go his hold of the bridle; but Germain avoided the blow, and seizing him by the leg stretched him on the green sward, where after a short struggle he again prostrated him, although the latter had sprung to his feet and defended himself vigorously. When he had got him under—

"Man of little heart!" said Germain, "I could break every bone in your body if I wished; but I do not want to harm you, and besides no correction would amend your conscience. However, you shall not budge from this until you have asked this young girl's pardon on your knees."

The farmer, who was well acquainted with affairs of this sort, wished to turn the matter off as a joke. He pretended that his crime was of no such great magnitude, since it consisted merely of words, and that he would willingly ask pardon, on condition that she should give him a kiss; that afterwards they should all proceed together to the nearest cabaret, discuss a pint of wine, and then part good friends.

"You make me blush for you!" replied Germain, pushing his face against the ground, "and I shall hasten to get out of sight of your villanous countenance! There—blush if you can! and remember to take *le chemin des affronteux*\* when you pass our way again."

So saying he picked up the farmer's stout holly staff, broke it across his knees to show him the strength of his arms, and threw the fragments away with an air of contempt.

Then, taking his son with one hand and little Mary with the other, he left the scene of the farmer's disgrace, trembling with indignation.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DAME MAURICE.

IN about a quarter of an hour's time they had crossed the heath and were trotting along the high road, La Grise neighing at every object she recognised. Little Pierre recounted to his father all that he had been able to understand of what had passed since he left him.

"When we arrived," said he, "*that man* came to speak to my Mary in the sheepfold, whither we had gone straight to see the beautiful sheep. I had climbed into the manger to play, and *that man* didn't see me. Then he bid good-day to my Mary and kissed her."

"And you allowed him to kiss you, Mary?" said Germain, trembling with anger.

"I thought that it was merely a piece of civility—a custom of the place with newcomers; just as at your place the grandmother kisses the young girls who enter her service, to show them that she adopts them and that she will be as a mother to them."

"Well, and after that," resumed little Pierre, who was proud of having an adventure to relate, "*that man* said something very bad to her—something that you told me never to

\* *Le chemin des affronteux* is the name given to the road which branches off from the principal street at the entrance of a French village and passes round by the outskirts. It is supposed that persons, fearful of receiving some well-merited insult, would take this way to avoid being seen.

repeat and not to remember; so of course I forgot it very quickly. However, if my father wish me to tell him what it was—

"No, no, Pierre; I don't wish to hear it, and I desire that you will never remember it any more."

"In that case I will forget it again," replied the child.—

"Well, and then *that man* appeared to grow angry, because Mary said she would go away. He told her he would give her whatever she wished—a hundred francs! and my Mary then got angry also. Then he took hold of her as if he was going to do her harm; and I got frightened and ran up to little Mary, crying. Then *that man* said:—

"'Who is this? Where does this child come from? Put him out of doors!'

"And he raised his stick as if to beat me; but my Mary prevented him and said:—

"'We will talk over this matter together by-and-bye, monsieur; I must take this child to Fourche now, and then I will return.'

"And as soon as he had left the sheepfold my Mary said to me:—

"'Let us go away, my Pierre; we must leave this very quickly, for this man is wicked and he would hurt us.'

"Then we slipped away behind the barns, passed a little field, and got at last to Fourche, to look for you. But you were not there, and they would not let us stop to wait for you. Well, and then *that man*, who had mounted upon a great black horse, came behind us, and we ran on further and hid ourselves in the wood. And then he came after us; and when we heard him coming we concealed ourselves, and then when he had passed by we began running again to get home. And then at last you came and found us, and that is just the way it happened. Isn't that it my Mary; I have forgotten nothing—have I?"

"No, my Pierre; all you have said is true. Now, Germain, you can answer for me, and you can tell every one at home that if I did not remain at the Elms it was not for want of courage or from unwillingness to work."

"And you, Mary," said Germain, "I pray you to ask yourself if, when it is a question of defending a woman or thrashing a bully, a man of eight-and-twenty is too old? I should just like to know if Bastien, or any other pretty fellow though even ten years younger than myself, would not have been crushed by *that man*, as Pierre calls him. What think you?"

"I think, Germain, that you have rendered me a great service, and that I shall be grateful to you for it all my life?"

"Is that all?"

"Papa, I never thought of saying to little Mary what I promised you I would. I had not time; but I will speak to her when we get home, and I will speak to grandmamma also."

This promise of his son's made Germain reflect. He saw that he must now think of explaining matters to his relations, and while relating his charges and complaints against the widow Guerin, steer clear of all mention of those ideas which had predisposed him to so much clear-sightedness and severity. When happy and proud, the courage necessary to make others share our happiness appears easy; but to be repelled on one side, blamed on the other, forms no very agreeable situation.

Fortunately little Pierre was asleep when they reached home, and Germain laid him in his bed without awaking him. Then he entered into all the explanations he was able to give. Old Maurice, seated on a three-legged stool at the door, listened gravely to his son-in-law's narrative; and, although he was discontented at the result of the expedition, when Germain, in recounting the widow's system of coquetry, asked his father-in-law if he had time to go over to Fourche fifty-two Sundays in the year in order to pay his court to the widow, at the risk of being refused in the end, the old man nodded his head in sign of acquiescence and replied:—

"You are in the right, Germain; that could not be."

And afterwards, when Germain related how he had been obliged to bring back little Mary as quickly as possible to save her from the insults, perhaps the violence, of an unworthy master, old Maurice again made a gesture of approbation, and said:—

"You acted quite right there, Germain;—that was very proper."

When Germain had finished his recital and given all his reasons, the old couple, looking at each other, simultaneously heaved a deep sigh of resignation. Then the head of the family rose, saying:—

"Well, God's will be done! Love is not to be forced."

"Come to supper, Germain," said the mother-in-law. "It is unfortunate that this matter cannot be arranged; but Providence, it seems, does not so will it. We must look else where."

Nothing more was said about the matter in the farmer's dwelling, and when, on the following morning, little Pierre

rose with the lark at daybreak, no longer excited by the extraordinary events of the preceding day, he relapsed into that state of apathy common to little peasant boys of his age, forgot all that had been running through his head, and thought no more but of romping with his brothers, and *playing the man with the oxen and horses.*

Germain also endeavoured to forget by throwing himself heart and soul into his daily labour; but he became so thoughtful and melancholy that every person remarked it. He spoke no more to little Mary, nor even looked at her; and yet if any one had asked him in what field she was, or by what road she had passed, there was not an hour in the day he could not have answered the question had he wished it. He did not venture to ask his relations to receive her into their service during the winter, and yet he well knew that she must be suffering acutely from poverty. But she suffered not, and Dame Guillette could never make out how it was that her little store of wood never diminished, and that her out-house was always full in the morning, when she had left it almost empty the night before. It was the same with the wheat and potatoes. Some one evidently entered the little store-house window every night and emptied a sack upon the floor, without awaking any one and without leaving any traces behind him. The old dame was at once uneasy and rejoiced; she enjoined her daughter to secrecy on the subject, saying that if the neighbours got wind of the miracle which was performed at her house, she should be taken for a witch. She certainly had her suspicions that his Satanic Majesty was somehow or other mixed up in the affair; but she was by no means anxious to embroil herself with him by requesting the curé to exorcise her house. She said to herself that it would be time enough for that when Satan should visit her in person to demand her soul from her in return for his benefactions.

Little Mary understood the truth of the matter better, but she dared not speak of it to Germain, dreading lest he should return to his idea of matrimony, and she therefore feigned to perceive nothing.

One day Dame Maurice, finding herself alone in the orchard with Germain, said to him with an air of affection:—

“My poor son-in-law, I do not think you are well. Your appetite is not so good as it used to be; you no longer laugh, and you talk less and less every day. Has anybody here, or have we ourselves, without knowing it, offended you in any way?”

“No, mother,” replied Germain. “you have always been as



kind to me as the mother that bore me, and I should indeed be ungrateful if I were to complain either of you, your husband, or any one in the house."

"In that case, my child, you must be fretting again after your poor wife. In place of lessening with time, your grief only increases, and you must absolutely do what your father-in-law very sensibly advises—you must marry."

"Yes, mother, that was my idea too; but the women whom you have advised me to take do not suit me. When I see them, in place of forgetting my Catherine, I only think of her the more."

"It would appear, then, Germain, that we have not been able to guess your taste. You must assist us by telling us the truth. Doubtless there is somewhere or other a woman made for you, for the Almighty never creates any one without reserving for him his happiness in another. If therefore you know where to find this woman, take her; and whether she be young or old, rich or poor, pretty or ugly, we have made up our minds, my old man and myself, to give our consent; for we cannot bear to see you so sad, nor can we be easy ourselves while you are not so too."

"Mother, you are only too kind to me, and my father equally so," replied Germain; "but your compassion cannot bring me any remedy for my grief. The girl that I wish will not have me."

"Is she too young then? To attach yourself to a young girl would be unreasonable in you."

"Well, yes, good mother, I am foolish enough to attach myself to a young girl, and I blame myself for it. I do all I can to forget her; but whether at work or at rest, whether at mass or in my bed, with my children or with you, I am always thinking of her—I can think of nothing else."

"Then it is a sort of fate, Germain? There is but one remedy for that, namely, that the young girl may change her mind and listen to you. It is absolutely necessary that I should take a part in the business and see if anything can be done. You must tell me where she lives and what's her name."

"Alas! my dear mother, I dare not," said Germain; "you would laugh at me."

"I shall not laugh at you, Germain, because you are in trouble, and I would not increase your sorrow. It can't be Fanchette?"

"No, mother, it is not she."

"Nor Rosette?"

"No."

"Tell me then, for if I were to name all the girls of the place I should never have done."

Germain hung his head and could not make up his mind to reply.

"Well, well," said Dame Maurice, "I shall leave you alone for to-day, Germain; to-morrow probably you will be more open with me, or rather perhaps your sister-in-law will be cleverer in cross-questioning you."

So saying she took up her basket and proceeded to the hedge to hang out her clothes to dry.

Germain acted as children do who make up their minds when they perceive that there is no longer any attention paid to them. He followed his mother-in-law, and at last with a trembling voice he named *Dame Guillette's little Mury*.

Great was the surprise of the worthy Dame Maurice; it was the very last person she should have thought of. But she had sufficient delicacy to repress her exclamations of astonishment and to make her comments mentally. Then, seeing that her silence abashed Germain, she held out her clothes-basket to him, saying:—

"Well! is that any reason why you should not help me in my work? Carry this for me, and let us have a little talk together. Have you reflected well, Germain? Are you quite decided?"

"Alas! my dear mother, that is not the point. I should be quite decided if I could succeed; but as I shall not be listened to, I have made up my mind to cure myself if I can."

"And if you cannot?"

"Everything has its end, Dame Maurice: when the horse is too heavily laden he falls; and when the ox has nothing to eat he dies."

"That is as much as to say that you will die if you do not succeed? God forbid, Germain! I do not like to hear a man like you say such things, because when you say them you think them. You have great courage, and sudden weakness is dangerous in strong minds. Come, come, take heart! I cannot conceive that a girl struggling with poverty, and one to whom you do much honour by seeking her hand, can possibly refuse you."

"It is the truth, however; she does refuse me."

"And what reasons does she give for so doing?"

"That you have always been kind to her, that her family owes much to yours, and that she would be unwilling to displease you by being the means of keeping me from a wealthy match."

"If she says that, she shows her good heart, and it is honest on her part. But in telling you that, Germain, she does not cure you, for she tells you beyond a doubt that she loves you, and that she would marry you if we were willing."

"That is the worst! She says that her heart is not inclined towards me."

"If she tells you what she does not think, in order the more to estrange you from her, she is a child who deserves that we should love her and overlook her extreme youth in consideration of her good sense."

"Yes," said Germain, struck with a hope which he had not before conceived, "that would be very wise, and very proper on her part. But if she is so sensible, I fear that it is because I am displeasing to her."

"Germain," said Dame Maurice, "you must promise me to keep your mind easy all this week, and not torment yourself, but to eat and sleep and be as gay as formerly. In the mean time I will talk over the matter with my old man, and if I get his consent, you shall then know the girl's true sentiments with regard to you."

Germain promised, and the week passed away without old Maurice uttering a single word to him on the subject or even appearing to suspect anything. The labourer forced himself to appear tranquil, but he was even paler and more anxious than usual.

At length, on Sunday morning when leaving mass, his mother-in-law asked him what he had obtained from his sweetheart since the conversation in the orchard.

"Why nothing at all," replied he; "I have not spoken to her."

"How then do you intend to persuade her if you do not speak to her?"

"I spoke to her but once," replied Germain. "That was when we went to Fourche together; and since that time I have not said a single word to her. Her refusal gave me so much pain at the time, that I have no desire to hear her tell me again that she does not love me."

"Well, my son, you must speak to her now: your father-in-law authorises you to do so. Go, decide your fate! I tell you to do so, and if necessary I desire you; for you cannot remain in this state of doubt and uncertainty."

Germain obeyed. With downcast eyes, and an embarrassed air he bent his steps towards the humble dwelling of old Dame Guillette. Little Mary was seated alone and pensive at the corner of the fire, and in such deep thought that she was un-

conscious of Germain's approach. When she perceived him standing before her, she almost started from her chair with surprise and became as red as a rose.

"Little Mary," said he, seating himself beside her, "I am come to distress and annoy you. I know it well: but *the man and woman at home*,"—designating thus according to custom the heads of the family—"wish me to speak to you, and ask you to marry me. You do not wish it, do you? I expected as much."

"Germain," replied little Mary, "you are certain then that you love me?"

"That annoys you, I know, but it is not my fault. If you were to change your opinion I should be only too glad, but doubtless I do not deserve that it should be so. Come, look at me, Mary; am I so very hideous then?"

"No, Germain," replied she, with a smile, "you are handsomer than I am."

"Do not laugh at me; look at me kindly. As yet I have lost neither a hair nor a tooth. My eyes tell you that I love you. Look at my eyes therefore; it is written there, and every girl can read that writing."

Mary fixed her eyes on those of Germain with her usual playful assurance: then all at once she turned away her head and trembled.

"Ah! heavens! I terrify you," said Germain; "you look at me as if I were the farmer of the elms. Do not be afraid of me, I beseech you; that would indeed pain me. I shall not, like him, whisper a single bad word in your ear; I shall not kiss you against your will, and when you wish me to go, you need only point to the door. Come, tell me; must I go that you may cease to tremble?"

Mary held out her hand to the labourer, but without turning her eyes from the fire, and without uttering a word.

"I understand," said Germain, "you pity me. You are kind-hearted, it distresses you to make me unhappy, but you cannot love me?"

"Why do you say such things, Germain?" replied little Mary at last; "do you wish to make me cry?"

"My poor little one! You have a good heart, I know; but you do not love me, and you hide your face because you fear to show me your displeasure and repugnance. And I dare not as much as press your hand! In the woods, when my son was asleep, and you too, I almost kissed you once, but very gently. But I would have died of shame rather than have asked such a favour from you, and I suffered as much that

night as a man consuming over a slow fire. Ever since then I have dreamed of you every night. Ah! how I kissed you in my dreams, Mary! But all this time, you slept without dreaming. And now do you know what I think? That if you were to turn round and look at me with the eyes I have for you, and if you were to put your face near mine, I do think, I should fall dead with joy. And you are thinking that if such a thing were to happen to you, you would die of shame and anger."

Germain spoke as if in a dream, without heeding what he said. Little Mary still trembled, but as he himself trembled still more, he no longer perceived it. All at once she turned round; she was in tears, and gazed at him with an air of reproach. The poor labourer imagined that this was the final blow, and, without awaiting his sentence, he rose to depart; but the young girl stopped him by throwing her arm round his neck and hiding her face in his bosom.

"Ah! Germain," exclaimed she in a voice broken with sobs, "have you not guessed that I love you?"

Germain would have gone mad with joy, had not his son, who had been seeking him everywhere and who now entered the cottage full gallop upon a stick, with his little sister *en croupe* flogging this imaginary charger with an osier twig, recalled him to his senses. . . . He caught him up in his arms, and placing him in those of his betrothed he said:—

"There! Mary, you have made more than one happy by





