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GABORIAU'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

VI. Eo-7378

THE GILDED CLIQUE.

BY EMILE GABORIAU.

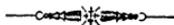
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THE GILDED CLIQUE.



I.

Few houses in Paris are better kept, or of more inviting aspect, than No. 23 Rue de la Grange, where everything wears an air of Dutch-like neatness and cleanliness. The neighbours might use the brass plate on the door as a shaving-glass, the pavement of the hall is polished till it shines, and the woodwork of the staircase is varnished to perfection. In the vestibule numerous notices, couched in the peculiar style which Parisian landlords habitually affect, request the tenants to respect other people's property, quite regardless of the high rents they have to pay. "Wipe your boots, if you please," says one of the placards to all who enter the house. "No spitting permitted on the stairs" declares another—obviously intended for more particularly ill-mannered tenants and visitors,—while a third, in the same curt style, authoritatively enunciates that no dogs are allowed on the premises.

And yet, although it has always been spick and span, "No. 23" enjoyed, at the time we write of, but a sorry reputation in the neighbourhood. Was it worse than other houses—than No. 21 for instance, or No. 25? Probably not; but there is a fate for houses as well as for men and books. The first storey was rented by two independent gentlemen and their families, whose minds were as simple as their lives. On the second floor were the offices and abode of a tax-receiver, who dabbled at times, it was reported, in usury on his own private account. The third storey was let to a wealthy man, a baron, so people said, who only turned up at long intervals, preferring, according to his own statement, to live on his estates in the province of Saintonge. The whole of the fourth floor was occupied by an individual familiarly known as Papa Ravinet, who dealt in all sorts of second-hand merchandise—furniture, garments, *bric-à-brac*, and so on—his rooms being replete with a medley collection of things which he was wont to purchase at sales by auction. The fifth and top-most storey of the house was divided into numerous small rooms and closets, mainly rented by artisans and clerks, who almost without exception left for their avocations early in the morning and returned home late at night. A second block in the rear of the building facing the street had a staircase of its own, and was occupied by still humbler tenants, whose presence in this central part of Paris was explained by the difficulty of letting small lodgings.

However this may have been, the house had a bad reputation, and its

inmates had to bear the consequences. Not one of them would have been trusted with a crown's worth of goods in any of the neighbouring shops. No one however stood, rightly or wrongly, in such bad repute as the door-keeper or *concierge*, who from a little window just inside the *porte-cochère* watched over the safety of the whole house. Master Chevassat and his wife were severely cut by all their colleagues in the street, and the most scandalous reports were circulated concerning them. Chevassat was said to be well off, having acquired his means by lending money at the remunerative rate of a hundred per cent. per month. He increased his income, moreover, by acting, so it was stated, as the agent of the tax-receiver and the dealer in second-hand goods, superintending the executions they ordered whenever poor debtors were unable to pay. Against Madame Chevassat there were yet even more grievous charges, for folks pretended she would do anything for money, and had launched many a poor girl into a profligate career. This worthy couple had previously lived in the fashionable Faubourg St Honoré, which it was said they had been compelled to leave on account of various ugly occurrences. Finally, they were reported to have a son named Justin, a handsome fellow of five-and-thirty, who lived in the best society, and whom they literally worshipped. He, however, was ashamed of his parents, though he would frequently come at night-time and ask them for money. It must be confessed that none of the gossips of the street had ever seen this son, and the origin of the report was altogether lost in mystery. As for the Chevassats, when any of this tittle-tattle reached their ears, they simply shrugged their shoulders, and remarked that they cared little for public opinion as long as their own consciences were clear.

One Saturday evening towards the close of last December, the door-keeper and his wife were just sitting down to dinner, when an individual, wearing a flowered-silk waistcoat and a long frock coat with an immense collar, rushed precipitately into their room. He was a man of fifty or thereabouts, of medium height, with a clean shaven face, and small bright yellow eyes, which shone with restless eagerness from under thick bushy brows. "Quick, Chevassat!" he cried in a tone of alarm. "Take your lamp and follow me—an accident has happened upstairs."

The Chevassats were quite frightened by the new comer's disturbed expression of countenance, and the woman nervously enquired, "Dear me, what is the matter, M. Ravinet?"

"The matter! the matter," rejoined the dealer in second-hand merchandise (for the messenger of ill-omen was none other than the tenant of the fourth floor). "Why, while I was on the landing just now, I fancied I heard a death-rattle on the floor above. I listened for a moment, and hearing nothing further, I was going into my rooms again, when I heard a confused sound of sobbing and sighing,—as if some one was in agony, in fact, at the point of death."

"And then?" ejaculated Master Chevassat.

"Why, then I determined to come and find you," replied the dealer. "I cannot be positively sure, but still I could almost swear that the moans came from the room of Mlle. Henriette, that pretty young girl who lives just above me. Come, let us go and see if there is anything amiss with her."

But the Chevassats did not stir from their seats. "Mlle. Henriette is not at home," said the wife in a frigid tone. "She went out a little while ago, and told me she would not come back till nine o'clock; you

must have been mistaken, M. Ravinet. Perhaps you had a ringing in your ears, or—”

“No, no; I certainly heard the moaning, and we must find out where it came from.”

During this conversation the door of the *concierge's* room had remained open, and several people of the house overhearing Papa Ravinet's story, and the exclamations of the Chevassats while crossing the hall, had paused, and listened with natural inquisitiveness: “Yes,” they repeated in chorus, “We must find out what is the matter.”

Chevassat did not dare to resist such a collective summons, and rising from his seat with a sigh, he muttered, “Well, let us go, then.” The whole party, composed of Chevassat and his wife, Papa Ravinet, and the lookers-on, thereupon ascended the staircase. As they tramped from flight to flight, the occupants of the various floors opened their doors to ascertain what was going on, and on learning that something was likely to happen, they almost all left their rooms and joined the procession, so that when the door-keeper paused on the landing of the fifth floor to draw breath, he had well nigh a dozen persons behind him. Mlle. Henriette's room was the first on the left. Chevassat began by rapping gently at the door, but, finding that mildness had no effect, he knocked louder and louder, until at last his heavy fist shook all the flimsy partition walls around. Between each blow he cried, “Mlle. Henriette! Mlle. Henriette, you are wanted!” But as all his hammering and shouting failed to elicit any response, he at last turned round with a triumphant air, and exclaimed, “Well, you see my wife was right: she's not at home!”

While Chevassat was knocking, however, M. Ravinet had been on his knees, in turn applying eye and ear to the keyhole, and at this moment he sprang to his feet with a pale face: “'Tis all over!” he cried. “We are too late!” Then, as the bystanders looked at him, bewildered, he added furiously, “Have you no noses? can't you smell that abominable charcoal?”

The lookers-on forthwith began to sniff, and soon agreed that the dealer was in the right. Moreover, Chevassat's repeated blows had had considerable effect on the fastenings of the door, and a sickening vapour now filtered through the apertures around the framework. Every one shuddered, and a woman tremulously exclaimed, “She has destroyed herself!” As it happens only too frequently in such cases, all the bystanders hesitated, and a pause ensued before Chevassat ventured to remark, “Ah, well, I must go for the police.”

“That's right!” retorted the dealer in second-hand merchandise. “At this moment there is perhaps still a chance of saving the poor girl's life, but when you come back it will of course be too late.”

“What's to be done, then?”

“Why, break in the door.”

“I don't dare.”

“Well, then, I will;” and suiting the action to the word, Papa Ravinet put his shoulder to the worm-eaten door, the lock of which almost instantly gave way. A mass of vapour rolled out into the passage, and the frightened lookers-on instinctively shrank back. But curiosity speedily mastered fear. Every one was now convinced that the poor girl was lying dead inside the room, and one and all strove to distinguish her form through the dense fumes. But their efforts were fruitless. The feeble light of the lamp carried by Chevassat had gone out in the foul air, and the darkness would have been utterly impenetrable, save for the ruddy glow of the charcoal

burning away in two little hand-stoves, amid tiny heaps of white ashes. Papa Ravinet had, however, gone too far already to remain waiting in the passage. "Where is the window?" he asked, turning to the house-porter.

"On the right-hand side."

"Very well, I'll open it;" and he boldly plunged into the dark room. A moment afterwards a crash of breaking glass was heard, and a current of air being established, the smoke was speedily carried away into space. As soon as it was possible to breathe inside the room everyone rushed in. It was certainly a death-rattle that Papa Ravinet had heard. Stretched at full length on a thin mattress, destitute alike of sheet, blanket, and counterpane, lay a young girl, barely twenty years of age, clad in a flimsy dress of black merino. Her limbs were already stiff, and she was apparently lifeless. "To die so young, and in such a manner!" exclaimed the women of the party, sobbing aloud.

But the dealer in second-hand goods did not waste his time in sentimental lamentation. Approaching the bed, he carefully scrutinized the girl. "She is not dead yet," he cried; "No, she cannot be dead! Come, ladies, try and prolong her life till the doctor comes. Give her air—plenty of air—try to get some breath into her lungs. Cut her dress open, pour some vinegar on her face, rub her limbs with some warm woollen stuff."

The women cheerfully obeyed these orders, though none of them entertained any hope of success. "Poor child," said one of them, "no doubt she was crossed in love." "Or else she was starving," significantly whispered another. It was indeed plain enough that this humble room was the abode of extreme poverty. The only articles of furniture were the bed, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. There were no curtains to the window, no clothes in the bag standing in a corner, not a ribbon in the drawers. Everything that could be disposed of had plainly been pawned or sold, bit by bit, little by little. The bed clothes had followed the wearing apparel, and even half the wool had been removed from the mattress. Too proud to complain, friendless owing to timidity perhaps, the poor girl had gone through all the stages of suffering which utter poverty entails.

Papa Ravinet was thinking of all this when he espied a paper lying on the chest of drawers. Taking it up, he read the following lines:—"Let no one be accused—I die voluntarily. I beg Madame Chevassat to deliver the two letters I leave lying beside this paper. She will be paid whatever I may owe her.—HENRIETTE." Hard by, the dealer perceived the mentioned missives, the addresses of which he eagerly scanned. The first was directed to the "Count de Ville-Handry, 115 Rue de Varennes," and the second to "M. Maxime de Brévan, 62 Rue Lafitte." As he perused the latter superscription a strange gleam came into Papa Ravinet's yellow eyes, a wicked smile played round his lips, and he uttered a very peculiar "Ah!" A moment later, however, his brow became as dark as before, and he glanced around him with mingled anxiety and suspicion to see if any one had noticed his momentary change of expression. No, he had escaped observation, and the letters also had remained unperceived—for all the inmates of the room were busy trying to recall Mlle. Henriette to consciousness. Papa Ravinet thereupon slipped the paper and the two letters into the pocket of his frock coat with a dexterity and speed that might have excited a professional pilferer's jealousy.

He then turned towards the women who were bending over the bed. They were greatly excited, for one of them declared that she had felt the

body tremble, a statement which the others generally refused to credit. The point was soon to be decided. After perhaps twenty seconds of suspense, during which all held their breath, an exclamation burst forth. "She is alive! She has moved!" Indeed, doubt was no longer possible. The poor girl had stirred, very faintly perhaps, but still in a sufficiently perceptible manner for everyone to notice it. Moreover, a slight colour had returned to her pallid cheeks, her bosom began to heave, her clenched teeth parted, and she stretched forth her neck as if to imbibe the fresh air. The women standing around were as appalled as if they had witnessed a miracle. One of them, a lady living on the first floor, who supported the poor child's head as she gazed about her with a blank, unmeaning glance, spoke to her, but she did not answer. Plainly she could not hear. "Never mind," said Papa Ravinet, "she is saved, and when the doctor arrives there will be little remaining for him to do. Still, she must be attended to, poor girl, for we cannot leave her here alone." The bystanders fully understood the drift of the dealer's words, and yet only one or two of them proffered a timid assent. Uninfluenced however by their evident reluctance, he calmly continued, "She must be put to bed properly, with another mattress, a couple of blankets, and a counterpane. We want firing as well, for it's terribly cold here, and tea and sugar, and a candle." Although he did not mention everything that might be needed, his improvised list, such as it was, proved already a great deal too long for most of the people standing round. The tax-receiver's wife grandly laid a five-franc piece on the mantelshelf and then slipped outside, several of the others following her example in the latter if not in the former respect. Papa Ravinet, indeed, found himself abandoned by everyone, excepting the Chevassats and the two ladies living on the first floor. The worthy fellow smiled significantly, and after a momentary pause exclaimed, "Fortunately I deal in all sorts of goods. Please wait here a moment, while I just run downstairs to fetch the needful. After that we'll see what remains to be done."

Mother Chevassat was quite amazed. "Am I going mad?" she said to herself, "or has some one changed Papa Ravinet?" The fact is, that the dealer in second-hand merchandise did not precisely enjoy a reputation for generosity and benevolence. However, he soon reappeared, quaking under the weight of two heavy mattresses; and on returning a second time, he brought, not merely all the remaining articles he had mentioned, but several others besides. Mlle. Henriette was now breathing more freely, though her limbs and features were still rigid. She was evidently unconscious of her situation; and the ladies of the first floor, although very willing to help her, were extremely puzzled as to what they ought to do. "The only thing is to put her to bed," said Papa Ravinet. "When the doctor comes he will very likely bleed her." And turning to Chevassat, he added, "We are in the way of these ladies: so suppose we go down to my rooms and drink a glass together? We can come back when the child has been comfortably put to bed."

The good-natured dealer lived in the midst of his thousand-and-one purchases. He slept just where he could, or, rather, wherever a sale cleared space for his accommodation,—reposing one night in a costly carved bed of Louis Quatorze style, and the next on a common lounge merely worth a few francs. For the time being he occupied a little closet not more than three-quarters full; and it was to this encumbered apartment that he now conducted Master Chevassat.

After pouring some brandy into two small wine-glasses, and putting a

kettle on the fire, he sank into an arm-chair, exclaiming, "Well, what a terrible thing this is!"

The doorkeeper had been well drilled by his wife, and answered neither yes nor no; but Papa Ravinet was a man of experience, and knew well enough how to loosen his visitor's tongue. "The most disagreeable thing about it," said he, with an absent air, "is, that the doctor will report the matter to the police, and there will be a legal investigation."

Master Chevassat nearly dropped his glass. "What? The police in the house? Well, good-bye, then, to our tenants; we are lost. Why did that stupid girl try to kill herself, I wonder! But perhaps you are mistaken, M. Ravinet?"

"No, I am not. But you jump to erroneous conclusions. All the police will ask you is—who that girl is, how she supports herself, and where she lived before she came here."

"That's exactly what I can't tell."

The dealer in old clothes seemed amazed: and frowned ominously as he asked, "Then how did it happen that Mlle. Henriette came to live here?"

The doorkeeper was evidently ill at ease, and it was with affected assurance that he replied, "Oh, it's as clear as sunlight; and, if you like, I'll tell you the story: you will see there has been no harm done."

"Let us hear, then."

"Well, one day, about a year ago, a well-dressed young fellow, with an eye-glass stuck in his eye—a thoroughly fashionable young man—came into my room and said he had seen a notice outside, stating that there was a room to let in the house. He wanted to see it; and although I told him it was a wretched garret, unfit for a gentleman like himself, he insisted, and so I took him upstairs."

"To the room where Mlle. Henriette has been living?"

"Exactly. I thought he would be disgusted; but no. He looked out of the window, tried the door, examined the partition-wall, and eventually said, 'The room suits me, and I'll take it.' Thereupon he hands me a twenty-franc piece to close the bargain. I was amazed."

If M. Ravinet felt any interest in this story, at all events he took pains not to show it; for his eyes wandered to and fro as if his thoughts were elsewhere—indeed, as if he were heartily bored with Chevassat's tedious account. "And who was that fashionable young man?" he asked.

"Ah! that's more than I know, except that his name is Maxime."

At the mention of this name the old dealer almost sprang from his seat. He changed colour, and a strange gleam came once more into his small yellowish eyes. However, he recovered himself so promptly, that his visitor did not notice his temporary excitement; and it was in a tone of the utmost indifference that he remarked, "So the young fellow did not give you his family name?"

"No."

"But ought you not to have inquired?"

"Ah, there's the trouble! I did not do so," answered Chevassat, who was now gradually surmounting his original embarrassment, and preparing himself in anticipation of the police enquiry. "I know it was wrong," he continued; "but I don't think you would have acted differently in my place, sir. Just think! My room belonged to M. Maxime; for I had his money in my pocket. I asked him most politely where he lived, and if any furniture would come, whereupon he laughed in my face, and with-

out even letting me finish my question, exclaimed, 'Do I look like a man who lives in a place like this? And, when he saw I was puzzled, he proceeded to tell me that he intended to rent the room for a young person from the country, in whom he took an interest; observing that the receipts for rent must all be made out in the name of Mlle. Henriette. That was clear enough, wasn't it? Still, it was my duty to know who Mlle. Henriette was; so I asked him civilly enough. But he became angry, and told me that was none of my business, adding, that some furniture would presently be sent." The doorkeeper paused, waiting for Papa Ravinet to express his approval either by word or gesture; but as the dealer remained mute and motionless, he continued, "In short, I did not dare to insist, and everything was done as he desired. The same day a dealer in second-hand furniture brought the goods you have seen upstairs; and on the morrow, just before noon, Mlle. Henriette arrived. She had not much luggage with her—in fact, merely a hand-bag."

The old dealer was stooping over the fire, apparently giving all his attention to the kettle, in which the water was beginning to boil. "It seems to me, my friend," said he, "that you did not act very wisely. Still, if that is really everything, I don't think you are likely to be troubled."

"What else could there be?" asked Chevassat.

"How do I know?" But if that young damsel had been carried off by M. Maxime, if you lent a hand in an elopement, you might find yourself in a nasty pickle. The law is very strict when minors are concerned."

"Oh, I have told you the whole truth," protested the doorkeeper, with a solemn air.

On this point, however, Papa Ravinet had his doubts. "That is your look-out," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Still, you may be sure you will be asked how it happens that one of your tenants became reduced to such a state of abject poverty without your giving notice to anybody."

"Why, surely I don't wait on the tenants. They are free to do what they like in their rooms."

"Quite right, Master Chevassat, quite right! So you did not know that M. Maxime no longer came to see Mlle. Henriette?"

"But he still came to see her."

At these words Papa Ravinet raised his arms to heaven, as if horror-struck, and exclaimed, "What! is it possible? That handsome young fellow knew how the poor girl suffered? He knew that she was dying of hunger?"

Master Chevassat grew more and more disturbed. He began to perceive the drift of the dealer's questions, and realised how unsatisfactory his answers were. "Ah! you ask too many questions," he said at last. "It was not my duty to watch M. Maxime. As for Mlle. Henriette, as soon as she is able to move—the little serpent!—I'll send her off about her business."

But Papa Ravinet shook his head, and softly rejoined, "No, no, Chevassat, you won't do that, for from to-day I mean to pay her rent. And, more than that, if you wish to oblige me, you will be very kind to her,—you hear?—and even respectful, if you please."

There was no misunderstanding the meaning of the word "oblige," pronounced as the old dealer pronounced it; and yet he was about to enforce the recommendation, when a fretting voice was heard calling on the stairs, "Chevassat! where are you, Chevassat?"

"My wife wants me," exclaimed the doorkeeper; and, delighted to get

away, he added, "I understand, M. Ravinet; she shall be treated as politely as if she were the landlord's daughter. But excuse me, I have to attend to my duties; and, as my wife calls me, I must go down stairs."

Without waiting for an answer he then slipped out, quite unable to guess why the old dealer should take such a sudden interest in the tenant on the fifth floor.

"The rascal!" muttered Papa Ravinet, as soon as he was alone,—*"the rascal!"* But he had not yet found out everything he wanted to know, and he knew he had no time to lose.

Removing the kettle from the fire, and drawing Mlle. Henriette's two letters from his pocket, he held the one addressed to M. Maxime de Brévan over the steam of the boiling water. In a moment the gum securing the envelope softened, and the letter could easily be opened without leaving any trace of the act. The missive ran as follows:—"You are victorious, M. de Brévan. When you read this, I shall have ceased to live. You may raise your head again: you are relieved of all fears. Daniel can come back. I shall carry the secret of your infamy and cowardice to the grave. And yet, no! I can forgive you, having but a few moments longer to live; but God will not pardon you. I feel that I shall be avenged. And, if a miracle be needed, that miracle will be accomplished, so that the man who thought you were his friend may learn how and why died the poor girl whom he had entrusted to your honour.—H."

On reading these lines, Papa Ravinet became furious. "What?" growled he in a tone of bitter hatred, "Maxime de Brévan's honour! A pretty security, indeed!" However, his excitement did not deter him from manipulating the other letter, addressed to the Count de Ville-Handry, in precisely the same manner. The operation was equally successful; and, without the slightest hesitation, the dealer read:—"DEAR FATHER,—Broken down with anxiety, and faint from exhaustion, I have waited till this morning for an answer to the humble letter which I wrote you on my knees. You have never replied to it: you are inexorable. I see I must die. Alas! I can hardly say I die willingly. I must appear very guilty in your eyes, father, for you to abandon me in this manner to the hatred of Sarah Brandon and her people. And yet, I have suffered terribly. I struggled hard before I could make up my mind to leave home, the home where my mother died, where I had been so happy, and so tenderly beloved as a child by both of you. Ah, if you but knew! And yet it was so little I asked of you!—barely enough to bury my *undeserved* disgrace in a convent. Yes, *undeserved*, father; for at the moment of appearing before God—at an hour when no one dares to pervert the truth—I declare, that despite all slanderous reports, I have ever preserved the honour of our name."

Tears rolled down Papa Ravinet's cheeks as he read this heart-rending missive; and it was in a half-stifled voice that he murmured, "Poor, poor child! And to think that for a whole year I have lived under the same roof with her without knowing it. But, fortunately, I am still in time. Oh, what a friend chance can be when it chooses!"

None of the inmates of the house would have recognised Papa Ravinet at this moment, for he was literally transfigured. He was no longer the cunning dealer in second-hand articles, the old scamp with the sharp, vulgar face, so well known at all public sales, when he always sat in the front row, watching for good bargains, and keeping cool while all around were in a state of fervent excitement. The letters he had just read had re-opened more than one heart-wound of old times—wounds badly scarred

and badly healed. He was suffering intensely; and pain, wrath, and hope of vengeance long delayed, imparted to his features a strange expression of energy and nobility. Resting his elbows on the table, holding his head in his hands, and looking apparently into the far past, he seemed to be recalling the miseries of former times, and tracing out the vague outlines of some great scheme of the future. And as his thoughts progressed, he broke out into a strange, spasmodic soliloquy: "Yes," he murmured, "yes, I recognise your work, Sarah Brandon! Poor child, poor child! Crushed by such horrible intrigues! And that Daniel, who intrusted her to Maxime de Brévan's care, who is he? Why did she not write to him when she suffered thus? Ah, if she had trusted me! What a sad fate! How can I ever hope to induce her to confide in me?" At this moment an old clock standing in a corner struck seven, and the dealer was suddenly recalled to the present.

"Dear me!" he growled. "I was falling asleep; and time is precious. I must go up-stairs and hear the child's confession."

With amazing dexterity he then replaced the letters in their envelopes, and dried and smoothed them down, till every trace of the steam had entirely disappeared. Then glancing at his work with an air of satisfaction, he remarked, "Not so badly done for an amateur, after all. A post-office expert in the *cabinet noir* could scarcely have done better. I think I can risk returning them."

So speaking he rapidly climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, where Mme. Chevassat barred his way on the landing in a manner which clearly showed that she had been lying in wait for him. "Well, my dear sir," said she in her sweetest manner, "so you have become Mlle. Henriette's banker?"

"Yes; do you object to it?"

"Oh, not at all! It is none of my business; only"—she stopped, smiling equivocally, and then added, "only she is a remarkably pretty girl; and I was just saying to myself, 'Upon my word, M. Ravinet has good taste.'"

The dealer was on the point of giving her a sharp reply; but he controlled himself in time, remembering how important it was to mislead the woman; so forcing himself to smile, he said, "You know I count upon your being discreet."

On reaching Mlle. Henriette's room, he found that he must, at least, give some credit to Mme. Chevassat and the two ladies from the first floor, who had skilfully turned the articles he had contributed to use. The room, which an hour previously had been so cold and bare, now wore an air of comparative comfort. On the drawers stood a lamp, with its shade so adjusted that the light might not hurt the patient's eyes. A bright fire blazed in the fire-place, several old curtains had been hung before the window, one over the other, so as to replace for the time the missing panes; while on the table were a tea-kettle, a china cup, and two small medicine-bottles. So the doctor had called during Ravinet's absence. He had bled the poor girl, prescribed some medicine, and departed, with the assurance that nothing more was needed but perfect quiet. In fact, had it not been for the patient's pallid cheeks, no traces remained of her sufferings or of the terrible danger from which she had so marvellously escaped. Lying at ease on her now comfortable bed, with its thick mattresses and snow-white sheets, her head reposing on a couple of pillows, she was breathing freely, as was evident from the steady, regular rise and

fall of her bosom under the coverlet. But life and consciousness had also brought back to her a full sense of her distressing position ; and with her brow resting on her arm, almost concealed by thick locks of golden hair, she was lying motionless looking into space, the big tears gathering beneath her eyelids, slowly dropping meanwhile down her cheeks. Sorrow imparts at times an additional charm to beauty, and when, as Papa Ravinet entered the room, he beheld her thus, he paused abruptly, struck with admiration. But as he did not wish his acts to be misinterpreted, or to be accused of prying, he coughed, so as to announce his arrival, and then stepped forward again.

On hearing him, Henriette roused herself, and speaking in a faint, feeble voice, said, " Ah ! it is you, sir. Those kind ladies have told me everything. You have saved my life." Then, shaking her head, she added, " You have rendered me a sad service, sir."

She uttered these words so simply, but in a tone of such harrowing grief, that Papa Ravinet was overcome. " Unhappy child !" he exclaimed, " you surely do not think of trying it over again ?" She made no answer. It was as good as if she had said, Yes. " Why, you must be mad !" resumed the old man, excited almost beyond control. To give up life at your age ! No doubt you are suffering now ; but you can hardly imagine what compensation Providence may have in store for you hereafter—"

Interrupting him by a gesture, she rejoined, " There was no future for me, sir, when I sought refuge in death."

" But—"

" Oh, don't try to convince me, sir ! I did what I had to do. I felt that life was leaving me, and I only wished to shorten my agony. I had not eaten anything for three days when I lit that charcoal, and to procure it, I had to risk a falsehood, and cheat the woman who let me have it on credit. And yet, God knows, I was not wanting in courage. I would have cheerfully done the coarsest, hardest work. But how could I procure employment ? I asked Mme. Chevassat a hundred times to obtain work for me ; but she always laughed in my face ; and, when I begged all the harder, she said—" Henriette paused, and the crimson blush of shame suffused her features. She did not dare to repeat what the doorkeeper's wife had said to her. But she added, in a voice trembling with womanly virtue and indignation, " Ah, that woman is a wicked creature !"

The old dealer was probably fully acquainted with Mme. Chevassat's character. He guessed only too readily what kind of advice she had given this poor girl of twenty, who had turned to her for help in her dire distress. He could not repress an oath which would have startled even that estimable female, and then warmly replied, " I understand you, Mlle. Henriette, I understand. Do you think I don't know what you must have suffered ? I know poverty as well as you do. I can understand your purpose only too well. Who would not give up life itself when everybody abandons us ? But I do not understand your despair, now that circumstances have changed."

" Alas, sir, how have they changed ?"

" How ? What do you mean ? Don't you see me ? Do you think I would abandon you, after arriving just in time to save your life ? That would be pretty conduct ! No, my dear child, compose yourself : poverty shall not come near you again, I'll see to that. You want some one to advise you, to defend you ; and here I am : if you have enemies, let them beware ! Come, smile again, and think of the good times a-coming." But

she did not smile: she looked frightened, almost stupefied. Making a supreme effort, she looked fixedly at the old man to see if she could read his real thoughts in his face. He, on his part, was seriously disturbed by his failure to win her confidence. "Do you doubt my promises?" he asked.

She shook her head; and speaking slowly, as if to give her words greater weight, she said, "I beg your pardon, sir. I do not doubt you. But I cannot understand why you should offer me your kind protection."

Papa Ravinet affected greater surprise than he really felt, and, raising his hands to heaven, exclaimed, "Great God! she mistrusts my goodwill."

"Sir!"

"Pray what can you have to fear from me? I am an old man: you are almost a child. I come to help you. Is it not perfectly natural and simple?" She said nothing; and he remained for a moment buried in thought, as if trying to divine her motive for refusing his help. Suddenly he struck his forehead, and exclaimed, "Ah, I have it. That woman Chevassat has talked to you about me, no doubt. Ah, the viper. I'll crush her one of these days! Come, let us be frank: what has she told you?" He hoped that Henriette would at least give him a word of reply. He waited; but none came. Then breaking forth with strange vehemence, and in language one would scarcely have expected a man like him to use, he continued—"Well, I will tell you what the old thief said. She told you Papa Ravinet was a dangerous man, of bad repute, who plied all kinds of suspicious callings in the dark. She told you that the old scamp was a usurer, who knew no law, and kept no promise; whose only principle was profit; who dealt in everything with everybody, selling one day old iron in junk-shops, and on the morrow cashmere shawls to fashionable ladies; lending money on imaginary securities—the talent of men and the beauty of women. In short, she told you that it was a piece of good fortune for a woman to obtain my protection, and you knew it was a disgrace." He paused, as if to allow the poor girl time to form her judgment, and then proceeded in a calmer tone—"Let us suppose that there is such a Papa Ravinet as she has described. But there is another one whom only a very few people know, a man who has been sorely tried by misfortune; and it is he who now offers you his help!"

There is no surer way of inducing people to believe in such virtues as we may possess, or pretend to possess, than to accuse ourselves of failings, and even vices, from which we are exempt. But, if the old fellow had calculated upon this policy, he failed signally in his object. Henriette remained as icy as ever, and merely said, "Believe me, sir, I am exceedingly grateful to you for all you have done for me, and for your efforts to convince me."

Papa Ravinet looked disappointed. "So you reject my offers," said he, "simply because I do not explain them by any of the usual motives. But what can I tell you? Suppose I told you that I have a daughter who has secretly left me; that I do not know what has become of her, and that her memory makes me anxious to serve you. May I not have said to myself, that she is struggling with poverty like you; that she has been in similar fashion abandoned by her lover?"

The poor girl turned deadly pale as the dealer spoke in this strain, and, raising herself on her pillows, eagerly interrupted him—"You are mistaken, sir. My position here may justify such suspicions, I know; but I have no lover."

"I believe you," he replied; "I swear I believe you. But, if that is

so, how did you get here? and how were you reduced to such extreme suffering?"

At last Papa Ravinet had touched the right chord. Henriette was deeply moved; and tears started from her eyes. "There are secrets which cannot be revealed," she murmured.

"Not even when life and honour depend on them?"

"Yes."

"But—"

"Oh, pray do not insist!"

If Henriette had known the old merchant, she would have read in his eyes the satisfaction he now felt. A moment before he had despaired of ever gaining her confidence; but at present he felt almost sure of success, and determined to strike a decisive blow. "I confess," said he, "that I have tried my best to win your confidence; but it was solely in your own interest. If it had been otherwise, do you think I should have asked you these questions, when it was so easy for me to ascertain everything by simply tearing a piece of paper?"

The poor girl could not restrain a cry of alarm. "You mean my letters?" she said.

"I have them both."

"Ah! Then that is why the ladies who nursed me looked everywhere for them in vain."

Papa Ravinet's only answer was to draw the missives from his pocket, and to lay them on the bed with an air of injured innocence. To all appearances the envelopes had not been touched. Henriette gave them a glance, and then, holding out her hand to the dealer, she said, "I thank you, sir."

Ravinet did not stir; but he realised that this mock proof of honesty had helped him more than all his eloquence. "After all," said he, in a hurried tone, "I could not resist the temptation to read the directions, and draw my own conclusions. Who is the Count de Ville-Handry? Your father, I suppose. And M. Maxime de Brévan? No doubt the young man who called to see you so often. Ah, if you would only trust me! If you knew how a little experience of the world often helps us to overcome the greatest difficulties!" He was evidently deeply moved. "However, wait till you are perfectly well again before coming to any decision. Consider the matter carefully. You need only tell me the bare facts I ought to know in order to advise you."

"Yes, indeed! In that way I might—"

"Well, then, I'll wait as long as you wish me to wait—two days, ten days."

"Very well."

"Only, I pray you, promise me solemnly to give up all idea of suicide."

"I promise you solemnly I will."

Papa Ravinet's eyes shone with delight; and he joyfully exclaimed, "Done! I'll come up again to-morrow; for, to tell the truth, I am tired to death, and must go and lie down."

This was plainly a pious fib on the old fellow's part; for, instead of returning to his rooms, he left the house, and, on reaching the street, concealed himself in a dark corner, whence he could watch the front door. Here he remained exposed to wind and rain, now and then giving vent to a low oath, and stamping his feet to keep them warm. At last, just as eleven was striking, a cab stopped in front of No. 23, and a young man alighted, rang the bell, and entered the house.

"That's Maxime de Brévan," murmured the dealer; adding in a savage voice, "I knew he would come, the scoundrel! to see if the charcoal had done its work." But a moment later the young man came out again, and sprang into the vehicle, which quickly drove away. "Aha!" laughed Papa Ravinet, "No chance for you my fine fellow! You have lost your game; you'll have to try your luck elsewhere; and this time I am on hand. I hold you fast; and instead of one bill to pay, there will be two."

II.

As a rule it is only in novels that unknown people suddenly take it into their heads to tell the story of their career, and acquaint their neighbours with their most important secrets. In real life things do not go quite so fast. For a long while after the old dealer's departure, Henriette remained reflecting over her position, and asking herself what decision she should take. Who could this odd individual be? What could be thought of a man who denounced himself as a dangerous and suspicious character? Was he really what he seemed? The girl almost doubted it; for although quite inexperienced, she had still been struck by certain astounding changes in Papa Ravinet's manner. Thus, in moments of animation, his air was no longer in keeping with the singular antiquated costume he wore; and his language, usually careless and slangy, became correct and almost elegant. What was his business? Had he always been a dealer in second-hand articles before he became a tenant of No. 23 Rue de la Grange, three years ago? One might easily have imagined that Papa Ravinet (was this his real name?) had previously held a very different position. And why not? Is not Paris the haven where all the shipwrecked sailors of society seek a refuge? Does not Paris alone offer to the wretched and the guilty a hiding-place, where they may begin life anew, lost and unknown in the "madding crowd?" Many a man, after shining in society, has suddenly disappeared, and been sought for in vain by friend and foe; and yet he is still in Paris, wearing strange attire, and earning a livelihood in the most unexpected way. Might not the old dealer be such an individual? And yet, even if this were the case, his eagerness to assist Henriette, and his perseverance in offering her advice, could scarcely have been explained. Was he merely acting out of charity? Alas! Christian charity is seldom so pressing. Did he know who Henriette was? Had they ever met together at any previous period? Had his interests ever coincided with hers? Was he anxious to requite some kindness shown him? or did he count upon some reward in the future? Who could tell? "Would it not be the height of imprudence to place myself in this man's power?" thought the poor girl. But if, on the other hand, she rejected his offers, she must subside again into the same state of forlorn wretchedness from which she had sought to save herself by suicide. This last prospect was all the more alarming, as, like all persons rescued at the last hour, after draining the cup of suffering to the dregs, the poor girl now began to cling to life with almost desperate affection. It seemed as if the contact with death had at once wiped out all memory of the past, and all dread of the future. "O Daniel!" she murmured tremblingly—"O Daniel! my only friend on earth, what would you suffer if you knew that the very means you chose to secure my safety nearly lost me to you!" To refuse Papa Ravinet's proffered

assistance would have required more energy than she possessed. An inward voice constantly repeated—"The old man is your only hope."

It never occurred to her to conceal the truth from Papa Ravinet, or to deceive him by a fictitious story. She only deliberated how she might tell him the truth without acquainting him with everything; how she might confess sufficient to enable him to serve her, and yet not betray a secret which she held dearer than happiness, reputation, and life itself. Unfortunately, she was the victim of one of those intrigues which originate and progress within the narrow circle of a family,—intrigues of the most abominable character, which people suspect, and are often fully acquainted with, and which yet remain unpunished, as they are beyond the reach of the law. Henriette's father, the Count de Ville-Handry, was in 1845 one of the wealthiest landowners of the province of Anjou. The good folks of Rosiers and Saint Mathurin were fond of pointing out to strangers the massive towers of Ville-Handry, a magnificent castle, half hidden by noble old trees, on the beautiful slopes which line the Loire. "There," they said, "lives a true nobleman, a little too proud, perhaps, but, nevertheless, a true nobleman." For, contrary to the usual state of things in the country, where envy is apt to engender hatred, the count, despite his title and his wealth, was conspicuously popular. He was then about forty years of age, tall and good-looking, and albeit somewhat solemn and reserved, still at times grandly affable and obliging, and even good-natured to boot; that is, so long as no one spoke in his presence of the reigning family, the nobility or the clergy, of his hounds, the wines he vintaged, or of various other subjects on which he had what he chose to consider his "own opinions." As he seldom spoke, and even then with remarkable brevity, he managed to say fewer foolish things than most people are in the habit of uttering, and thus he won the reputation of being clever and well informed, of which he was very proud and careful. He lived freely, almost profusely, putting aside each year but little more than half his income. He was dressed by a Paris tailor, and always wore the most exquisite boots and gloves. The castle was kept in handsome style, and the pleasure-grounds were a great source of expense. The stables sheltered six hunters, and the kennels a pack of hounds; while idling in the hall one always found half-a-dozen lazy servants, whose gorgeous liveries, adorned with the family coat-of-arms, were a source of perpetual wonder at Saint Mathurin. The count himself would have been perfect, but for his inordinate passion for the chase. As soon as the season opened, he was ever afield, now on foot and now in the saddle—now breaking through thickets in search of a boar, and now up to his knees in the marshes after water-fowl. He carried these proceedings so far, that the ladies of the neighbourhood, with marriageable daughters, blamed him to his face for his imprudence, and scolded him for risking his precious health so recklessly.

This wealthy nobleman of forty was still unmarried. And yet he had not lacked opportunities to assume the bonds of Hymen, for there was not a mother for twenty miles around who did not covet this prize for her daughter—ten thousand a-year, and a great name. He had only to appear at a ball, and at once he became the hero of the evening. Mothers and daughters alike lavished their sweetest smiles on him; and flattering welcomes were forthcoming on all sides. But all manœuvres had been fruitless; he had escaped every snare, and defeated every matchmaker's cunning devices. Why was he so averse to matrimony? His friends

referred the explanation to a certain person, half housekeeper, half companion, who lived at the castle, and who was both very pretty and very designing. But, then, there are malicious tongues everywhere.

However, in July 1847, an event occurred which was calculated to impart some plausibility to these idle, gossiping tales. One fine day the count's housekeeper died most unexpectedly, and six weeks later it was reported that the Count de Ville-Handry was going to be married. The report was correct. The count did marry; and the fact could not be doubted any longer, when the banns were read, and the announcement appeared in the official journal. And whom do you think he married? Why, the daughter of a poor widow, the Baroness de Rupert, who was living in great poverty at a place called Rosiers, her sole income being a small pension granted her for her husband's services as a colonel of artillery.

She did not even belong to a good old family, nor was she either a native of the province. No one exactly knew who she was, or where she came from. Some people said the colonel had married her in Austria; others, in Sweden. Her husband, they added, had merely been created a baron under the first empire, and had no genuine right to call himself a noble. On the other hand, Pauline de Rupert, then twenty-three years old, was in the full bloom of early womanhood, and marvellously beautiful. Moreover, she had hitherto been looked upon as a sensible, modest girl, possessed of every quality and virtue that can make life happy. But now people mainly insisted on the fact that she had no dower—not a farthing, not even a *trousseau*! The idea of the count marrying her amazed everyone; and a perfect storm of indignation swept over the country-side. Was it possible, was it natural, that a great nobleman like M. de Ville-Handry should end in this miserable, ridiculous fashion,—and marry a penniless girl, an adventuress,—he who had had the pick and choice of the richest and greatest heiresses of the land? Was the count a fool? or was he only insane about Mlle. de Rupert? Was she not, perhaps, after all, a designing hypocrite, who, in her retired home, had quietly woven the net in which the lion of Anjou was now held captive? People would have been less astonished if they had known that, for some years, a great intimacy had existed between the bride's mother and the deceased housekeeper at the castle. But, on the other hand, this fact might have led to more scandalous surmises still.

However this might be, the count was not long allowed to remain in doubt as to the change of opinion in the neighbourhood. He realised it as soon as he paid his usual visits at Angers, or called on the nobility near him. No more affectionate smiles, tender welcomes, or little white hands stealthily seeking his. The doors that formerly seemed to fly open at his mere approach now turned but slowly on their hinges: some even remained closed, the owners being reported not at home, although the count knew perfectly well that they were indoors at the time. One very noble and pious old lady, who gave the keynote to Angevin society, had said to her friends in the most decided manner, "For my part, I will never receive at my house a damsel who used to give music-lessons to my nieces, even if she had caught and entrapped a Bourbon!" The charge was true. Pauline, in order to provide her mother with some of the comforts which are almost indispensable to old age, had given lessons on the pianoforte to several young ladies residing in the neighbourhood. Her terms had been low enough; and yet she was now blamed precisely for accepting such paltry remuneration. Folks would indeed have blamed her for the noblest

of virtues ; for all the blame was cast on her. When people met her, they averted their heads, so as not to have to bow to her ; and, even when she was leaning on the count's arm, there were some who spoke most courteously to him, and yet did not say a word to his wife, as if they had not seen her, or as though she had not existed at all. This impertinence went so far, that at last one day the count was so enraged that he seized one of his neighbours by the collar of his coat and shook him violently, exclaiming—“Don't you see the countess, my wife, sir ? How shall I chastise you to cure you of your near-sightedness ?” Foreseeing a duel, the impertinent individual apologised, and his experience put others on their guard. But their opinions remained unchanged : open war only changed into secret opposition—that was all.

Fate, however, always kinder than man, held a reward in store for the count, which amply repaid him for his heroism in marrying a penniless girl. One of his wife's uncles, a banker at Dresden, died, leaving his “beloved niece Pauline” a legacy of two and a-half million francs. This opulent individual, who had never assisted his sister in her trouble, and who would have utterly disinherited Mlle. de Rupert had she remained the mere daughter of a soldier of fortune, had been flattered by the idea of inscribing in his will the name of the “high and mighty Countess de Ville-Handry.” This unexpected piece of good fortune ought to have delighted the young wife. She might now have revenged herself on all her slanderers, and acquired unbounded popularity. But far from appearing glad, she had never looked sadder than on the day when the great news reached her. For on that very day she for the first time cursed her marriage. The voice of conscience reminded her that she ought never to have yielded to her mother's entreaties and orders. An excellent daughter, destined to become the best of mothers, and the most faithful of wives, she had literally sacrificed herself. And now she perceived that her sacrifice had been superfluous.

Ah, why had she not resisted, at least for the purpose of gaining time ? For in her girlhood she had dreamed of a very different future. Long before giving her hand to the count she had, of her own free will, given her heart to another. She had bestowed her first and warmest affections upon a young man who was only two or three years older than herself—Peter Champcey, the son of one of those wealthy farmers who live in the valley of the Loire. He worshipped her. Unfortunately, from the very first there had been an obstacle between them—Pauline's poverty. It could not be expected that such keen, thrifty peasants, as Champcey's father and mother, would ever allow one of their sons—they had two—to perpetrate so foolish an act as marrying for love.

They had toiled hard for their children's benefit ; Peter, the elder, was to be a lawyer ; while Daniel, the younger, who longed to go to sea, was studying day and night preparing for the examination he must pass before entering the service of the state. The old couple were not a little proud of these “gentlemen,” their sons ; and they told everybody they knew, that, in return for the education they were giving their boys, they expected them to marry large fortunes. Peter knew his parents so well, that he never mentioned Pauline to them. “When I am of age,”* he said

* In France, a young man cannot marry without his parents' consent until he is five-and-twenty, and even then he is obliged to signify his intentions by formal *sommaisons respectueuses*.—*Trans.*

to himself, "it will be a different matter." Ah! why had not Pauline's mother waited at least till then? Poor girl! on the day she entered the castle of Ville-Handry, she had sworn she would bury this love of hers so deep in the innermost recesses of her heart, that it should never resuscitate nor hinder her from performing her duty. And hitherto she had kept her word; but now it suddenly broke forth, more powerful than ever, till it well-nigh overcame her. What had become of the man she should have waited for? When he had heard that she was going to marry the count, he had written her a last letter, in which he overwhelmed her with irony and contempt. Had he since forgotten her? At all events, he also had married; and the two lovers, who had once hoped to walk hand-in-hand through life, were now each following a different road.

For long hours the young countess struggled in the solitude of her chamber against the ghosts of the past which crowded round her. But, if ever a guilty thought called a blush to her brow, she quickly conquered it. Like a brave, loyal woman, she renewed her oath, and swore to devote herself entirely to her husband. He had rescued her from abject poverty, and bestowed upon her his fortune and his name; and in requital she must make him happy. She needed all her courage, all her energy, to fulfil her vows; for two years of married life had shewn her the count as he really was—with a narrow mind, empty thoughts, and cold heart. She had long since discovered that the brilliant man of the world, whom everybody considered so clever, was in reality an absolute nullity, incapable of propounding any idea that was not suggested to him by others, and at the same time full of overweening self-esteem and absurd obstinacy. The worst was, however, that the count felt a growing repugnance for his wife. He had heard so many people say that she was not his equal, that he finally believed it himself; and besides, he blamed her for the prestige he had lost. An ordinary woman would have shrunk from the difficult task which Pauline saw lying before her, and would have contented herself with respecting her marriage-vows. But the countess was not an ordinary woman. She meant to do more than her duty. Fortunately, a cradle somewhat lightened her task. She had a daughter, her Henriette; and upon that darling curly head she built a thousand castles in the air. Shaking off the languor to which she had given way for nearly two years, she began to study the count with all the sagacity that hope of a high reward is apt to give.

A remark accidentally made by her husband shed a new light on her destiny. One morning, in the course of conversation after breakfast, he happened to say, "Ah! Nancy was very fond of you. The day before she died, when she knew she was going, she made me promise her that I would marry you." This Nancy was the count's former housekeeper; and after such a significant remark, the young countess clearly realised what position she had really held at the castle. She understood how, though keeping in the background, and exaggerating the humility of her position, she had been in truth the count's intellect, energy, and will. Her influence over him had, besides, been so powerful, that it had survived her, and she had been obeyed even when already gone. Although cruelly humiliated by this confession on her husband's part, the countess had sufficient self-control not to blame him for his weakness. "Well, be it so," she remarked to herself, "for his happiness and our peace, I will stoop to play the same part Nancy played."

This was more easily said than done; for the count was not the man to be led openly, nor was he willing to listen to good advice, simply because

it was good. Irritable, jealous, and despotic, like all weak men, he was ever resenting imaginary insults to his authority, declaring that he meant to be master everywhere, in everything, and forever. He was so sensitive on this point, that no sooner had his wife evinced the merest purpose of her own, than he at once opposed and prohibited it. "I am not a weather-cock!" was one of his favourite sayings. Poor fellow! he did not know that those that turn against the wind revolve quite as well as those that follow the breeze. But the countess was less ignorant, and her knowledge gave her strength. After toiling patiently and cautiously during several months, she fancied she had learnt the secret of managing him, and would henceforth be able to influence his will whenever she was in earnest.

An opportunity to make the experiment was soon offered. Although the nobility of the neighbourhood had generally altered in their behaviour towards the countess, and treated her with due courtesy, especially since she had become an heiress, she scarcely found Ville-Handry a pleasant place of sojourn, and was anxious to leave Anjou. The sites around recalled too many painful memories. There were lanes and paths she could never tread without a pang at her heart. On the other hand, it was well known that the count had sworn to end his days on his estate. He hated large cities; and the mere idea of leaving his castle, where everything was arranged to suit his habits, invariably raised his ire. Hence, when it was reported that he meant to leave Ville-Handry, and had purchased a mansion in Paris, intending to establish himself permanently in the capital, people set the rumour down as a joke, and obstinately refused to believe in it. And yet it was true; and, strange to say, although it was the countess who by her diplomacy had imparted this intention to M. de Ville-Handry, he really believed that he was acting against her desires. He was indeed delighted. "My wife," he said, "was altogether opposed to our going to Paris; but I am not a weather-cock. I insisted on having my way, and she had to yield at last." Thus, towards the close of 1851, the Count and Countess de Ville-Handry moved to a princely mansion in the aristocratic Rue de Varennes, which did not cost them more than a third of its real value, for, owing to the gloomy political situation, house property then found no purchasers in Paris.

It had been comparatively child's play to bring the count to the capital; the real difficulty was to keep him there. Deprived of the active exercise and the fresh air he had enjoyed in the country, without any of his usual occupations and duties, he might either give way to weariness or seek refuge in dissipation. His wife realised this danger, and determined to provide the count with suitable employment and amusement. Before leaving Anjou she had already sown in his mind the seed of a passion,—which, in a man of fifty, may acquire pre-eminence above all others—ambition,—and, in point of fact, he came to Paris with the secret desire and hope of winning political renown. The countess, who was well aware, however, of the dangers that beset a neophyte in the legislative arena, had determined to begin by examining the situation, so as to be able to guide her husband in the future. Her rank and fortune proved of great assistance to her in this enterprise. She managed to attract all the celebrities of the day to her receptions, and her Wednesdays and Saturdays soon became famous throughout Paris. People of admitted importance were flattered by an invitation to one of her grand dinners, or even to one of her smaller parties on Sundays. The mansion in the Rue de Varennes was considered neutral ground, where political intriguing and party strife

were alike tabooed. The countess spent a whole winter pursuing her investigations; and her guests, as they saw her seated modestly by the fireside, fancied that she was entirely occupied with her pretty little girl, Henriette, who was constantly with her. But, in point of fact, she was carefully listening to the conversation around her, and striving, with all her mental powers, to understand the great questions of the day. She studied the characters of the men of import who met in her *salons*; noted the passions that influenced several of them, and detected the trickery of others—taking especial care to distinguish those who might prove enemies, and those who might become allies, and whom it was therefore expedient to conciliate. Like certain imperfectly informed professors, who “read up” in the morning the subject they mean to treat in the afternoon, she carefully grounded herself for the lessons she meant soon to give, and, thanks to her superior intellect and feminine shrewdness, she had not to endure too long a period of probation. At the beginning of the following winter the count, who had so far kept aloof from politics, came out with his opinions. He soon made his mark, aided by his prepossessing appearance, elegant manners, and imperturbable self-possession. He spoke in public, and the common-sense of his remarks—so rare a quality in an orator—at once created a favourable impression. He advised others, and they were struck by his sagacity. He had soon numerous enthusiastic partisans, and, of course, as many violent adversaries. His friends encouraged him to become the leader of his party; and he worked day and night to achieve that end. “Unfortunately I have to pay for it at home,” he said to his intimate friends; “for my wife is one of those timid women who cannot understand that men are made for the excitement of public life. I should still be in the provinces if I had listened to her.”

She enjoyed her work in quiet delight. The greater her husband's success, the prouder she became of her own usefulness. Her feelings were akin to those of the dramatist who hears an audience applaud his production. But there was this wonderful feature in her work,—that nobody suspected her; no one, not even her own child. She concealed from Henriette the fact that she was the count's Mentor and Egeria, as jealously as she hid it from the world; and she not merely taught her to love him as her father, but to respect and admire him as a man of eminence. Of course, the count was the very last man to suspect such a thing. The countess's diplomacy might have been fully revealed to him, but he would have treated the whole matter as a joke. He fancied that he had himself discovered the whole line of proceeding which his wife had so carefully traced out for him. In the full sincerity of his heart, he believed he had composed the speeches she drew up for him; and the newspaper articles and letters she dictated appeared to him all to have sprung from his own fertile brain. He was even sometimes surprised at his wife's want of good sense, and pointed out to her, ironically, that the steps from which she tried hardest to dissuade him were the most successful he took. He did not know that the countess, well acquainted with his obstinacy, invariably pleaded in favour of a contrary course to that which she was desirous he should adopt. No irony could turn her from her design. She guarded her secret most carefully; and the more he gloried in his utter nullity, the more she delighted in her work, finding ample compensation for his sarcasm and contempt in the approval of her own conscience. The count had been generous (!) enough to marry her when she was penniless: she owed him the historic name she bore and a large fortune; but, in return, she had

given him, and without his knowledge, a position of some eminence. She had made him happy in the only way in which a man of inferior abilities can be made happy,—by gratifying his vanity. Thus she was no longer under any obligation to him, for, as she said to herself, “we are quits, fairly quits!”

She reproached herself no longer for allowing her thoughts to turn at times to the man of her early choice. Poor fellow! She had been his evil star. His existence had been embittered from the day he was forsaken by the woman he loved better than life itself. His parents had “hunted up” an heiress, and he had dutifully married her. But the good old people had been unlucky. The bride, chosen among a thousand, had brought their son a fortune of half-a-million francs; but she proved a bad woman, and after eight years of intolerable matrimonial bondage, Peter Champcey had shot himself, unable to endure any longer his domestic misfortunes, and his wife’s disgraceful infidelity. He had, however, avoided committing this crime at Angers, where he held a high official position. He had gone to Rosiers, where Pauline’s mother had lived in poverty; and there, in a narrow lane, nigh the Ruperts’ former abode, his body was found by some peasants coming home from market, his features being so fearfully disfigured that at first no one recognised him. The affair created a terrible sensation. The countess first heard of it through her husband. He could not understand, he said, how a man in a good position, with a large income at hand and a bright future before him, could destroy himself in this fashion. “And to chose such a strange place for his suicide!” he added. “It is evident the man was mad.” But the countess did not hear this last remark. She had fainted. She understood only too well why Peter had wished to die in that sequestered lane, beneath the shadow of the old elm trees. “I killed him,” she thought, “I killed him!” The blow was so sudden and so severe, that she could scarcely bear it. However, her mother died nearly at the same time, and this misfortune helped to explain her utter prostration and grief. Mme. de Rupert had been gradually failing, ever since obtaining the object of her desires. She lived in real luxury during her last years, and her selfishness was so intense that she never realised the cruelty she had exercised in sacrificing her daughter. For Pauline had been truly sacrificed, and never did woman suffer as acutely as she did from the day her lover’s suicide added bitter remorse to all her former grief. What would have become of her if her child had not bound her to life? For she resolved to live: feeling that she must do so for Henriette’s sake.

Thus she struggled on alone, for she had not a soul in whom she could confide; when one afternoon, as she was going down-stairs, a servant approached and told her that a young man in naval uniform wished to have the honour of speaking with her. The servant handed her the visitor’s card, on which she read the name “DANIEL CHAMPCEY.” It was Peter’s brother. Pale as death, the countess turned as if to escape. “What answer does Madame wish me to give?” asked the servant, rather surprised at the emotion his mistress shewed. Mme. de Ville-Handry was faint and dizzy. “Show him up,” she replied in a scarcely audible voice, —“show him up.” When she raised her eyes again, a young man, of three or four-and-twenty, with a frank open face, and clear, bright eyes beaming with intelligence and energy, stood before her. The countess pointed to a chair near her: she was quite unable to speak. The young fellow could not help noticing her embarrassment; but he did not guess its cause, for

Peter had never mentioned Pauline's name in his father's house. So he sat down, and explained the object of his visit. After graduating at the Naval Academy, he had been appointed as a midshipman on board "*The Formidable*," with which vessel he still served. A younger man had recently been wrongly promoted over him: and he had asked for leave of absence to appeal to the Minister of Marine in Paris. He was sure of the justice of his claims; but he also knew that strong recommendations never spoil a good cause. In fact, he hoped that the Count de Ville-Handry, of whose kindness and great influence he had heard a great deal, would consent to endorse his appeal.

While listening, the countess had gradually recovered her calmness. "My husband will be happy to serve a countryman of his," she replied; "and he will tell you so himself, if you will wait for him and stay to dinner."

Daniel did stay. At the table he was seated next to Henriette, then fifteen years of age; and the countess, seeing these young people side by side, was suddenly struck with an idea which seemed to her nothing less than an inspiration from on high. Why might she not entrust her daughter's future happiness to the brother of the man who had loved her so dearly? In this way she might make some amends for her own conduct, and show some respect to his memory. "Yes," she said to herself that night before falling asleep, "it must be so. Daniel shall be Henriette's husband."

Thus it happened that, a fortnight afterwards, the Count de Ville-Handry pointed out Daniel to one of his intimate friends, and remarked, "That young Champey is a very remarkable young man: he has a great future before him. And one of these days, when he is a lieutenant, and a few years older, if it so happened that he liked Henriette, and asked me for my consent, I should not say No. The countess might think and say what she pleased: I should have to remind her that I am the master."

From that time forward Daniel became a constant visitor at the house in the Rue de Varennes. He had not only obtained ample satisfaction at headquarters, but, by the powerful influence of certain high personages, he had been temporarily assigned to office-duty at the Ministry of Marine, with the promise of a better position in active service hereafter. Thus Daniel and Henriette met frequently, and, to all appearances, began to love each other. "O God!" thought the countess, "why are they not a few years older?" For several months Mme. de Ville-Handry had been troubled by dismal presentiments. She felt she would not live long; and she trembled at the idea of leaving her child without any other protector than the count. If Henriette had at least known the truth, and, instead of admiring her father as a man of superior ability, had learned to mistrust his judgment! Over and over again the countess was on the point of revealing her secret, but excessive delicacy always kept her from doing so.

One night, on returning from a ball, she was suddenly seized with vertigo. She did not think much of it, but asked for a cup of tea. When it came, she was standing in her dressing-room before the fire-place, undoing her hair; but instead of taking it, she suddenly raised her hand to her throat, gave vent to a hoarse moan, and fell back. The servants raised her up, and in an instant the whole house was astir. Several physicians were sent for, but all in vain. The Countess de Ville-Handry had died from disease of the heart.

III.

HENRIETTE, roused by the voices on the landing, and the tramp on the staircase, and suspecting that some accident had happened, had rushed at once into her mother's room, where she heard the doctors utter the fatal sentence, "It is all over!" There were five or six of them in the room; and one of them, an elderly man whose eyes were swollen from sleeplessness, and who was utterly overcome with fatigue, had drawn the count into a corner, and, pressing his hand, was repeating over and over again, "Courage, my dear sir, courage!" M. de Ville-Handry's eyes were turned to the floor, and a cold perspiration had gathered on his pallid brow. He evidently did not understand the physician, for he continued to stammer incessantly,—“It is nothing, I hope. Did you not say it was nothing?” Some misfortunes come with such terrible overwhelming suddenness, that the mind, literally stunned, refuses to believe them, and doubts that they have taken place even when they have occurred before one's own eyes. How could any one imagine or understand that the countess, who but a moment previously was standing there apparently full of life and in perfect health, happy so far as the world knew, and beloved by everybody—how could one conceive that she had all at once ceased to exist? They had laid her on her bed in her ball dress—a robe of blue satin, richly trimmed with lace. The flowers were still in her hair; and the blow had come with such suddenness, that, even in death, she retained the appearance of life: her corpse was still warm, her skin transparent, and her limbs supple. Even her eyes, still wide open, retained their expression, and betrayed the last sensation that had filled her heart and mind—a feeling of terror. Maybe that at that last moment she had had a revelation of the future which her excessive cautiousness had prepared for her daughter.

“Mamma is not dead; oh, no! she cannot be dead!” exclaimed Henriette. And she went from one doctor to the other, urging them, beseeching them, to find some means—. What were they doing there, looking blankly at each other, instead of acting? Were they not going to revive her,—they whose business it was to cure people, and who surely had saved numbers of patients? The men of science turned aside, distressed by her terrible grief, and expressing their inability to help by a gesture; and then the poor girl returned to the bed, and, bending over her mother's corpse, watched with a painfully-bewildered air for her return to life. It seemed to Henriette as if she felt that noble heart still beating under her hand, and as if those lips, sealed forever by death, would speak again to reassure her. The doctors and the maids attempted to take her away from the heart-rending scene: they begged her to go to her room; but she insisted upon remaining. They tried to remove her by force; but she clung to the bed, and vowed they should tear her to pieces sooner than make her leave her mother. At last, however, the truth broke upon her mind. She fell upon her knees by the bedside, hiding her face in the hangings, and repeating amid her sobs, “Mamma, darling mamma!”

It was nearly morning, and the pale dawn was stealing into the room, when at last several sisters of charity who had been sent for arrived, soon followed by a couple of priests. A little later, one of the count's friends put in an

appearance, and undertook to superintend all those sickening preparations which christian civilization (!) requires in such cases. On the next day the funeral took place. More than three hundred persons called to condole with the count, or left their cards, and fully thirty ladies came and kissed Henriette, calling her their poor dear child. Then the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard in the courtyard, there was a sound of coachmen quarrelling; orders were given; and at last the hearse rolled solemnly away—and that was everything.

Henriette wept and prayed in her own room.* Late in the day the count and his daughter sat down at table alone for the first time in their lives; but they did not eat a morsel. How could they do so, in presence of the empty seat, once occupied by her who was the life of the house, and now never to be filled again? During long weeks they wandered about the house without any definite purpose, but as if looking or hoping for something to happen. The countess was not merely mourned, however, by her husband and her daughter. Daniel had loved her like a mother; and a mysterious voice warned him that, in losing her, he had well-nigh lost Henriette as well. He had called several times at the house in the Rue de Varennes; but it was only a fortnight later that he was admitted. When Henriette saw him, she felt sorry she had not received him earlier, for he had apparently suffered as much as herself: his face was pale, and his eyes were red. They remained for some time without exchanging a word, feeling instinctively, however, that their common grief bound them more firmly than ever to each other. The count, in the meantime, walked up and down the drawing-room. He was so changed, that many would have failed to recognize him. There was a strange want of steadiness in his gait; he looked almost like a paralytic, whose crutches had suddenly given way. Was he really conscious of the immense loss he had sustained? Despite his sorrow this was scarcely probable, given his excessive vanity. "I shall master my grief as soon as I return to work," he said.

He ought to have abandoned politics forever, but he foolishly resumed his duties at a time when they had become unusually difficult, and when great things were expected of him. Two or three absurd, ridiculous, in fact, unpardonable blunders, ruined both his political prestige and influence. No one suspected the truth, however. Folks attributed the sudden failure of his faculties to the great sorrow his wife's death had caused him. "Who would have thought he loved her so dearly?" they asked one another. Henriette was as much misled as the others, and perhaps even more. Her respect and admiration, far from being diminished, increased every day. She loved him all the more dearly as she watched the apparent effects of his incurable sorrow. He was really deeply grieved, but only by his fall. How had it happened? He tortured his mind in vain: for he could not find a plausible explanation. "It is perfectly inexplicable," he would say; he was the victim of a plot, of a coalition, of mankind's fickleness and black ingratitude. At first he had serious thoughts of returning to Anjou. But with time his wounded

* It may here be remarked, for the benefit of the reader imperfectly acquainted with French manners and customs, that it is not usual in Parisian society for a wife to attend her husband's funeral, for a mother to attend her child's, or for a daughter to attend her mother's. Wife, mother, and daughter alike, are presumed to be so crushed by grief as to be physically incapable of attending. Excepting as regards the working-classes, and in some instances the lower *bourgeoisie*, the only women that attend Parisian funerals are distant relatives or friends.—*Trans.*

vanity began to heal: he forgot his misfortunes, and adopted new habits of life. He was a great deal at his club now, rode about on horseback, went to the theatre, and dined with his friends. At first Henriette was delighted; for her father's health had begun to give her serious concern. But she was not a little amazed when she saw him lay aside his mourning, and in lieu of wearing attire suited to his age, adopt the eccentric fashions of the day, donning brilliant waistcoats and trousers of fantastic patterns. A few days later matters grew worse. One morning the count, who was quite grey, made his appearance at breakfast with jet black beard and hair. Henriette could not restrain an expression of amazement; whereupon he remarked, with considerable embarrassment, "My valet is making an experiment: he thinks this is better suited to my complexion, and makes me look younger."

Something strange was evidently occurring in the count's life. But what was it? Henriette, although ignorant of the world, and innocence personified, was, nevertheless, a woman, and hence endowed with all the keen instinct of her sex, which is often of more value than experience. She reflected, and fancied she could guess what was happening. After three days' hesitation, she at last ventured to confide her troubles to Daniel. But she had only spoken a few words when he interrupted her, "Don't trouble yourself about that, Mlle. Henriette," said he, blushing deeply; "don't let your father's conduct worry you."

This advice was more easily given than followed; for the count's ways became more extraordinary every day. He had gradually drifted away from the friends of his married life, and to the high-bred society he had formerly frequented, he now seemed to prefer the company of people of questionable manners and breeding. Of a morning a number of young fellows on horseback would call at the mansion in the Rue de Varennes. They were clad in unceremonious costume, and came in smoking their cigars, making themselves quite at home, and freely imbibing absinthe and other liqueurs. In the afternoon, another set of men made their appearance—intensely vulgar individuals, with huge whiskers and enormous watch-chains, who gesticulated vehemently, and were on the best terms with the servants. The count closeted himself with these strange characters, and their discussions were so loud, they could be heard all over the house. What was all this noisy conversation about? The count undertook to enlighten his daughter. He told her, that, having abandoned politics, he intended to devote himself henceforth to financial and commercial enterprise, and hoped confidently to realise an enormous fortune, while, at the same time, rendering important services to certain branches of industry. A fortune? Was he in want of money? Why, with his own property, and his wife's fortune, he already possessed an income of half-a-million francs. Was that not enough for a man of sixty-five, and a young girl who did not spend a thousand a-year on her toilet? It was with the greatest timidity that Henriette, afraid of hurting her father's feelings, asked him why he wanted more money.

He laughed heartily, playfully tapped her cheek, and said, "Ah, you would like to rule your papa, would you?" And in a more serious tone he added, "Am I so old, my little lady, that I ought to subside into retirement? Have you, also, gone over to my enemies?"

"Oh, dear papa!"

"Well, my child, then you ought to know that a man like myself cannot condemn himself to inactivity without serious risk for his life. I don't

require any more money : what I need is an outlet for my energy and talents."

This was so sensible a reply, that both Henriette and Daniel were re-assured. The countess had taught both of them to look upon her husband as a man of genius : so that they were convinced he would succeed in any enterprise he embarked in. Besides, Daniel hoped that business matters would keep the count from playing the fashionable young man. But it seemed as if nothing could turn him from this folly : every day he endeavoured to give a yet more juvenile turn to his appearance. He dressed in the very latest fashion, and never left the house without a camellia or a rosebud in his buttonhole. He no longer contented himself with dyeing his hair, but actually began to rouge, and used such strong perfumes, that one might have followed his track through the streets by the scent he diffused around him. At times he would sit for hours in an arm-chair, with his brow knit, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and his thoughts apparently occupied with some grave problem. If he was spoken to on these occasions, he started like a criminal caught in the act. He had quite lost the magnificent appetite, in which, likening himself to the Grand Monarque, he had once taken a special pride ; and he constantly complained of oppression in the chest, and of palpitation of the heart. His daughter repeatedly found him with tears in his eyes—big tears, which, struggling through his dyed beard, fell like drops of ink on to his white shirt-front. Then, again, these fits of melancholy would be followed by sudden outbursts of joy. He would rub his hands till they pained him ; sing and almost dance with delight. Now and then a *commissionnaire* (it was always the same man) brought him a letter. The count invariably tore it from his hands, threw him a gold piece, and hurried into his study. "Poor papa !" said Henriette to Daniel. "There are moments when I tremble for his mind."

At last, one evening after dinner, when he had drunk more than usually, perhaps in order to fire himself with courage, he drew his daughter on to his knee, and said in his softest voice, "Confess, my dear child, that in your innermost heart you have more than once thought me a very bad father. I dare say you blame me for leaving you so constantly alone in this large house, where you must feel very weary by yourself."

There were good grounds for such a charge, for Henriette was left more completely to herself than if her father had been a clerk or a workman, whose avocations kept them perforce from home all day long. The clerk and the workman, at least, take their children out on Sundays. Nevertheless, she quietly replied, "I am never weary, papa."

"Really ? Why, how do you occupy yourself ?"

"Oh ! in the first place I attend to the housekeeping, and try my best to make home pleasant to you. Then I embroider, sew, and study. In the afternoon my music-teacher and my English master come. In the evening, I read."

The count smiled, but it was a forced smile. "Never mind !" he broke in, "such a lonely life cannot last. A girl of your age stands in need of some one to advise and pet her—an affectionate and devoted friend. This is why I have been thinking of giving you another mamma."

Henriette drew away the arm which she had wound round her father's neck ; and, rising suddenly to her feet, exclaimed, "You think of marrying again ?"

He turned his head aside, hesitated for a little, and then replied, "Yes." At first the poor girl could not utter a word ; her stupor, indignation, and

bitter grief were so intense. But making an effort, she at last rejoined in a tremulous voice, "Oh, papa, I cannot believe you—what! you mean to bring another wife to this house where everything reminds us of our loss? You want another woman to sit in mamma's chair, and rest her feet on the cushion she embroidered? Perhaps you would even want me to call her 'mamma' as well? Oh, dear papa! surely you can't think of such profanation!"

The count's embarrassment was pitiful in the extreme; and yet, if Henriette had been less excited, she would have read in his eyes that his mind was made up. "What I mean to do will be done in your interest, my dear child," he stammered out at last. "I am old; I may die; we have no near relations: what would become of you without a friend?"

She blushed crimson; and timidly replied, "But, papa, there is M. Daniel Champcey."

"Well?" ejaculated the count, whose eyes shone with delight as he saw she was falling into the pit he had prepared for her.

"I thought—I had hoped—poor mamma had told me—in fact, since you allowed M. Daniel to come here," stammered the poor girl.

"You thought I intended to make him my son-in-law?" asked her father; and seeing she made no answer, he continued, "That was in fact one of your mother's ideas. She certainly had very odd notions, against which I had to use the whole strength of my firm will. A sailor is a sorry kind of husband, my dear child; a word from his minister may separate him from his wife for years." Henriette still remained silent. She began to realise the nature of the bargain her father proposed, and felt indignant. He, on his side, considered he had said enough for this occasion, so he left her with these words, "Consider, my child; for my part, I will also think over the matter."

"What should she do?" she asked herself, as soon as she was alone. After a moment's reflection she took a pen, and for the first time in her life wrote to Daniel:—"I must speak to you *instantly*. Pray come.—HENRIETTE." She gave the letter to a servant, ordering him to carry it at once to its address; and remained waiting in a state of feverish anxiety for Daniel to arrive.

Daniel Champcey rented three rooms in the neighbouring Rue de l'Université, his windows looking out on the garden of an adjoining mansion—a pleasure-ground replete with flowers, and where the birds carolled all day long. He spent nearly all the time that was not occupied by his official duties at home. A walk in company with his friend, Maxime de Brévan; a visit to one of the theatres whenever some new dramatic masterpiece was performed; and two or three calls a-week at the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion;—such were his sole and certainly very harmless amusements. "A genuine old maid, that sailor," quoth the doorkeeper of the house. The truth is, that, if Daniel's natural refinement had not kept him from contact with what Parisians call "pleasure," his ardent love for Henriette would have sufficed to prevent his falling into bad company. A pure, noble love, such as his, based upon perfect confidence in the girl to whom it is given, is quite sufficient to fill a life-time; for it lends an absorbing charm to the present, and tinges the horizon of the future with all the radiant hues of the rainbow. But the more he loved Henriette, the more he felt it his duty to make himself worthy of her, and deserve her affection. He was not ambitious. He had chosen a profession which he loved. He had considerable means of his own; and his private

income and pay as an officer quite secured him against want. For himself he needed nothing more. But Henriette belonged to an ancient family; her father had held a high position, and was immensely wealthy. Even if she only brought Daniel her own private fortune, this dowry would be ten times as considerable as his own capital. The young officer realised his disadvantage. He did not wish his wife to stoop to him, and hence he toiled incessantly, waking up each morning with the renewed determination to make for himself one of those names that outweigh the most ancient parchments, and to win one of those positions which cause a wife to be as proud as she is fond of her husband. Fortunately, the times were favourable to his ambition. The French fleet was in course of transformation; but the service itself was as yet unreformed, waiting, apparently, for the hand of a man of genius. And why might not he be that man? Supported by his love, he saw nothing impossible in the idea, and fancied he could overcome all obstacles. He was certainly already giving brilliant promise of great things. "Do you see that d—— little fellow there, with his quiet ways?" said Admiral Penhoel one day to his young officers. "Well, look at him: he'll checkmate you all."

When the count's servant arrived with Henriette's letter, Daniel was seated in his little study, busy finishing a paper for the minister. He realised that something extraordinary must have happened for Henriette, who was usually so reserved, to write to him, and especially in such brief but urgent terms. "Has anything happened at the count's?" he asked the servant.

"No, sir, not that I know."

"The count is not ill?"

"No, sir."

"And Mlle. Henriette?"

"My mistress is quite well."

Daniel breathed more freely. "Tell Mlle. Henriette I will come at once; and make haste, or I shall arrive before you."

Having dressed as soon as the servant left, Daniel walked rapidly towards the Rue de Varennes. "I have, no doubt, alarmed myself unnecessarily," he thought, as he approached the house. "Perhaps she has only some commission for me." But he was still beset with dark presentiments, and realised, as soon as he entered the drawing-room, that his first impression had been correct; for Henriette was seated by the fire, with pale cheeks and lips, and swollen eyes. "What is the matter?" he exclaimed, scarcely waiting for the door to be closed behind him. "What has happened?"

"Something terrible, M. Daniel."

"Tell me, pray, what? You frighten me."

"My father is going to marry again."

At first Daniel was amazed; then recalling the count's attempts at rejuvenescence, he exclaimed, "Oh, oh! that explains everything."

But Henriette interrupted him; and, in a half-stifled voice, proceeded to repeat, almost word for word, the conversation she had had with her father.

"You have guessed right, Mlle.," said Daniel, when she had finished. "Your father evidently meant to propose a bargain to you."

"Ah, how horrible!"

"He wished you to understand, that, if you would consent to his marriage, he would consent—" Shocked at what he was going to add, he paused abruptly.

But Henriette boldly finished the phrase,—“To ours, you mean,” cried she—“to ours? Yes, so I understood it; and that was why I sent for you to advise me.”

Poor fellow? She asked him to seal his own fate. “I think you ought to consent,” he stammered.

Trembling with indignation, she rose and replied, “Never, never!”

Daniel was overcome by this sudden shock. Never! He saw all his hopes shattered, his life's happiness destroyed, Henriette lost to him for ever. But the very imminence of the danger restored his energy. Mastering his grief, he rejoined, with counterfeit calmness, “I beseech you to let me explain why I gave you this advice. Believe me, your father does not require your consent at all. You cannot act without his approval; but he can marry without asking you for yours. No law authorises children to oppose their parents' follies. What your father wishes is your tacit approval; the certainty that his new wife will be kindly received. If you refuse, he will, nevertheless, pursue his course despite all your objections.”

“Oh!”

“I am, unfortunately, only too sure of that. If he spoke to you of his plans, you may be sure he had made up his mind. Your resistance will only lead to our separation. *He* might possibly forgive you; but *she*—Don't you think she would avail herself of her influence over him,—and might not her hatred have terrible consequences? She must be a dangerous woman, Henriette,—a woman capable of anything.”

“Why?”

He hesitated for a moment, scarcely daring to express his thoughts; but at last he replied slowly, weighing every word, “Because—because this marriage can, on her side, only be a speculation. Your father is immensely wealthy; she covets his fortune.”

Daniel's reasoning was so plausible, and he pleaded his cause with such eagerness, that Henriette's resolution was evidently shaken. “You want me to yield?” she asked.

“I beseech you to do so.”

She shook her head sadly, and rejoined in a tone of utter dejection, “Very well. It shall be as you desire. I will not oppose this profanation. But you may be sure my weakness will have no good result.” Then offering her hand to Daniel, she added, “I will see you again to-morrow evening. By that time I shall know the name of the woman my father is going to marry; for I shall ask him who she is, and will tell you.”

She was spared the trouble of attacking the subject, for on the following morning the count's first words were, “Well, have you thought it over?”

She looked at him till he was constrained to glance aside; and then in a tone of resignation she replied, “Father, you are master here. I should not speak the truth if I said, the idea of a stranger coming here did not make me suffer cruelly. But I will receive her with all due respect.”

Ah! the count was scarcely prepared for so speedy a consent. “Do not speak of respect,” he said. “Tell me that you will be tender, affectionate, and kind! Ah! if you knew her, Henriette! She is an angel.”

“How old is she?”

“Twenty-five.” The count read in his daughter's eyes that she thought his new wife much too young for him; and therefore swiftly added, “Your mother was two years younger when I married her.” This was true; but he forgot that he himself was twenty years younger at the time.

"However," he continued, "you will see her : I shall ask her to let me present you to her. She is a foreigner, of excellent family, very rich, marvellously clever and beautiful ; and her name is Sarah Brandon."

That evening, when Henriette told Daniel her future step-mother's name, he started with an air of despair, and exclaimed, "Good heavens ! if Maxime de Brévan is not mistaken, that is worse than anything we could possibly anticipate."

IV.

WHEN Henriette saw how the young officer was overcome by the mere mention of that name, Sarah Brandon, she felt the blood freeze in her veins. She knew perfectly well that a man like Daniel was not likely to be so overwhelmed without good cause. "Do you know the woman, Daniel ?" she asked. Regretting his want of self-possession, he was already thinking how he could remedy his imprudence. "I swear to you," he began.

"Oh, don't swear ! I see you know who she is."

"I know nothing about her."

"But—"

"It is true I heard her spoken of once, a long time ago."

"By whom ?"

"By one of my friends, Maxime de Brévan, a fine, noble fellow."

"What sort of woman is she ?"

"Ah, me ! I can't tell you. Maxime happened to mention her in a casual way ; and I never thought I should hear of her again. If I seemed so greatly surprised just now, it was because I remembered, all of a sudden, an ugly story in which Maxime said she had been involved, and then—" Daniel was no expert in the art of telling fibs ; so, when he found that he was talking nonsense, he turned his head away to avoid Henriette's eyes.

"Do you really think I am not strong enough to hear the truth ?" said she, interrupting him in a reproachful voice.

At first he did not reply. Overcome by the strange position in which he found himself, he sought for a means of escape, and found none. At last he said, "You must give me time before I tell you any more. I know nothing positive ; and I dare say I am unnecessarily alarmed. I will tell you everything as soon as I am better informed."

"When will that be ?"

"This evening, if I can find Maxime de Brévan at home, as I hope to do : if I miss him, you must wait till to-morrow."

"And if your suspicions prove correct ; if what you fear, and now conceal from me, is a fact,—what must I do then ?"

Without a moment's hesitation he answered solemnly, "I am not going to tell you again how I love you, Henriette ; I am not going to tell you that to lose you would be death to me, and that in our family we do not value life very highly : you know that, don't you ? But, in spite of all that, if my fears should be well founded, as I apprehend they are, I should not hesitate to say to you, whatever might be the consequences, Henriette, and even if we had to part forever, that we must try our utmost, indeed employ all possible means in our power, to prevent your father from marrying Sarah Brandon."

In spite of her sufferings, Henriette's heart leapt with unspeakable happiness and joy. Ah ! he deserved to be loved,—this man whom her

heart had freely chosen,—this man who gave her such an overwhelming proof of his devotion. She offered him her hand; and, with her eyes beaming with enthusiasm and tenderness, she said, “And I,—I swear by the sacred memory of my mother, that whatever may happen, and whatever force may be employed, I will never belong to any one but you.”

Daniel had seized her hand, and held it for some time pressed to his lips. Then, as rapture gave way to calmer thoughts, he said, “I must leave you at once, Henriette, if I want to catch Maxime.”

His head was in a whirl, his thoughts in a maze, as he left the house. His life and his happiness were at stake; and a single word would decide his fate despite himself.

Hailing a passing cab, he sprung quickly inside, shouting to the driver, —“Quick, my good fellow, take me to No. 61 Rue Laflitte, and you shall have 5 francs.”

This was Maxime de Brévan’s address. Daniel’s friend was a tall, light-haired, full-bearded man of thirty or thirty-five, with a bright eye and pleasing face. Associating on intimate terms with the members of what is called “Parisian high life”—*viveurs*, whose only occupation is pleasure-seeking, he was very popular among them all. They said he was a man who could always be relied upon, always ready to render a service when it was in his power, a pleasant companion, and an excellent second whenever one had to fight a duel. He enjoyed an unblemished reputation. And yet, far from following the advice of the philosopher, who bids us screen our life from public gaze, Maxime de Brévan seemed desirous of letting everybody into his secrets. He was so anxious to tell everyone where he had been, and what he had been doing, that one might have imagined he was always preparing an *alibi*. Thus he told the whole world that the Brévans came originally from the province of Maine, and that he was the last, the sole representative, of that old family. Not that he prided himself particularly on his ancestors; he acknowledged frankly that there was very little left of their ancient splendour; in fact, nothing but a bare competence. He never stated, however, what this “competence” amounted to, and his most intimate friends could not tell whether he had an income of one or ten thousand francs a-year. This much was certain, that, to his great honour and glory, he had solved the problem of retaining his independence and dignity while associating—a comparatively poor man—with the wealthiest of the gilded youth of Paris. His rooms were simple and unpretentious; he kept but a single servant; his carriage was hired by the month. Maxime de Brévan and Daniel had become friends in the simplest possible way. They had been introduced to each other at a ball by a common friend, a lieutenant in the navy. They had left the entertainment together with the view of walking home in company, and as it was a fine, mild, moonlight night, they loitered awhile on the Place de la Concorde smoking their cigars. Had Maxime really felt much sympathy for the young officer? Perhaps so. At all events, Daniel had been irresistibly attracted by Maxime’s peculiar ways, and especially by the cool stoicism with which he spoke of his genteel poverty. They had met several times again, and finally had become intimate.

Brévan was just dressing for the opera when Daniel entered his room. As was his wont, he uttered a cry of delight on perceiving his friend. “What!” said he, “the hermit student from the other side of the river in this worldly region, and at this hour? What good wind blows you over here?” Then, suddenly noticing Daniel’s terrified appearance,

he added,—“But what am I talking about? You look frightened out of your wits. What's the matter?”

“A great misfortune, I fear,” replied Daniel.

“How so? What is it?”

“And I want you to help me.”

“Don't you know that I am at your service?”

Daniel certainly thought so. “I thank you in advance, my dear Maxime,” said he; “but I don't wish to give you too much trouble. I have a long story to tell, and you are just going out—”

“Oh, I was only going out for want of something better to do,” interrupted Brévan with a shake of the head. “So sit down, and tell me everything.”

The news that Henriette had imparted to him, and the fear of losing her for ever, had so unnerved Daniel that he had hastened to his friend without reflecting what he ought to tell him. Now that the moment to speak was at hand he remained silent. The thought had just occurred to him, that the Count de Ville-Handry's secret was not his own, and that he ought if possible to avoid betraying it, even though he might rely upon his friend's discretion. Instead of replying, he therefore paced the room in an agonised state of mind, seeking for some plausible excuse to ask the question he had on his tongue. His irresolution lasted so long that Maxime, who had lately heard of several cases of brain disease, asked himself if Daniel could possibly have lost his mind. No; for suddenly the young officer stopped in front of his friend and exclaimed, in a short, sharp tone,—“First of all, Maxime, swear that you will never, under any circumstances, repeat to any human being a word of what I am going to tell you.”

Thoroughly mystified, Brévan raised his hand, “I pledge my word of honour,” he replied.

This promise seemed to reassure Daniel, who, when he thought he had regained sufficient self-possession, continued,—“A few months ago, my dear friend, I heard you telling somebody a horrible story concerning a certain Mme. Sarah Brandon—”

“Mademoiselle, not Madame, if you please.”

“Well, it does not matter. You know her?”

“Certainly. Everybody knows her.”

Daniel did not notice the extreme self-conceit with which these words were uttered. “All right then,” said he. “Now, Maxime, I conjure you, by our friendship, tell me frankly what you think of her. What kind of a woman is this Sarah Brandon?”

The expression of his features, as well as his voice, evinced such extreme excitement, that Brévan was perfectly amazed. “But, my dear fellow, you ask me in a manner—”

“I must know the truth, I tell you. It is of the utmost importance to me.”

Struck by a sudden thought, Brévan clapped his hand to his forehead, and exclaimed,—“Oh, I see! You are in love with Sarah!”

Daniel would never have thought of such a subterfuge in order to avoid mentioning the Count de Ville-Handry's name, but, as it was thus offered to him, he determined to profit by the opportunity. “Well, yes, suppose it is so,” he said, with a sigh.

Maxime raised his hands to heaven, and in a tone of painful conviction rejoined, “In that case you are right. You ought to make enquiries; for you may be close upon a terrible misfortune.”

"Ah, is she really so formidable?"

Maxime shrugged his shoulders as if he considered it ridiculous that he should be called upon to enunciate a well-known fact, and remarked, "I should think so."

There seemed to be no reason why Daniel should persist in his questions after that. These words ought to have proved sufficient. Nevertheless he continued in a subdued voice, "Pray explain yourself, Maxime! Don't you know, that, as I lead a very quiet life, I know nothing?"

Brévan assumed a more serious look than hitherto, and rising and leaning against the mantelpiece, replied, "What do you wish me to tell you? It is only fools who bid lovers beware; and to warn a man who refuses to be warned, is useless. Are you really in love with Sarah, or are you not? If you are, nothing that I could say would change your mind. Suppose I were to tell you that she is an abominable creature, an infamous forger, who has already on her conscience the death of three poor devils, who loved her just as you do? Suppose I told you worse things than these, and could prove them? Do you know what would happen? You would press my hand with effusion. You would overwhelm me with thanks, with tears in your eyes. You would vow, in the candor of your heart, that you are forever cured; and, when you left me—"

"Well?"

"You would rush to your beloved, tell her all I had said, and beseech her to clear herself of these charges."

"I beg your pardon: I am not one of those men who—"

But Brévan was growing more and more excited. "Nonsense!" said he, interrupting his friend. "You are a man like all other men. Passion does not reason, nor calculate; and that is the secret of its strength. As long as we have a spark of common-sense left we are not really in love. That is a fact, I tell you; and no will, no amount of energy, can alter it. There are people who tell you ~~truly~~ ^{truly} that they have been in love without losing their senses, and who reproach you for not keeping cool. But that's all bosh! And now, my dear fellow, have the kindness to accept this cigar, and let us take a walk."

Was it really as Brévan said? Was it true that real love robs us of the faculty of reasoning, and of distinguishing truth from falsehood? Did he not love Henriette truly, because he was on the point of giving her up for the sake of duty?

No, that could not be. Brévan had been speaking of another kind of love,—a love neither pure nor chaste. He spoke of those passions which confound our senses and mislead our judgment, which are as destructive as fire, and leave nothing behind but disaster, disgrace, and remorse.

But all the more painful did Daniel's thoughts become when he remembered that the Count de Ville-Handry was seized with one of these terrible passions for a worthless creature. He could not accept Maxime's offer.

"One word, I pray you," he said. "Suppose I lose my free will, and surrender absolutely: what will become of me?"

Brévan looked at him with an air of pity, and replied,

"Not much will happen to you; only—" He paused, and then with mingled sternness and sarcasm he asked,

"You ask me to predict your fate, eh? Well, let it be so. Have you a large fortune?"

"A few hundred thousand francs."

"Well, in six months they will be gone; in a year you will be overwhelmed with debt, and at your wits' end; in less than a year and a-half you will become a forger."

"Maxime!"

"Ah! You ask me to tell you the truth. Then, as to your naval position. It is now excellent: you have been promoted as rapidly as merit could claim, at least so everybody says. You might be an admiral one of these days. But in six months you will be nothing at all; you will have resigned your commission, or you will have been dismissed."

"Allow me—"

"No. You are an honest man, the most honourable man I know; but after six months' acquaintance with Sarah Brandon, you will have lost your self respect so completely, that you will have become a drunkard. There's your portrait. 'It's not a flattering one,' you will say. But you wanted to have it. And now let us go."

This time he was determined; and Daniel realised that he would not obtain another word from him, unless he changed his tactics. Accordingly, just as Brévan opened the door, he said,—

"Maxime, you must forgive me for a very innocent deception, which was suggested by your own words. It is not I who am in love with Miss Brandon."

"Who is it, then?" asked Brévan in amazement.

"One of my friends."

"What name?"

"I wish you would render the service I owe you doubly valuable by not asking me that question,—at least, not to-day."

Daniel spoke with such an accent of sincerity, that not a shadow of doubt remained on Maxime's mind. It was not Daniel who had fallen in love with Sarah Brandon, that was certain; still, Brévan could not conceal his trouble, and his disappointment even, as he exclaimed,

"Well done, Daniel! Don't tell me that you ingenuous people can't deceive anybody!"

However, he said nothing more about it; and, while Daniel was repeating his apologies, he quietly returned to the fireside and sat down. After a moment's silence he began again,

"Let us assume, then, that it is one of your friends who is bewitched?"

"Yes."

"And the matter is—serious?"

"Alas! He talks of marrying the woman."

Maxime shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said,

"As to that, console yourself. Sarah would never consent."

"But she herself has made the suggestion."

This time Maxime started and looked stupefied.

"Then your friend must be very rich."

"He is immensely rich."

"He bears a great name, and holds a high position?"

"His name is one of the oldest and noblest in the province of Anjou."

"And he is a very old man?"

"He is sixty-five."

"Ah, she told me she would succeed," exclaimed Brévan, striking the marble slab of the mantelpiece with his fist; and with an indescribable accent of mingled admiration and hatred, he added in a lower tone, as if speaking to himself, "What a woman! Oh, what a woman!"

Daniel, who was himself greatly excited, and far too busy with his own

thoughts to observe what was going on, did not notice his friend's agitation. "Now you will understand my great curiosity?" he continued quietly. "In order to prevent the scandal of such a marriage, my friend's family would do anything in the world. But how can you attack a woman whose antecedents and mode of life are unknown?"

"Yes, I understand," said Brévan,—"I understand." The expression of his features shewed that he was making a great mental effort. He remained for some time absorbed in thought; but at last, as if coming to a decision, he resumed, "No, I don't see any way of preventing this marriage; none at all."

"Still, from what you told me—"

"What!"

"About this woman's cupidity?"

"Well?"

"If she were offered a large sum, four or five hundred thousand francs?"

Maxime laughed aloud. "You might offer a million francs," said he, "and she would laugh at you as I'm doing. Do you think she would be fool enough to content herself with part of a fortune, when she can have the whole, with a great name and a high position into the bargain?" Daniel opened his lips to present another suggestion; but Maxime, altogether laying aside his usual half-dreamy, mocking manner, continued, as if roused by a matter of great personal interest, "You do not understand me, my dear friend. Miss Brandon is not one of those vulgar hawks, who, in broad daylight, seize upon a poor pigeon, pluck it and cast it aside, bleeding, but still alive."

"Then, Maxime, she must be—"

"Well, I tell you you misunderstand her. Miss Brandon—" He paused, and, looking at Daniel much as a judge examines a criminal's features, he added in an almost threatening voice, "By telling you what little I know about her, Daniel, I give you the highest proof of confidence which one man can give to another. I esteem you too highly to exact a formal promise of discretion, but if you ever mention my name in connection with this affair, if you ever let any one suspect that you learned what I am going to tell you from me, you will dishonor yourself."

Daniel, who was deeply moved, seized his friend's hand, and pressing it affectionately, replied, "Ah! you know that Daniel Champcey is to be relied upon."

Maxime knew it; for he continued, "Miss Sarah Brandon is one of those cosmopolitan adventuresses, whom the railways now-a-days bring to Paris from the four quarters of the world. Like a great many others, she has come to our capital to spread her net, and catch her birds. However, she is more intelligent and ambitious than most of her kind; and she possesses a real genius for intrigue. She means to have a fortune, and is not at all scrupulous as to the means she may employ to win it; but she is also anxious to retain public respect. I should not be surprised if anyone told me she was born within ten miles of Paris; but she calls herself an American. She certainly speaks English perfectly, and knows a great deal more of America than you know of Paris. I have heard her relate her family history to a large and attentive audience; but I won't say I believed it. According to her own account, Mr Brandon, her father, a thoroughbred Yankee, was a man of great enterprise and energy, who during his lifetime made his fortune and lost it, at least ten times in succession. Fortunately for her he happened to be wealthy when he died—leaving behind him, in fact, several

million dollars. According to her account, he was a banker and broker in New York, at the epoch when the civil war broke out. He entered the army, and in less than six months, thanks to his marvellous energy, he was created a general. When peace returned, he was quite without occupation, and did not know what on earth to do with himself. Fortunately, his good star led him to a region where large tracts of land were for sale. He purchased them for a few thousand dollars, and soon afterwards discovered on his estate the most productive oil-wells in all America. He was on the point of becoming another Peabody when he lost his life in a fearful accident, being burnt to death in a fire that destroyed one of his establishments. As for her mother, Sarah says, she lost her when she was quite young, in a most romantic, though horrible manner."

"What!" interrupted Daniel, "has nobody taken the trouble to ascertain the truth of all these statements?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But I certainly have met Americans who were acquainted with a broker Brandon, a Gen. Brandon, a petroleum Brandon."

"She may have borrowed the name."

"Certainly, especially as the original man is said to have died in America. However, Miss Brandon has now been living for five years in Paris. She came here accompanied by a Mrs. Brian, a relative of hers, who is the driest, boniest person you can imagine, but at the same time the slyest woman I ever met. In addition she brought with her a kind of protector, an Englishman, who is also a relative of hers, probably on her mother's side. He is called Sir Thomas Elgin, and is altogether a most extraordinary character, as stiff as a poker, but evidently a dangerous man, never opening his mouth except to eat. He is a famous hand at small-swords, however, and at pistols he snuffs his candle nine times out of ten at a distance of thirty yards. This Elgin, whom people familiarly call "Sir Tom," and Mrs Brian, always reside with Miss Brandon. When they first arrived they took up their quarters near the Champs Elysées, in a house which they furnished most sumptuously. Sir Tom, who is a capital judge of horse-flesh, soon procured his ward a pair of grey horses, which created quite a sensation at the afternoon drive in the Bois,—attracting everyone's attention to the fair occupant of the carriage they drew. Heaven knows how Sarah had managed to get hold of letters of introduction. But two or three of the most influential members of the American colony here received her at their houses. After that, everything was easy enough. She gradually crept into society; and now she is welcomed almost everywhere, visiting not only the best people, but even certain families which have a reputation of being most exclusive. In fact, if she has enemies, she has fanatic partisans as well. Some folks may say she's an adventuress; but others—and by no means the least acute—assure you that she is an angel, only needing wings to fly away from this wicked world. They talk of her as a poor little orphan girl, whom people slander simply because they envy her youth, beauty, and wealth."

"Ah, so she's rich?"

"Miss Brandon spends at least a hundred thousand francs a-year."

"And no one inquires where they come from?"

"From her sainted father's petroleum-wells, my dear fellow. Petroleum explains everything." Brévan seemed to take a kind of savage delight in witnessing Daniel's despair, and in explaining to him how solidly and skilfully Sarah Brandon's position in the world had been established. Had he any desire to prevent a struggle with her by exaggerating her strength;

Or rather, knowing Daniel as he did, was he trying to goad him into a contest with this formidable adversary? At all events, he continued in that frigid tone which imparts additional bitterness to sarcasm, "Besides, my dear Daniel, if you are ever introduced to Miss Brandon, and I pray you will believe me, people are not so easily introduced to her,—you will at first be quite astonished by the prevailing tone of her household. The air is redolent with a perfume of hypocrisy which would delight the stiffest Quaker. Cant rules supreme there."

Daniel was evidently becoming utterly bewildered. "But how, how can you reconcile that," he asked, "with Miss Brandon's thoroughly worldly life?"

"Oh, very easily, my dear fellow! and this is an additional proof of her skill. To the outer world, Miss Brandon is all levity, indiscretion, coquettishness, and even worse. She drives her own phaeton. She declares she has a right to do as she pleases, out of doors, according to the code which governs American young ladies. But at home she bows to the tastes and wishes of her relative, Mrs. Brian, who displays all the prudishness of an austere Puritan. Then stiff Sir Tom is always at her side, and he never jokes. Oh! the three understand each other perfectly: the parts are carefully distributed, and—"

"There is no way, then, of getting at this woman?" asked Daniel, interrupting his friend.

"I think not."

"But that adventure which you spoke of some time ago?"

"Which one? The affair with poor Kergrist?"

"How do I know? It was a fearful story: that's all I remember. What did I, at that time, care for Miss Brandon? Now, to be sure—"

"Now, you think that story might become a weapon in your hands? No, Daniel. Still, it is not a very long one; and I can tell it to you now, in more detail than I could before. Some fifteen months ago, a nice young fellow, called Charles de Kergrist, arrived in Paris. He had as yet lost none of his illusions, being barely five-and-twenty, and having something like half a million of francs of his own, to do as he liked with. Directly he saw Miss Brandon, he 'took fire.' He fell desperately in love with her. What his relations were with her no one can positively say—I mean, with sufficient evidence to carry conviction to others,—for the young man was a model of discretion. But, some eight months afterwards, when Miss Brandon's neighbours opened their shutters one morning, they espied a corpse dangling, a few feet above the ground, from the iron fastenings of the young lady's window. Upon inspection, the dead man proved to be that unlucky fellow Kergrist. A letter was found in the pocket of his overcoat, in which he declared he committed suicide because an unrequited affection had made life unbearable. Now, this letter—mark the fact—was open; that is to say, it had been sealed, and the seal was broken."

"By whom?"

"Let me finish. As you may imagine, the affair caused a great sensation. Kergrist's family took the matter up; there was an enquiry, and it was discovered that the half million francs which Kergrist had brought to Paris with him had utterly disappeared."

"What! and Miss Brandon did not lose her reputation?"

"You know very well she didn't," replied Maxime, with an ironical smile. "On the contrary, her partisans profited by the occasion to praise

her virtue and chastity. 'If she had been weak,' they said, 'Kergrist wouldn't have hanged himself.' Besides, they added, 'how can a girl, be she ever so pure and innocent, prevent her lovers from hanging themselves at her window?' As for the money, they said, it must have been lost at some gaming-table. Kergrist was reported to have been seen at Baden-Baden and Homburg: and no doubt he played there."

"And society was content with such an explanation?"

"Yes: why not? To be sure, some sceptical persons told the story very differently. According to their account, Sarah had been Kergrist's mistress, and had sent him off about his business as soon as she had eased him of his coin. They declared that, on the evening before his death, he had called on her at the usual hour, and was refused admittance, whereupon he begged, and wept, and finally threatened to kill himself. Like a fool he really did so; and Miss Brandon, stationing herself behind the blinds, watched all his preparations, saw him fasten the rope to the outside hinges of her window, slip the noose round his neck, and swing himself off into eternity; watching him closely during his agony, and remaining there till the last convulsions were over."

"Horrible!" whispered Daniel,— "too horrible!"

But Maxime seized him by the arm, and, in a low, hoarse voice, continued,— "Ay, that is what some people said; and there is still worse to come. As soon as she saw that Kergrist was dead, she slipped down-stairs like a cat, stealthily opened the house-door, and, gliding along the wall till she reached the body, actually searched the still quivering corpse to make sure there was nothing in the pockets that could possibly compromise her. Finding Kergrist's last letter, she took it away with her, broke the seal, and read it; and, having ascertained that her name was not mentioned in it, she had the amazing audacity to return to the body, and to put the letter back into the pocket. Then she breathed freely. She had got rid of a man she feared. She went to bed, and slept soundly."

"The woman's a monster!" exclaimed Daniel, who had become livid.

Brévan made no rejoinder; his eyes were gleaming with intense hatred: his lips quivering with indignation. He no longer thought of discretion, or caution, but gave himself up entirely to his feelings. "I have not done yet, Daniel," he said, after a pause. "There is another crime on record, dating from Miss Brandon's first appearance in Parisian society. You ought to know about that as well. One evening, four years ago, the manager of the Mutual Discount Society came into the cashier's room to tell him that, on the following day, the board of directors would examine his books. The cashier, an unfortunate man named Malgat, replied that everything was ready; but, the moment the manager turned his back, he took a sheet of paper, and wrote something to this effect:—'Forgive me. I have been an honest man for forty years: but a fatal passion has driven me mad. I have abstracted from the bank money that was intrusted to my care; and in order to conceal my defalcations I have forged several entries. I cannot conceal my crime any longer. The first defalcation occurred only six months ago. The entire deficiency amounts to about four hundred thousand francs. I cannot survive my disgrace: in an hour I shall have ceased to live.' Malgat laid this letter in a prominent position on his desk, and then rushed out, without a sou in his pocket, to go and throw himself into the canal. But when he reached the margin, and saw the foul, black water, he grew frightened. For hours and hours he walked up and down, madly, asking God to give him courage. If he did not kill himself, what was he

to do? He could not fly, for he had no money. Where could he hide? He could not return to the bank; for, by this time, his crime must have become known there. In his distress he ran as far as the Champs Elysées, and late at night he knocked at the door of Miss Brandon's house. She and the others did not as yet know what had happened, so that he was admitted. Then, in his wild despair, he told them everything, begging them to give him merely a couple of hundreds out of the four hundred thousand francs he had stolen to give to Miss Brandon,—a hundred only, to enable him to escape to Belgium. They refused. And when he begged and prayed, falling on his knees to Sarah, Sir Tom seized him by the shoulders, and turned him out of the house."

Overcome by his intense excitement, Maxime at this moment fell into an easy-chair, where he remained some time, with fixed eyes and clouded brow, repenting, perhaps, of his frankness and forgetfulness of ties that bound him to others. However, when he rose again, his rare strength of will had enabled him to reassume his usual phlegmatic manner; and he continued in a mocking tone, "I see from your looks, Daniel, that you think the story monstrous, improbable, and almost impossible. Nevertheless, four years ago, it was believed in many parts of Paris, and embellished by a number of hideous details which I will spare you. If you care to refer to the papers of that year, you will find it related by them all. But four years are four centuries in Paris. To say nothing of the many similar occurrences that have happened since."

Daniel bowed his head sadly. He felt a kind of painful emotion, such as he had never before experienced in his life. "It is not so much the story itself that overcomes me," said he at last; "what I can't understand is, how this woman could have refused the beggarly pittance Malgat required in order to evade justice, and escape to Belgium."

"Nevertheless, it was so," repeated M. de Brévan; and he swiftly added, "at least, people say so."

Daniel did not notice this cautious correction, but pensively continued, "Supposing the thing were true, would not Miss Brandon have been afraid of exasperating the unfortunate cashier, and of driving him to some desperate resolution? In his rage he might have left the house, hurried to the office of a commissary of police, and confessed everything, laying all the evidence he possessed before a magistrate—"

"That is precisely what the fair American's advocates said at the time," interrupted Brévan with a sardonic laugh. "But I tell you, her peculiarity is exactly the daring manner in which she ventures upon the most dangerous steps. She does not pretend to avoid difficulties; she crushes them. Her prudence consists in carrying imprudence to its farthest limits."

"But—"

"Besides, you ought to credit her with sufficient astuteness and experience to know she had taken the most careful precautions, destroying all proof of her own complicity, and feeling quite safe in that direction. Moreover, she had studied Malgat's character, just as she studied Kergrist's. Consequently, she was quite sure that neither of them would accuse her, even at the moment of death. And yet, in the case of this Mutual Discount Society, her calculations did not prove absolutely correct."

"How so?"

"Well, it became known that she had received Malgat two or three times secretly, for he did not openly enter her house; and papers hinted that 'the fair foreigner was no stranger to small peculations.' Public

opinion was veering round, when it was reported she had been summoned to appear before a magistrate. This proved, however, a fortunate occurrence for her : for she came out of the investigation whiter and purer than Alpine snow."

"Oh !"

"And so perfectly cleared, that, when the whole matter was brought into court, she was not even summoned as a witness."

"What !" exclaimed Daniel, starting to his feet, "Malgat submitted to the agony of trial, and the infamy of condemnation, without allowing a word to escape ?"

"No. It was by default that he was sentenced to ten years' confinement."

"And what has become of the poor devil ?"

"Who knows ? They say he killed himself. Two months later a body, in an advanced state of decomposition, was found in the forest of Saint Germain, and people declared it was Malgat's." As he spoke, a cloud passed over Brévan's brow, and it was in a lower tone and with some hesitation that he continued, "Somebody who used to be intimate with Malgat has told me, however, that he met him one day, not long ago, in front of the great auction-mart, in the Rue Drouot. This man declares he recognised Malgat, although he was most artistically disguised, and for this reason I have thought more than once, that a day may yet come after all, when Miss Sarah will have a terrible account to settle with her implacable creditor." He passed his hand across his brow as if to drive away such a thought, and then, with a forced laugh, he added, "Now, my dear fellow, I have reached the end of my story. The particulars I have given you were all imparted to me by Miss Sarah's friends as well as by her enemies. Some of them may be found in the old newspapers, but I have learnt a great deal by my own long and patient observation. And, if you ask me what interest I could have in knowing such a woman, I would tell you frankly, my dear Daniel, that I also was once in love with her ! But I was too small a personage, and too poor a devil, for Miss Brandon to take any interest in me. As soon as she perceived that her abominable coquetry had set my head on fire, and that I had become an idiot, a madman, a fool—on that very day she laughed in my face. Ah ! I tell you, she played with me, at first, as if I had been a child, and then sent me off as if I had been a lackey. And now I hate her as intensely as I loved her ; so, if I can help you, in secret, without it becoming known, you may count upon me."

Why should Daniel have doubted the veracity of his friend's statements ? Had not Maxime voluntarily confessed his folly, his love for this adventuress, thus anticipating all questions, and making a clean breast of the whole matter ? Thus, far from calling any of his friend's assertions into question, Champey thanked providence for having sent him such an ally, such a friend, who had lived long enough in Parisian society to know all the scandalous intrigues broached under cover of apparent integrity. Taking Maxime by the hand, he exclaimed in a tone of deep feeling, "Now, my friend, we are bound to each other for life."

Brévan seemed greatly touched, and raised his hand as if to wipe a tear from his eyes. But he was not a man to give way to sentiment. "Well, how about your friend ?" he asked. "How can we prevent his marrying Sarah ? Does any plan occur to you ? No ? Ah ! you see, it will be hard work." For a few minutes he remained in apparent meditation ; then speaking slowly and with marked emphasis, as if to give additional weight to his words and impress them forcibly on Daniel's mind, he resumed,

"We must attack Miss Brandon herself if we wish to master the situation. If we could only find out who she really is, and where she really comes from, the game would be ours. Fortunately, skilful spies can easily be found in Paris, and work well, providing they are handsomely paid." As the clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past ten, he started and stopped. Then springing to his feet as if suddenly inspired by a bright idea, he hurriedly exclaimed, "But now I think of it, Daniel, you don't know Miss Brandon: you have never even seen her!"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, that's a pity. We must at least know our enemies if we are to contend against them. I want you to see Miss Sarah."

"But who can point her out to me? where? when?"

"I will do so to-night, at the opera. I can bet she will be there!"

Daniel had assumed evening dress before calling upon Henriette, so that there was nothing to prevent him from accepting his friend's proposal. A moment later they were both in the street, and reached the theatre just as the curtain rose on the fourth act of *Don Giovanni*. They were, fortunately, able to secure two stalls. The performance was splendid; but what did they care for the singers on the boards, or for Mozart's divine music. Brévan raised his opera-glass to his eyes, and, rapidly surveying the house, soon found what he was looking for. Nudging Daniel with his elbow, he whispered in his ear, "See, there, in the third box from the stage on the grand tier, look, there she is!"

V.

DANIEL looked up, and in the box which Maxime had indicated he perceived a young woman of such rare and dazzling beauty, that he could hardly restrain a cry of admiration. She was leaning forward, resting one arm on the velvet cushion of the box, listening attentively to the music. Her hair, which although wonderfully profuse, was so carelessly arranged that it was plain it was all her own, gleamed with the bright refulgency of refined gold. Long lashes shaded her large soft eyes, which changed from the deepest to the lightest blue whenever she raised the lids. Her lips smiled with all the freshness of early womanhood, revealing as they parted two rows of pearly teeth, matchless in their beauty and regularity. "Is it possible," murmured Daniel to himself; "can that be the wretched creature whom Maxime has described to me?" A little behind Miss Brandon, an angular bony face could be discerned, surmounted by an absurd bunch of feathers. This was the countenance of Mrs Brian, whose eyes perpetually flashed indignation, and whose thin lips, half parted, seemed always on the point of saying "Shocking!" Still farther back, in the shadow of the box and barely discernable after long examination, appeared a tall, stiff figure, a shiny bald head, two dark, deep-sunken eyes, a hooked nose, and a pair of immense streaming whiskers. Their owner was Sir Thomas Elgin, commonly known as "Sir Tom." As Daniel gazed at the smiling beauty in front, and the stern old woman and placid old man in the background, he felt doubts of all kinds creeping into his mind. Might not Maxime be mistaken? Hadn't he merely repeated the atrocious slanders of the envious world? The thought worried Daniel; and he would have mentioned his doubts to Maxime; but his neighbours were musical enthusiasts, and, as soon as he bent over to whisper into his friend's ear, they began to growl,

and, on his trying to speak, requested him to remain silent. At last the curtain fell. Several spectators left the house; others simply rose to look round them; but Maxime and Daniel retained their seats. They were giving their whole attention to Miss Brandon's box, when they suddenly perceived the door open to admit a gentleman who, at their distance off, looked like a very young man. His complexion was exceedingly brilliant, his beard jet black, and his curly hair most carefully arranged. He had his opera-hat under his arm, a camellia in his button-hole; and his straw-coloured kid gloves were so tight, that it looked as if they must inevitably burst the instant he used his hands. "The Count de Ville-Handry!" said Daniel to himself.

"Your old friend, eh!" exclaimed Maxime, bending over and touching the young officer's arm; "Miss Brandon's happy lover?"

"Yes, you're right, I must confess it," replied Champcey, who was on the point of explaining why he had not mentioned the count's name, when M. de Brévan spoke again,— "Just look, Daniel; just look!"

The count had taken a seat in the front part of the box, by Miss Brandon's side, and was talking to her with studied affectation, bending forward, gesticulating, and laughing till he showed every one of the long yellow teeth that were left him. He was evidently on exhibition, and desired to be seen by everyone. Suddenly, however, after Miss Brandon had said a few words to him, he rose and left the box. The stage bell was ringing, and the curtain was about to rise again, "Let us go," said Daniel to M. de Brévan: "I am suffering." The idea that Henriette's father should be seen in public conducting himself so ridiculously mortified him beyond description. And he no longer entertained any doubts concerning Miss Brandon's evil intentions; he had clearly marked how she spurred the old man on, and fanned his feeble flame.

The two friends had just left the theatre and were turning towards the boulevards, when they came face to face with a gentleman wearing a furred pelisse, behind whom walked a servant laden with an armfull of magnificent cut roses. The first comer was the Count de Ville-Handry, who, on suddenly finding Daniel before him, evinced considerable embarrassment. "What, is it you?" he asked, after a pause. "Where on earth do you come from?"

"From the opera."

"And you run away before the fifth act? That is a crime against the majesty of Mozart. Come, go back with me, and I promise you a pleasant surprise."

"Go," whispered Brévan in his friend's ear; "that's the very opportunity I was wishing for." And with these words he raised his hat and went his way.

Daniel, taken rather by surprise, thereupon accompanied the count, who, approaching the carriages which were waiting for the wealthier spectators at the opera, halted in front of a capacious landau—open, despite the cold weather, and guarded by a coachman and two footmen in gorgeous livery. On perceiving the count, they all three uncovered respectfully; but, without taking any notice of them, he turned to the porter carrying the flowers, and exclaimed, "Scatter those roses in this carriage." The man hesitated. He was the servant of a famous florist, and had often seen people pay ten and fifteen napoleons for a bouquet, but he considered this too much of a joke. However, as the count insisted, he at last did as he was bid, receiving a handsome fee for his trouble.

M. de Ville-Handry then returned to the opera-house, Daniel following him, filled with amazement. Love had evidently made the count forget his years, and lent renewed youth to his jaded limbs. He bounded up the steps of the grand staircase, and in a few seconds reached Miss Brandon's box. Taking Daniel by the hand, and, drawing him towards the American *belle*, he exclaimed, "Allow me to present to you M. Daniel Champey, one of our most distinguished naval officers."

Daniel bowed, first to Sarah, and then to Mrs Brian, and long, stiff Sir Tom.

"I need not tell you, my dear count," said Sarah, "that your friends are always welcome here." And turning to Daniel, she added, "Besides, I may say I have known you for some time already."

"Me, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Monsieur. And I even know that you are a most frequent visitor at Count de Ville-Handry's house." She looked at Daniel with an air of malicious simplicity, and continued, "I don't mean to say that your visits are entirely due to your friendship for the count. I have heard something of a certain young lady—"

"Sarah," interrupted Mrs Brian, "what you are saying is highly improper." This reproof, far from checking Miss Brandon's merriment, only seemed to increase it. Without losing sight of Daniel, she turned to her aunt, and replied, "Since the count is not opposed to this gentleman paying his attentions to his daughter, I think I may safely speak of them. It would be really too extraordinary if anything happened to interfere with his hopes!"

Daniel, who had blushed scarlet a moment before, suddenly turned deadly pale. After all he had been told, these words sounded to him, in spite of the laugh that accompanied them, like a warning and a threat. But he was not allowed time to reflect. The performance was coming to a close, and Miss Brandon was now drawing a fur cloak over her shoulders. She left the box on the count's arm; while Daniel escorted Mrs Brian, being closely followed by tall, stiff Sir Tom. The landau was at the door. The servants had let down the steps, and Miss Brandon prepared to get in; but as her foot touched the bottom of the carriage, she drew back, half frightened, and exclaimed, "What's that? What can be there?"

The count advanced, looking somewhat embarrassed. "You are fond of roses," he said, "and I have ventured to order a few." So saying, he took up some of the leaves and showed them to her.

"You certainly are bent upon making me angry," replied Miss Brandon, whose fright had almost turned to wrath. "You want everyone to say that I urge you to commit all kinds of follies. What a glorious thing for a millionaire to waste a dozen napoleons on flowers." Then, perceiving by the light of the street lamp that the count's face evinced deep disappointment, she added in a tone calculated to make him lose his little remaining reason, "Your attention would have been more welcome if you had brought me a sou's worth of violets."

In the meantime Mrs Brian had taken her seat by Miss Brandon's side; Sir Tom also had installed himself in the carriage; and it was now the count's turn. Just as one of the footmen was about to close the door, Sarah bent forward towards Daniel, and said, "I hope I shall have the pleasure of soon seeing you again. Our dear count will give you my address, and tell you my reception-days. I must tell you that we American girls dote upon naval officers, and that I—"

The remainder was lost in the noise of the rolling wheels, and the carriage was already some distance off before Daniel could recover from his amazement. All these strange events, occurring successively in the course of a few hours, and breaking suddenly upon so calm and quiet a life, had so unnerved him, that he was not quite sure whether he was awake or dreaming. Alas! he was not dreaming. This beautiful Miss Brandon, who had just driven away, was only too real; and there, on the muddy pavement, a handful of rose leaves testified to the power of her charms, and the folly of her aged lover. "Ah, we are lost!" exclaimed Daniel, in so loud a voice, that several passers-by stopped, expecting one of those street dramas which the halfpenny papers describe in such effusive style. They were disappointed, however. For, noticing that he attracted attention, Daniel shrugged his shoulders, and walked quickly off towards the boulevards. He had promised Henriette to tell her that very evening, if possible, what he had found out; but it was too late now, for midnight was striking. "I'll go to-morrow," he said to himself. Whilst strolling leisurely down the boulevards, still brilliantly illuminated and crowded with people, he endeavoured to examine the situation with all requisite calmness. He had at first imagined that he would merely have to contend against one of these common *intriguantes* who only wished to secure a competency for their old age, and clumsily spread their nets in hopes of catching a victim—lower-class adventuresses who may more or less easily be got rid of by the payment of a sum of money. Had Sarah Brandon been such a woman, he would still have had some hope; but no, she was a far more formidable character. He realised now that Maxime de Brévan had told him the truth. How could he hope to compete with such a woman? and with what weapons could he attack her? How could she be reached? Was it not pure folly to think even of making her abandon her designs on the magnificent fortune which she evidently looked upon as her own already, enjoying, as it were, its sweets in anticipation. "Oh, for an inspiration!" murmured Daniel, but none came; and he tortured his mind in vain.

On reaching home, he went to bed as usual; but the consciousness of his misfortunes prevented him from sleeping. Indeed, he did not close his eyes all night. Nevertheless, at 9 a.m. he was up and dressed, and about to go out, when some one knocked at his door. The visitor proved to be M. de Brévan, who came to enquire what had occurred after their separation on the previous night. "Well?" asked he.

"Ah!" replied Daniel, "I think the wisest plan would be to give it up."

"Upon my word, you are in a great hurry to surrender."

"And what would you do in my place, eh? That woman has beauty enough to drive anyone mad; and the count is a lost man." And before Maxime had time to make any rejoinder, Daniel told him simply and frankly all about his love for Henriette, the hopes he had been encouraged to cherish, and the dangers that threatened his happiness in life. "For I can no longer deceive myself, Maxime," he concluded, with a tone of utter despair; "I can foresee what will happen. Henriette will do everything in her power to prevent her father from marrying Miss Brandon: she will struggle on to the bitter end at any risk. Ought I to help her? Certainly I ought; but can we succeed? No! we shall only transform Miss Brandon into a mortal enemy, and on the morning after her wedding, her first thought will be how to avenge herself, and how to separate Henriette and myself forever."

Little as Brévan was generally given to sentiment, he was evidently deeply touched by his friend's despair. "In short, my dear fellow," he said, "you have reached the point at which one no longer knows what to do. All the more reason, then, for you to listen to a friend's advice. You must have yourself introduced at Miss Brandon's house."

"She invited me herself, last night."

"Well, then, don't hesitate, but go as soon as you can."

"What for?"

"Not for much. But just pay Miss Brandon some compliments, be all attention to Mrs Brian, and try to win over Sir Thomas Elgin. Finally, and above everything, be all ears and eyes."

"I am sorry to say I do not understand you yet."

"What? Cannot you realise that the position of these daring adventurers, however secure it appears, may, after all, hang on a single thread, and that nothing but an opportunity may be wanting to sever that thread. When anything and everything may happen at any moment, what can one do but wait and watch?"

Daniel did not seem convinced. "Miss Brandon will no doubt talk to me about her marriage," he rejoined.

"Certainly, she will."

"What can I say?"

"Nothing,—neither yes nor no,—but smile, or run away: at all events, gain time."

At this moment Maxime was interrupted by Daniel's servant, who, entering the room with a card in his hand, informed his master that there was a gentleman, in a carriage down-stairs, who wished to know if M. Champey could be seen. "What is his name?" asked Daniel.

"The Count de Ville-Handry. Here is his card."

"Quick!" rejoined Daniel; "ask him to kindly walk up."

M. de Brévan had started from his seat, and was standing, with his hat on, near the door. As the servant left, he said, "I'm off."

"Why?"

"Because the count must not find me here. You would be compelled to introduce me to him; he might remember my name; and, if he were to tell Sarah that I'm your friend, everything would be lost." Whereupon he turned to go; but at the same moment the outer door was opened, and he added, "There's the count! I'm caught."

But Daniel promptly opened his bedroom door, and pushed Maxime into his sleeping apartment. It was high time, for at the same moment the count entered.

VI.

M. DE VILLE-HANDRY must have risen early that day. Although it was not yet ten o'clock, he was already brilliant, rouged, dyed, and frizzed. A result which it had naturally taken some hours to achieve. As he entered, he drew a long breath, and exclaimed, "Ah! You live pretty high up, my dear Daniel." For the moment he forgot that he was playing the young man; but speedily correcting himself, he added vivaciously,— "Not that I complain of it; oh, dear, no! A few storeys to climb—what is that to me?" At the same time he stretched out his leg, and caressed his calf, as if to exhibit its vigour and suppleness, while Daniel, full of

respect for his future father-in-law, drew forward his easiest arm-chair. The count sat down, and seeking to hide such embarrassment, as he may have felt, by an apparent airiness of manner, continued,—“I am sure, my dear Daniel, you must be very surprised and puzzled to see me here; are you not?”

“I confess I am, sir. If you wished to speak to me, you had only to drop me a line, and I would have waited upon you at once.”

“I am sure you would! But it was not necessary, for, in fact, I have nothing to say to you. I shouldn't have come to see you if I hadn't missed an appointment. I was to meet one of my fellow-members of the Corps Législatif, but he did not come to the rendezvous. On my way home, I happened to pass your house, and said to myself, ‘Why not go up and see my sailor friend? I might ask him what he thinks of a certain young lady to whom he had the honour of being presented last night.’”

Now or never was the favourable moment for following Maxime's advice: hence Daniel, instead of replying, simply smiled as pleasantly as he could.

But this did not satisfy the count, who repeated his question more directly. “Come, tell us frankly, what do you think of Miss Brandon?”

“She is one of the greatest beauties I have ever seen in my life.”

The Count de Ville-Handry's eyes beamed with delighted pride as he heard these words. “Say she is *the* greatest beauty, the most marvellous beauty, you ever saw,” he exclaimed. “And that beauty of hers, M. Champcey, is her least attraction. When she opens her lips, the charms of her mind make one forget those of her person; and on learning to know her better, her beauty and attainments give precedence to her refreshing artlessness, her chastity and purity.” This excessive, all but idiotic, admiration, this implicit, absurd faith in his innamorata, imparted a strange, almost ecstatic expression to the count's painted face. “And to think,” he said to himself, but in a tone loud enough to be heard, “to think it was by pure chance that I ever met her!” On hearing this Daniel started involuntarily, whereat the count, seemingly disturbed, repeated his words with additional emphasis. “Yes, I met her by chance alone; and I can prove it to you.” Then settling in his chair like a man who intends to speak for some length of time, he continued in that emphatic style which so well indicated the high opinion he had of himself,—“You know, my friend, how deeply I was affected by the death of the Countess de Ville-Handry. It is true she was not exactly the companion a statesman of my rank should have chosen. Her intellect rarely rose beyond the effort to distinguish a ball-dress from a dinner-toilette. But she was a good woman, attentive, discreet, and devoted to me; an excellent manager, economical, and yet jealous of the high reputation of my house.” Thus, in all sincerity, did the count speak of the woman to whom he owed all his political eminence, and who, for sixteen long years, had endeavoured to instil some ideas into his empty head. “In short,” he pursued, “the death of my wife so completely upset me, that I lost all taste for the avocations which had so far been dear to me, and set about looking for occupation elsewhere. Soon after, when I got into the habit of going frequently to my club, I fell in with Sir Thomas Elgin; and although we never became intimate, we always exchanged a friendly greeting, and occasionally a cigar. Sir Tom, as they call him, is an excellent horseman, and used to ride every morning in the Bois. I had also been recommended to take similar exercise, and the result was that we frequently met in the Avenue des Poteaux. We

wished each other good morning, and at times we cantered for a while side by side. I am rather reserved; but Sir Tom is even more so; and it scarcely seemed as if our acquaintance would ripen into anything better, when an accident brought us together. One morning while we were returning from a ride, Sir Tom's mare, a vicious brute, suddenly shied, and with such effect that, despite his horsemanship, he was thrown. I alighted instantly, with the view of assisting him to remount, but he could not rise. As you know, it requires something serious to disable an Englishman. However, as we afterwards discovered, he had not merely sprained an ankle, but dislocated the knee of the same leg as well. There was no one at hand, and I was feeling seriously embarrassed, when two soldiers fortunately came up. One of them procured a cab, and we took Sir Tom home. He was suffering badly, and groaned a good deal. We had great difficulty in removing him from the vehicle, and getting him up-stairs. I was walking ahead, and had just reached the second floor, when a door suddenly opened, and a young girl appeared on the threshold. The noise on the stairs had startled her, and she had hastened out of her room, only partially dressed. A *fichu* was loosely thrown over her shoulders, and her hair streamed from under a coquettish morning cap. Scarcely had she perceived Sir Tom in the servants' arms, than—imagining no doubt that he was seriously wounded, or perhaps even worse—she turned as pale as death and fell forward. She would have been precipitated headforemost down the stairs, if I had not fortunately caught her in my arms. She had fainted, and for a moment I held her leaning on my shoulder, and feeling her heart beat—almost imperceptibly—against mine. Her cap had fallen, and her golden locks streamed around me, nearly touching the floor. All this scarcely lasted a minute; for, on recovering her senses, and finding herself in a man's arms, she looked extremely distressed, and slipped away into her room."

The count paused. The recollection of this incident so unnerved him, that his frame quivered, his voice faltered, and his cheeks turned pale under their thick coating of rouge. He did not attempt to conceal his emotion. "I am a poor old fellow," he continued; "and between you and I, Daniel, I may tell you that the fair sex have not,—well, not exactly—proved unkind to me. In fact, I fancied that love and passion had no more secrets for me. Well, I was mistaken, for never in my life had I experienced such a sensation as that which seized hold of me while Miss Brandon was reclining in my arms." So saying, M. de Ville-Handry produced a cambric handkerchief, saturated with opopanax, and wiped his forehead—doing so, of course, with infinite care, so as not to damage his valet's artistic work. "I trust," he continued, "that you will soon be better acquainted with Miss Brandon. After once seeing her, I was seized with a longing to see her again. Fortunately I had a convenient pretext for calling, and, in fact, the very next day I was at her door again, inquiring after Sir Thomas Elgin. I was shown into his room, and found him reclining on an invalid's chair, with his leg bandaged. Beside him sat an elderly lady, to whom I was introduced, and who was none other than Mrs Brian. They received me most politely, but not without some reserve; and although I staid longer than is ordinary under such circumstances, I did not see a sign of Miss Sarah. She was equally invisible on subsequent occasions, and I positively came to the conclusion that she purposely avoided me. However, one day, Sir Tom, who was rapidly improving, expressed a desire to take a short turn in the Champs Elysées.

I offered him my arm, which he accepted; and as we were returning, he asked me if I would be kind enough to take pot-luck with him."

However important this information might be for Daniel, he had for some time been lending an inattentive ear to the count's story, for he had fancied he heard a strange faint noise which he could not account for. At last on looking round he divined the cause. His bedroom door, which he had carefully closed after pushing M. de Brévan into the inner apartment, was now ajar. No doubt Maxime, tired of confinement and excited by curiosity, had opened it so as to listen to M. de Ville-Handry's narrative."

The count, however, was still quite ignorant of M. de Brévan's presence. "So," said he, "I was to see Miss Brandon again. Upon my word I was less excited on the day I made my first speech. However, as you are aware, I have some little power over myself; and I had already recovered my calmness, when Sir Tom confessed that he would have invited me long before, but for the fear of offending his young relative, who had declared she would never meet me again. I was grieved, and asked how I had offended her. Whereupon Sir Tom, with his usual composure, remarked, 'Oh, she doesn't blame you, but herself, on account of that ridiculous scene the other day.' Do you hear, Daniel, he called that adorable scene which I have just described to you, 'ridiculous!' It is only English and Americans who can perpetrate such absurdities. I have since found out that they had to insist with all their authority to induce Miss Brandon to receive me; but she had tact enough not to let me divine it when I was formally presented to her, just before dinner. No doubt, she blushed deeply; but we shook hands cordially enough, and to put me at my ease, she cut my first formal compliment short with the remark, 'You are Tom's friend, so I am sure we shall be friends as well.' Ah! Daniel! you admired Miss Brandon at the theatre; but you ought to see her at home. Elsewhere she sacrifices herself to the requirements of society, but at home she can venture to be herself. We soon became friends, as she had foretold; so soon, in fact, that I was quite surprised when I found her speaking to me like an old acquaintance. I soon discovered the reason of this. Our French girls, my dear Daniel, are charming, no doubt; but they are generally frivolous, badly informed, and care for nothing else but balls, novels, and fashion. But with American young ladies matters are different. They are so brought up that at an early date their minds occupy themselves with the same subjects that fill their parents' thoughts,—politics, parliamentary debates, industrial topics, scientific discoveries, and so on. A man like myself, known abroad and at home during a long political career of some distinction, could not be a stranger to Miss Brandon. My earnestness in defending causes which I considered just had often excited her enthusiasm; and moved by my speeches, which she was in the habit of reading, she had frequently thought of the speaker. I think I can hear her now exclaiming, with that crystal voice of hers, 'Oh, yes! I knew you, count; I knew you long ago. And many a day I wished I were a friend of yours, so that I might say to you, Well done, sir! your policy is grand and noble!' And it is evident she had done so, for she remembered a number of passages from my speeches, which I had forgotten myself, and quoted them almost literally. At times, I was amazed at some peculiarly bold thoughts she expressed; and, when I complimented her upon them, she broke out into loud laughter, exclaiming,—'Why, count, those are your own ideas: I got them from you. You said so and so on such and such an occasion.' And when, on returning home at night-time,

I looked into my papers to ascertain the truth, I almost always found that Miss Brandon had been right. Need I tell you after that, that I soon became a constant visitor at the house in the Rue du Cirque? But what I must tell you is, that I found there the most perfect and purest happiness I have ever known upon earth. I was filled with respect and admiration when I noted the rigid morality of the household, blended with the heartiest cheerfulness. I spent my happiest hours there between Mrs Brian, the Puritan lady,—so strict as regards herself, so indulgent for others; and Sir Thomas Elgin, the noblest and best of men, who under an appearance of icy coldness conceals the warmest and kindest of hearts."

What was the Count de Ville-Handry aiming at? or had he no aim at all? Was it his object merely to make Daniel the confidant of his amazing love romance? Or did he simply yield to the natural desire of all lovers, to find an outlet for their exuberant feelings, and talk of their passion even when they know that indiscretion may compromise success? Daniel asked himself these questions; but the count did not allow him time to reflect and answer them. After a brief pause, he roused himself, and suddenly changing his tone: "I guess what you think, my dear Daniel. You say to yourself, 'The Count de Ville-Handry was in love.' Well, I assure you you are mistaken."

Daniel started from his chair, and, overcome by amazement, exclaimed, "Can it be possible?"

"Exactly so: I give you my word of honour. The feelings which attracted me towards Miss Brandon were the same that bound me to my daughter. But as I am a shrewd observer, and have some knowledge of the human heart, I could not help being struck by a change in Miss Brandon's features, and especially in her manner. After treating me with the greatest freedom and familiarity, she suddenly became reserved, and almost cold. It was evident to me that she was embarrassed in my presence. Our constant intercourse, far from uniting us more closely, seemed to frighten her. You may guess how I interpreted this change, my dear Daniel. But, as I have never been a conceited man, I thought I might be mistaken. I watched her carefully, and soon realised that, if on my side I only loved Miss Brandon with a fatherly affection, I had yet succeeded in inspiring her with a more tender sentiment."

In any other person, this senile self-conceit would have appeared intensely absurd to Daniel: in Henriette's father, it pained him deeply. The count noticed his downcast look, and, misinterpreting it, asked him, "Do you doubt what I say?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well, then. I can assure you, at all events, that the discovery so disturbed and surprised me, that for three days I could not think calmly over the matter, nor decide what I ought to do. Still, it was necessary I should make up my mind. I did not for a moment think of abusing the confidence of this innocent child; and yet I knew, I felt, she was absolutely in my power. But no! It would have been infamous for me to repay excellent Mrs Brian's hospitality, and noble Sir Tom's kindness, with such ingratitude. On the other hand, must I necessarily deny myself those pleasant visits to the house in the Rue du Cirque, and break with friends who were so dear to me? I thought of that as well; but I had not the courage to do so." He hesitated for a moment, trying to read Daniel's real opinion in his eyes. Then after a pause, he added gravely, "It was then only that the idea of marrying her occurred to me."

Daniel had been expecting the fatal announcement, so that however heavy the blow might be, he was prepared for it. He did not move. His apparent indifference seemed to surprise the count, who, with an expression of discontent, curtly repeated, "Yes, I thought of marrying her. You will say, 'It was a serious matter.' I knew that only too well; and for this reason I did not decide the question in a hurry, but weighed the *pros* and *cons* most carefully. I am not one of those weak men, as I am sure you know, who can easily be hoodwinked, and who fancy they alone possess the secret of perennial youth. No, no; I know myself, and am fully aware, better than anybody else, that I am approaching maturer years. This was, in fact, the first objection that arose in my mind. But then I answered it triumphantly by the fact, that age is not a matter to be decided by one's certificate of birth, for, in point of fact, we are only as old as we appear to be. Now, thanks to an exceptionally sober and peaceful life, forty years of which were spent in the country—thanks, moreover, to an iron constitution, and to the extreme care I have always taken of my health, I possess a—what shall I say?—a vigour which many young men, who can hardly drag one foot after the other, might very well envy." So saying, M. de Ville-Handry rose to his feet, straightened his spine, and stretched out his well-shaped leg. Then, when he thought that Daniel had sufficiently admired him, he continued, "Now, what of Miss Brandon? You think, perhaps, that she is still in her teens? No, far from that! She is at least twenty-five, my dear friend; and, for a woman, twenty-five years mean—ah, ah!" He smiled ironically, as if to say that a woman of twenty-five appeared to him an old, a very old woman. "Besides," continued he, "I know how serious her disposition is, and am well acquainted with her eminent good sense. You may rely upon me when I tell you I have studied her. A thousand trifles, of no weight in appearance, and unnoticed by herself in all probability, have told me that she does not at all care for young men. She has learnt to appreciate the true value of young husbands of thirty, who are all fire and flame in the honeymoon, and who, six months later, wearied of pure and tranquil happiness, seek their delights elsewhere. It is not only of late that I have found out how truly she values what is, after all, most desirable in this world—a great name worthily borne by a true man, and a reputation that would shed new radiance upon her. How often have I heard her say to Mrs Brian, 'Above all, aunt, I want to be proud of my husband; I want to see everybody's eye sparkle with admiration and envy as soon as I mention his name, which will be mine as well; I want people to whisper around me, 'Ah, how happy she is to be loved by such a man!'" The count shook his head gravely, and continued in a solemn tone, "I examined myself, Daniel, and found that I answered all Miss Brandon's expectations; and the result of my meditations was, that I should be a madman to allow such happiness to escape me. Accordingly, having firmly made up my mind, I went to Sir Thomas Elgin to acquaint him with my intentions. I cannot describe to you his amazement. 'You are joking,' he said at first, 'and that grieves me deeply.' But when he saw that I had never spoken more seriously in my life, he, usually so phlegmatic, became perfectly furious, and I fell from the clouds when he told me outright that he meant to do all he could to prevent such a match. I had to use all my skill to make him change his mind. All I could obtain from him, after more than two hours' discussion, was a promise that he would remain neutral, and would leave Mrs Brian the responsibility of refusing or accepting my offer."

The worthy count laughed as he spoke—laughed most heartily—recalling no doubt his discussion with Sir Tom, and the diplomatic skill he had evinced. “So I went to Mrs Brian,” he resumed. “Ah! she did not mince matters. At the first word, she called me—God forgive her—an old fool, and plainly told me that I must never show myself in the Rue du Cirque again. I insisted; but in vain. She would not even listen to me, the old Puritan; and, when I became pressing, she dropped me a solemn courtesy, and left me alone in the room, looking foolish enough, I am sure. For the time I could only retire, and I did so, hoping that her interview with her niece might induce her to change her mind. Not at all, however, for when I called at the house the next day, the servants said that Sir Tom was out, and that Mrs Brian and Miss Brandon had just left for Fontainebleau. The day after, the same result; and so on for a whole week. I was growing more and more restless, when one morning a *commissionaire* brought me a letter. It was Miss Brandon who wrote. She asked me to be in the Bois de Boulogne, near the cascade, at four o’clock that very afternoon, adding, that she was going out riding with Sir Tom, and would find a means to escape from him and meet me. As a matter of course, I was punctual; and a few minutes after my arrival I perceived her riding towards me at full speed. She had scarcely reached my side than she exclaimed, ‘They are watching me so jealously, that I could not write to you till to-day. I am deeply wounded by this want of confidence, and cannot endure it any longer. Here I am, carry me off, let us go!’ Never, Daniel, never have I seen her look more marvellously beautiful than she looked at that moment. She was flushed with excitement and the rapid ride; her eyes shone with courage and passion, and her lips trembled. ‘I know I am ruining myself,’ she continued, ‘and you as well—you will probably despise me. But never mind! Let us be gone!’” The count paused, overcome with excitement; but at last recovering himself, he continued—“To hear a beautiful woman tell you that! Ah, Daniel! such an experience alone is worth a man’s whole life. And yet I had the courage, mad as I was, to speak to her words of reason. Yes, I had the courage, and almost fabulous control over myself, to conjure her to return home. She began to weep, and accused me of indifference. But I had discovered a way out of the difficulty, and rejoined, ‘Sarah, go home. Write me what you have just told me, and I am sure I shall compel your friends to grant me your hand.’ She did so, and then what I had foreseen came to pass. In the face of such proof of what they called our madness, Sir Tom and Mrs Brian did not dare to oppose our plans any longer. After some little hesitation, and imposing certain honorable conditions, they said to Sarah and myself, ‘Well, as you are determined—go and get married.’”

This is what the Count de Ville-Handry called “chance.” The whole chain of circumstances which he himself recorded, from Sir Tom’s accident and Miss Brandon’s fainting fit, the meeting near the cascade, and the suggested elopement—even the sudden enthusiasm of a frivolous young woman for his political opinions, and her amazing knowledge of his speeches—all seemed to him perfectly natural and simple. Daniel was thunderstruck. He could not possibly understand how a man like the count could be so perfectly blind to the intrigue that was going on around him. Limited, however, as were M. de Ville-Handry’s powers of perception, he none the less noted Daniel’s preoccupation. “Come,” said he, “what are you thinking of? Let us hear your opinion. Tell me frankly that you suspect Miss

Brandon of trying to catch me in her snares, or, at least, of self-interest."

"I do not say so," stammered Daniel.

"No, but you think so; and that is worse. Well, I think I can convince you of your mistake. What do you think Miss Brandon would gain by marrying me? A fortune, no doubt. I have only one word to reply, but that is sufficient: Miss Brandon is richer than I am myself." Even if this were true, Daniel knew well enough from Maxime's account how the adventuress had acquired her wealth, and he could not repress a shudder, which the count noticed with no little irritation. "Yes, richer than I am," he repeated. "The oil-wells she has inherited from her father bring her in, one year with the other, some two hundred thousand francs annually, and this in spite of their being sadly mismanaged. If they were properly attended to, they would yield three, four, or five times as much, or even more. Sir Tom has proved to me that they are an almost inexhaustible source of wealth. If petroleum was not fabulously profitable, how would you account for the oil-fever with which these cool, calculating Yankees have suddenly been seized, and which has made even more millionnaires than the gold-fever in California and the Territories? Ah! there is something to be made in that direction yet, and something grand, if one only disposed of a large capital." He was growing excited, and forgetting himself—almost to the point of revealing some hidden secret; but managing to recover himself in time, he continued more calmly, "However, enough of that. I trust your suspicions are removed. You may tell me, perhaps, that Miss Brandon takes me because she can do no better. Mistaken again, my friend. At this very moment she is called upon to choose between me and a much younger man than myself, a man whose fortune, moreover, is larger than mine—Count Gordon-Chalusse."

Why was it that the Count de Ville-Handry seemed to appeal to Daniel, and to plead his cause before him? Daniel did not even think of asking himself the question, for his mind was in a state of utter confusion. Still, as the count insisted on having his opinion, repeatedly asking, "Well, do you see any other objection?" he at last forgot Maxime's prudent warning, and said in a troubled voice, "No doubt, count, you know Miss Brandon's family?"

"Certainly! Do you think I would buy a cat in a bag? Her excellent father was a model of honesty."

"And—her previous life?"

The count started from his chair, and casting a savage glance at Daniel exclaimed, "Oh, oh! I see that one of those rascally slanderers, who have tried to tarnish the honour of the noblest and chastest of women, has already been at work here, anticipating my communication to you, and repeating the infamous calumnies I myself have heard of. You must give me the name of the scoundrel." Daniel instinctively turned towards the door, behind which M. de Brévan was listening. Perhaps he expected him to appear; but Maxime did not stir. "Sarah's previous life!" continued the count, "I know every hour of it; and I can answer for it as for my own. The darling! Before consenting to be mine, she insisted upon my knowing everything; yes, everything, without reserve or boastfulness; and I know what she has suffered. Did they not actually say she had been the accomplice of a wretched thief, a cashier, who robbed his employers? Did they not say she had driven a foolish young man, a gambler, to commit suicide; and that she had watched him destroy himself? Ah! you have

only to look at Miss Brandon to realise that these vile stories were concocted by malicious enemies and rivals. And look here, Daniel, you may believe me : whenever you see people calumniate a man or woman, you may rest assured that that man or woman has, somehow or other, wounded or humiliated some mean, envious fool, who cannot endure his or her superiority in point of fortune, rank, beauty, or talent."

M. de Ville-Handry had actually recovered his youthful energy in defending his inamorata. There was a brighter gleam in his eyes, a stronger ring in his voice, and more animation in his gestures. "But no more of that painful topic," he said, "let us talk seriously." And rising again from his chair, and leaning against the mantelpiece in front of Daniel, he continued, "I told you that Sir Tom and Mrs Brian insisted upon certain conditions before they consented to our marriage. One of them is, that Miss Brandon is to be received by my relations as she deserves to be, not only respectfully, but affectionately, even tenderly. Now, so far as this point is concerned, I have some remote cousins, who, having nothing to expect from me when I die, do not trouble themselves any more about me than I trouble myself about them. But I have a daughter; and there is the danger. I know she is distressed at the idea of my marrying again. She cannot bear the idea of another woman taking her mother's place, bearing her name, and ruling in my house!" Daniel at last realised what he was to understand by that unsuccessful appointment which had procured him the pleasure of the Count de Ville-Handry's visit. "Now," resumed the latter, "I know my daughter. She is her mother over again,—weak, but obstinate beyond endurance. If she has taken it into her head to receive Miss Brandon uncivilly, she will do so, notwithstanding all she has promised me, and there will be a terrible scene. In this case, if Miss Brandon consents, in spite of everything, to carry out our present intentions, my house will become a perfect hell upon earth. She—my wife—would no doubt suffer terribly. Now, the question is, whether I have sufficient influence over Henriette to bring her to reason. I scarcely think so; but the influence I may not possess may be at the command of a very honourable young man I know; and that man is you." Daniel flushed scarlet. It was the first time that the count spoke so clearly. "I have never disapproved of my poor wife's plans," resumed M. de Ville-Handry; "and the proof is, that I have allowed you to pay your attentions to my daughter. But now I make this condition: if my daughter behaves as she ought towards Miss Brandon,—that is, as a tender and devoted sister, then, six months after my marriage, there shall be another wedding at my house." Daniel was about to speak; but the count prevented him, continuing—"No, not a word! I have shown you the wisdom of my decision, and you may act accordingly." He had already put on his hat and opened the door, when he added, "Ah! one thing more. Miss Brandon has asked me to present you to her to-night. She wants to speak to you. Come and dine with me; and after dinner we will go to the Rue du Cirque. Now, pray think of what I have told you, and good-bye!"

VII.

THE COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY had hardly closed the door when M. de Brévan rushed out of his hiding-place. "Was I right?" he exclaimed.

But Daniel did not hear his friend, whose very presence he had forgotten.

Overcome by the great effort he had made to conceal his feelings, he had sunk on to a chair, where he still remained hiding his face in his hands, and mournfully repeating, "The count has lost his mind altogether; we are ruined."

His grief was so intense, that M. de Brévan was plainly touched. After looking at him compassionately for some minutes, he touched his shoulder, exclaiming, "Daniel!"

This time the young officer heard his friend, and starting like a man suddenly roused from slumber, he recalled what had just happened, and asked, "You heard what he said, Maxime?"

"Yes, I did—in fact I did not lose a single word or gesture. But do not blame me for my indiscretion. It enables me to give you some friendly advice. You know I have paid dearly for my experience." He hesitated for a moment, as if at a loss how to express himself, and then curtly asked: "You love Mlle. de Ville-Handry?"

"More than life itself: don't you know I do?"

"Well, if that is so, give up all thoughts of useless resistance; induce Mlle. Henriette to do as her father wishes; and persuade Miss Brandon to let your wedding take place a month after her own. But ask for special pledges. Mlle. de Ville-Handry may suffer somewhat during the month's interval; but, on the morrow of your wedding you will carry her off to your own home, and leave the old man to his amorous folly."

This suggestion disclosed a new prospect for Daniel. "I had not thought of that," said he.

"It is all you can do."

"Yes; no doubt it is the course that prudence would advise,—but in following it should I act honourably?"

"Oh, honour! honour!"

"Would it not be wrong for me to abandon the poor old fellow to the mercy of Miss Brandon and her accomplices?"

"You will never be able to rescue him, my dear boy."

"Still, I ought at least to try. You yourself thought so yesterday, and even this morning, not two hours ago."

Maxime could scarcely conceal his impatience. "I did not know then what I know now," he replied.

Daniel had risen, and was walking up and down the room, answering his own objections, rather than M. de Brévan's—"If I were the only person concerned in the matter," said he, "I might perhaps capitulate. But Henriette would never do so. Her father says, she is as weak as a child; but I fully believe that, in a moment of emergency, she would shew great energy and will."

"What need is there for you to tell her at all who Miss Brandon is?"

"I have pledged my word of honour to tell her everything."

M. de Brévan shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "Such folly is unpardonable"—and raising his voice, he exclaimed, "In that case, my poor fellow, you had better give up your Henriette altogether."

"Not yet, my friend, not yet!" rejoined Daniel, who had seemingly mastered his despair. "An honest man who defends his life and honour is pretty strong after all. It is true I have little or no experience, but I have you, Maxime; and I know I can always count upon you."

Daniel did not seem to notice that M. de Brévan, who the other evening had been all fire and energy, was now perceptibly cooler, as if—conscious of having made a mistake—he wished to retrace his steps. "Certainly,

you may count upon me," he replied quietly; "but what on earth can be done?"

"Well, what you said yourself. I shall call upon Miss Brandon, and watch her. I shall dissemble, and gain time. If necessary, I shall employ private detectives, and investigate her antecedents. I shall try to interest some high personage in my favour,—my minister, for instance, who is very kind to me. Besides, I have an idea."

"Ah!"

"Suppose we could find that unlucky cashier, whom you told me about, and who you fancy is still alive. What was his name? Oh, Malgat! An advertisement inserted in all the leading newspapers of Europe would, no doubt, reach him; and the hope of vengeance—"

M. de Brévan's cheeks reddened perceptibly; and with strange vehemence he exclaimed, "What nonsense!" Then in a more collected tone he added, "You forget that Malgat has been sentenced to several years' penal servitude, and that he will take your advertisement to be a police trick, and consequently conceal himself more carefully than ever."

But Daniel was not so easily shaken. "Well, I will think it over," he replied. "Perhaps something might be done with that young man whom M. de Ville-Handry mentioned—Count Gordon-Chalusse. If I thought he were really anxious for Miss Brandon's hand—"

"I have heard it said, and I am sure it's true, that young Gordon is a perfect idiot, mad with vanity, and determined on anything to heighten his notoriety. As Miss Brandon is very famous, he would marry her in the same way as he would pay a couple of hundred thousand francs for a race horse."

"And how do you account for Miss Brandon's refusal?"

"Why, by the young fool's character. She's very well aware that after three months' matrimony Gordon would decamp, and that there would be a legal separation before the year was over. And besides, Gordon is only five-and-twenty, and likely to live a good deal longer than a lover who is already nearly out of his sixties."

Maxime's intonation imparted terrible significance to his words; and Daniel turned pale and stammered,—“Heavens! Do you think Miss Brandon could—”

"Could do anything, most assuredly,—except, perhaps, get into trouble with the police. I have heard her say that only fools employ steel and poison." As he spoke, a strange smile crossed M. de Brévan's lips; and he added, "It is true there are other means—less prompt, perhaps, but much safer—by which one may get rid of troublesome people. You ask what they are? Why, the same no doubt that she employed to get rid of poor Kergrist and Malgat,—purely moral means, based upon her thorough knowledge of her victims' characters, and her own infernal power over them."

Daniel tried in vain to obtain more positive information from his friend. De Brévan answered him evasively; perhaps because he did not dare to speak out freely, and reveal his real thoughts; or, perhaps, because it came within his plans to content himself with adding this last terror to all Daniel's other apprehensions. Maxime's embarrassment, unmistakable a moment ago, had now quite disappeared, as if he had come to some final decision after long hesitation. He who had advised all kinds of concessions now suggested the most energetic resistance, and seemed confident of success. When he at last left Daniel, he had made the young officer

promise to keep him hourly acquainted with whatever happened, and, above all, to try every means in his power to unmask Miss Brandon. "How he hates her!" ejaculated Daniel when he was alone, and in his simplicity he again asked himself whether, after all, his friend's hatred might not be rather far fetched. Champcey could understand well enough that a young and beautiful woman, actuated by covetousness and ambition, might feign a love that she did not really feel for a foolish old millionaire, with the view of inducing him to marry her—bartering, as it were, her charms for gold. Such things happen every day in modern society, and are accepted quite naturally by people, said to be respectable. The same woman might, moreover, surmise that she would speedily become a widow, thus regaining her liberty, with the agreeable addendum of a large fortune. Such surmises are equally frequent. But it was a more serious thing to conclude that she would deliberately hasten her aged husband's death by criminal means. Maxime's prediction so seriously disturbed Daniel, that he remained for hours in gloomy meditation—forgetting alike his official duties and the count's invitation to dinner. At nightfall, however, his servant roused him from his reverie, and he suddenly remembered that he had not kept his promise, to acquaint Henriette with whatever he discovered concerning Miss Brandon.

Mlle. de Ville-Handry had passed a sleepless night and anxious day, wondering why Daniel did not return, starting at each footstep on the stairs, at each rumble of wheels in the street below. She was positively thinking of going to his rooms in the Rue de l'Université, when a servant entered, and announced "M. Champcey." Starting to her feet, she was about to greet her dilatory lover in reproachful strains, when, glancing at his sad face, she realised that he on his side must have suffered, and that some great misfortune had befallen them both. "Ah," she exclaimed, "Your fears were well grounded!"

"Yes—unfortunately," answered Daniel.

"Tell me everything," she replied.

"Your father called on me this morning," answered the young officer, "and offered me your hand, providing I obtained your consent to his marriage with Miss Brandon." And then, faithful to his promise, he repeated everything he had learnt from Maxime and the count, merely omitting such details as were unfit for Henriette's ears, and the last and most terrible charge which M. de Brévan had preferred against the adventuress.

"To think of my father marrying such a creature," exclaimed Henriette when he had finished. "It is impossible for me to sit still and smile, when such ruin and disgrace threaten us. I shall oppose Miss Brandon with all my strength and energy."

"Nevertheless, she may succeed," remarked Daniel.

"Succeed! Well, at all events, she shall never conquer me. My hand shall never touch her's, and if my father persists, I will seek refuge in a convent."

"M. de Ville-Handry would never consent to that."

"Then I will shut myself up in my room, and never leave it again. I scarcely think they will drag me out by force."

She spoke with an earnestness and a determination which nothing seemed likely to shake or break; and yet Daniel was oppressed with sad presentiments. "Miss Brandon will not come here alone," said he,

"Who will come with her, then?"

"Why, her relatives—Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. O Henriette, my love, to think that you should be exposed to the persecution of such odious beings."

"I am not afraid of them," replied Mlle. de Ville-Handry, proudly raising her head; and in a gentler tone she added, "Besides, won't you always be near me, to advise and protect me in case of danger?"

"I? Why, one of their first efforts will be to try and part us."

"Yes, I know well enough that the house will no longer be open to you."

"Well, then?"

Blushing to the roots of her hair, and averting her glance, Henriette resumed, "If they force me to do so, I must act as a girl in ordinary circumstances never should do. I will meet you secretly. I will win over one of my maids, the most discreet I can find, and through her we may correspond."

This arrangement did not seemingly relieve Daniel from his apprehensions, for with quivering lips he asked, "And then?"

Henriette understood his embarrassment and timidity. "I thought," said she, "that you would be willing to wait until the law authorises me to make my own choice; and when that day comes, I promise you, Daniel, that whatever my father may say, I will ask you for your arm, and in broad daylight leave this house never to re-enter it again."

Seizing his true love's hand and carrying it to his lips, Daniel repeated with rapture, "Ah, you have restored me to hope."

Then seated side by side they discussed their plans, and Daniel explained that he intended to make one last effort to avert this marriage; asking Henriette to hide her intentions from her father until the result of this final scheme was known. After infinite pleading, she at last consented. "I will do what you desire," she said; "but believe me, all your efforts will be in vain."

She was interrupted by the Count de Ville-Handry's arrival. He kissed his daughter, said a few words about the weather, and then, drawing Daniel into a bay window, eagerly asked, "Have you spoken to her?"

"Yes; Mlle. Henriette wants a few days to consider."

"That's absurd," replied the count with a look of displeasure. "Nothing could be more ridiculous. But, after all, it's your own business, my dear Daniel. And, if you want any additional motive, I will tell you that my daughter is very rich. She will have more than two million francs of her own."

"Sir!" exclaimed Daniel indignantly. But the Count de Ville-Handry had already turned upon his heels; and the butler was at the door, announcing that dinner was on the table.

Although the repast was excellent in itself, it was a very dull matter, indeed, so far as conversation was concerned. However, it was promptly despatched; for the count seemed to be sitting on needles, and looked at his watch every other minute. Coffee had just been handed round, when, turning to Daniel, he exclaimed, "Let us make haste. Miss Brandon expects us." And scarcely allowing the young officer time to take leave of Henriette, he led him to his carriage, pushed him inside, jumped in afterwards, and called out to the coachman, "To Miss Brandon's, in the Rue du Cirque! Drive fast!"

VIII.

THE coachman knew well enough what the count meant when he said, "Drive fast!" On such occasions he urged his horses into their very sharpest trot, and, but for his great skill, many a foot-passenger would have been run over. This evening, however, the count twice lowered the window to call out, "Don't drive at a walk!" The fact is, that, in spite of his efforts to assume a grave air, such as befits a statesman, he was as impatient, and as vain of his love, as a young undergraduate hurrying to his first rendezvous. During dinner he had been sullen and silent; but now he was talkative, and chatted away, without at all troubling himself concerning his companion's silence. Daniel did not even listen. Ensnconced in a corner of the well-padded vehicle, he was trying his utmost to control his feelings, for the idea of finding himself face to face with this formidable adventuress, Miss Brandon, was strangely exciting him, and he knew that he needed to retain all his composure and energy.

Ten minutes sufficed to drive the whole distance to the Rue du Cirque. "Here we are," cried the count, who, without waiting for the footman to assist him in alighting, sprang out of the vehicle, and impetuously raised the knocker garnishing the door of Miss Brandon's residence. The house was not one of those pretentious buildings which attract the attention of passers by. Seen from the street, it appeared singularly modest and unassuming, but then neither the garden nor the stables and carriage-house were visible. A servant took the visitors' overcoats, and escorted them to the first floor. Scarcely had they reached the landing, than the count paused and stammered as if his breath were failing him,—“There, there!”

Daniel was at a loss to divine his meaning, but in point of fact the count wished to apprise him that this was the spot where he had held Miss Brandon in his arms on the day she fainted. However, Daniel had no time to ask any questions, for here came another servant, who, with a low bow, informed the visitors that Mrs Brian and Miss Brandon had just risen from table, and were still engaged at their toilettes. At the same time he asked them to walk into the grand drawing-room, adding that he would inform Sir Thomas Elgin of their arrival.

“All right,” rejoined the count, in a tone which indicated that he considered himself perfectly at home in Miss Brandon's house, and, followed by Daniel, he at once entered the great reception-room. Evidence of Mrs Brian's puritanic tastes was here to be found on all sides. All the appointments were of great value, but they had a cold, stiff, mournful air. The furniture was singularly angular, and there was altogether a want of comfort and cosiness about the room. The clock on the mantelpiece was surmounted by a bronze group, portraying a couple of biblical personages, and the only other work of art—if such it could be called—was a huge painting, affixed to the wall, facing the fire-place. This was the full-length portrait of a man of fifty or thereabouts, attired in a fancy uniform with enormous epaulettes. He wore a plumed hat on his head; a huge sabre hung at his side, and a blue sash, into which a couple of revolvers were thrust, encircled his waist. “General Brandon, Miss Sarah's father,” remarked the Count de Ville-Handry in a tone of deep respect, which positively unnerved Daniel. “As a work of art, this portrait, no doubt, leaves much to be wished for; but I am told that the likeness is excellent,”

However that might be, there was certainly no resemblance between the American general's tanned features and Miss Brandon's delicate lineaments. When Daniel approached the painting, he fancied he could detect a studied and intentional coarseness of execution about it. It seemed as if the artist had purposely executed a daub; for by the side of glaring anatomical inaccuracies one noted unmistakable traces of a master's hand; for instance, one of the ears, half hid behind the hair, was admirably rendered.

However, before Daniel could draw any conclusions from this strange discovery, Sir Thomas Elgin entered the room. He was in evening dress, and looked taller and stiffer than ever in his white cravat; he walked a little lame, and leant for support on a stout cane. "What, my dear Sir Tom!" exclaimed the count, "does your leg still trouble you?"

"Oh, a great deal!" replied the honourable gentleman, with a marked English accent,— "a great deal since this morning. The doctor thinks there must be something the matter with the bone." And obeying the tendency we all have to display our ailments, he slightly drew up his trousers so as to show the bandages he wore.

The Count de Ville-Handry assumed a look of commiseration, and then, forgetting that he had introduced Daniel already the night before at the opera-house, he presented him over again. This ceremony being accomplished, he remarked, "Upon my word, I am almost ashamed to appear so early; but I knew you expected company to-night."

"Oh, only a few persons!"

"And I desired to see you for a few moments alone."

Sir Thomas Elgin smiled, or rather, he made a horrible grimace. Then caressing his whiskers, he exclaimed, "Miss Sarah has been informed of your arrival; and I heard her tell Mrs Brian that she was nearly ready. I cannot imagine how she can spend so much time at her toilet."

While the pair chatted before the fire-place,—Sir Tom stretched out in an easy-chair, and the count leaning against the mantelpiece,—Daniel withdrew to a window looking on to the court-yard and garden behind the house. With his brow resting against the cool glass, he remained in meditation. He could not understand this wound of Sir Thomas Elgin's. "Is it possible that his fall was an intentional one?" he asked himself, "or did he really break his leg? If he did so, that fainting-fit might have been natural, and not pre-arranged; but—" He was just plunging into a new train of doubt and speculation, when the noise of a carriage entering the court-yard roused him from his thoughts. He looked out. A brougham had stopped before the back door. A lady alighted; and he could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise, for he thought he recognized her. For a moment he remained uncertain, but she suddenly raised her head to speak to the coachman, and as she did so, the light of a lamp fell full upon her features. There could be no further doubt. This woman was Miss Brandon. She flew up the steps, and entered the house. Daniel distinctly heard the heavy door close behind her. At the opera, the night before, a single word uttered by her had sufficed to enlighten him. And now here was an unmistakable tangible fact to support his earlier suspicions. To increase the count's passionate impatience he had been told that Miss Brandon had not quite finished dressing, but was making all haste to come down to him. Not a word had been said of her absence from the house, or of her expected return. Where had she been? What new intrigue had compelled her to leave the house at such a moment? It must evidently have been something of great importance to have kept her out so late,

when, as she was bound to know, the count was waiting for her. This incident threw a flood of light on the cunning policy of these adventurers, on Sir Thomas Elgin's and Mrs Brian's clever and active complicity. Daniel now fully understood their game, and realized how the Count de Ville-Handry had been entrapped. He himself could never have escaped such snares. What skilful actors these *intriguants* were! And how perfect all their arrangements, down to the merest points of detail. The stiff puritanic elegance of the grand drawing-room was calculated to dispel many a doubt; and as for "General" Brandon's horrible portrait, it was simply a stroke of genius. Daniel no longer believed in Sir Tom's broken leg. "It is no more broken than mine," he mused, but at the same time he greatly marvelled at the honourable baronet's self-denial in consenting to wear his leg bandaged up for months, just as if it really had been injured. "To-night," he continued, "the performance will, no doubt, be specially artistic, as they expected me." Now fully enlightened, and with every doubt dispelled, the young officer composed himself for the coming battle; and fearing that his isolation and dreamy look might betray his thoughts, he returned to the fire-place, where the count and Sir Tom were still engaged in familiar conversation.

M. de Ville-Handry was just detailing his arrangements for his wedding. He meant to reside with his wife on the second floor of his mansion, for he intended dividing the first floor into two suites of apartments,—one for Sir Thomas Elgin, and the other for Mrs Brian; knowing very well that his adored Sarah would never consent to part from the dear relatives who had been father and mother to her. The last words remained in his throat: for he paused as if suddenly petrified, with his eyes starting from their sockets and his mouth wide open. Mrs Brian had entered the room, followed by Miss Brandon. On this occasion Daniel was even more impressed with the young American's beauty than on the previous night at the opera. Sarah's personal charms were, moreover, enhanced by the striking toilette she wore,—a puce coloured robe, profusely embroidered with tiny bouquets of Chinese silk, and trimmed with a long lace flounce. In her hair, as carelessly arranged as usual, she only wore a spray of fuchsia, but the crimson bells produced a charming effect as they mingled with her golden curls, and fell gracefully over the nape of her neck. Approaching the Count de Ville-Handry with a smile, and offering him her brow to kiss, she shyly asked, "Do I look well, dear count?"

The count quivered from head to foot, and had scarcely sufficient command over himself to stretch out his lips and stammer in an ecstatic tone, "Oh beautiful, too beautiful!"

"It has taken you long enough, I am sure," remarked Sir Tom severely,—"too long!" And yet he might have known that in point of fact Miss Brandon had accomplished a miracle of expeditiousness; for a quarter of an hour had not elapsed since her return to the house.

"You are an impertinent fellow, Tom," she rejoined with a girlish laugh, "and I am glad the count's presence relieves me from your eternal sermons."

"Sarah!" exclaimed Mrs Brian reprovingly.

But Miss Brandon had already turned, offering her hand to Daniel—"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "I am sure we shall understand each other admirably." She spoke these words as softly as possible; but, if he had known her better, he would have read in her eyes that her ideas had completely changed since the preceding night;—then she wished him well, now she hated him intensely.

"Understand each other?" he repeated as he bowed. "In what?"

She made no rejoinder. Indeed, their conversation was interrupted by a servant, who, opening the door, announced several of the usual visitors. It was now ten o'clock, and for an hour or so there was a constant arrival of guests. At eleven there were fully a hundred persons in the grand and small drawing-rooms, without counting the occupants of two side apartments where card tables had been set out. Some of the men who attended the adventuress's reception were not perhaps of immaculate reputations, but they all belonged to that section of society which Parisian chroniclers call "High Life"—a circle which clothes the vices and frailties of humanity in radiant garb, and which has to be carefully studied before its imperfections can be detected beneath the splendid livery of fashion. The younger men were especially remarkable for the superlative elegance of their attire, and the faultless arrangement of their hair; and the older ones, for their air of importance and endless brochettes of decorations. Those who might claim any degree of eminence, either by reason of their names or positions, were eagerly recognised by the deferential manner in which they were received. It was for the especial benefit of these more notable members of the gathering that the Count de Ville-Handry arrogantly aired his good fortune; now ordering the servants here and there, as if he had been the master of the house, and now, with mock modesty, strolling from group to group, catering for every available compliment at Miss Brandon's beauty and his own good luck. Gracefully reclining in an easy-chair near the fire-place, Sarah played the part of a young queen surrounded by her court. But, despite the multitude of her admirers, and the constant succession of compliments she had to listen to, she never for one moment lost sight of Daniel, but watched him stealthily, seeking to divine his thoughts by the expression of his features. At one moment she even shocked her crowd of worshippers by suddenly leaving her place to ask him why he held himself so aloof, and whether he felt indisposed. Then, perceiving that he was a perfect stranger in such a gathering, she was gracious enough to point out to him some of the most remarkable among her visitors—acquainting him, indeed, so persistently with the names of her distinguished friends, that Daniel began to think she must have divined his intentions, and desired to warn him against entering on a struggle. It was, indeed, as if she had said, "You see what friends I have, and how they could defend me if you dared to attack me."

Nevertheless, he was not discouraged, for he had already estimated the difficulty of his undertaking, and the obstacles he was likely to encounter. While the conversation was progressing around him, he arranged in his head a plan, which, he hoped, would enable him to fathom this dangerous siren's antecedents. He was so preoccupied with this scheme that he did not notice that the guests were rapidly retiring, and, indeed, he was still wrapt in reverie when only a few intimate friends and a few card-players—engaged at their last game—remained of all the brilliant throng. However, he was roused at last by Miss Brandon's voice exclaiming, "Will you grant me ten minutes' conversation, M. Champey?"

As he rose mechanically to his feet Mrs Brian interposed—exclaiming in English, "Your conduct is most improper, Sarah!" and Sir Thomas Elgin added, "Shocking!" But Miss Brandon merely shrugged her shoulders, and rejoined, "Our dear count alone would have a right to judge my conduct; and he has authorised me to do what I am doing." Then turning to Daniel, she added, "Come with me, sir."

IX.

SHE led him to a small boudoir of fresh and coquettish aspect, and which seemed almost a conservatory, so replete was it with rare and fragrant flowers. Large vases, filled with floral marvels, stood before the windows, the frames of which were overgrown with luxuriant creepers. The walls were hung with bright silk, and the light bamboo chairs covered with the same material. If the great reception-room reflected Mrs Brian's character, this charming boudoir surely represented Miss Brandon's own exquisite taste. Seating herself on a small sofa, she began, after a short pause, "My aunt was right: it would have been more proper for me to convey to you what I want to say through Sir Thomas Elgin. But, in my country girls are independent; and, when my interests are at stake, I trust no one but myself." She spoke these words in a bewitching, ingenuous manner, or rather with the would-be cunning air of a child bent on some formidable task. "I have heard that my dear aunt went to see you this afternoon," she continued, "so no doubt you know that in less than a month I shall be the Countess de Ville-Handry?" Daniel was surprised. In less than a month! What could be done in so short a time? "Now," concluded Miss Brandon, "I wish to hear from your own lips whether you see—any—objections to this match."

She spoke so frankly, that it was plain she was utterly ignorant of that article in the code of social laws which directs a French girl never to speak of matrimony without blushing to the roots of her hair. Daniel, on the contrary, was most embarrassed. "I confess," he replied with much hesitation, "that I do not understand, that I cannot possibly explain to myself, why you do me the honour—"

"To consult you? Excuse me: I think you understand me perfectly well. Has not Mlle. de Ville-Handry's hand been promised you?"

"The count has allowed me to hope—"

"He has pledged his word, sir, under certain conditions, and has told me everything. I speak, therefore, to the Count de Ville-Handry's son-in-law, and I repeat, Do you see any objections to this match?"

The question was too precise to allow of any prevarication. And yet Daniel was anxious to gain time, and avoid any positive answer. For the first time in his life he uttered a falsehood, and stammered out, "I see no objection."

"Really?"

"Really."

She shook her head as if scarcely satisfied, and then continued slowly, "If that be the case, you will not refuse me a great favour. Carried away by her grief at seeing her father marry again, Mlle. de Ville-Handry hates me without even knowing me. Will you promise me to use your influence in trying to persuade her to change her disposition towards me?"

Never had honest Daniel Champcey been tried so hard. "I am afraid you over-estimate my influence," he answered in diplomatic fashion.

"I do not ask of you to succeed," she rejoined, giving him a sharp and penetrating glance, which made him fairly start, "only give me your word that you will do your best, and I shall be very much obliged to you. Will you give me that promise?"

Could he do so? The situation was so exceptional, and it was so desir-

able he should lull the enemy into security for a time, that for a moment he was inclined to pledge his word. Nay, more than inclined, for he made an effort to do so. But his lips refused to utter a false oath.

"You see," resumed Miss Brandon coldly,—"you see you were deceiving me." And, turning away from him, she hid her face in her hands, apparently overcome by grief. "What a disgrace! Great God! What humiliation!" she repeated, in a tone of bitter sorrow. But suddenly her features brightened as if with a ray of hope, and she exclaimed, "Well, let it be so. I like it all the better so. A mean man would not have hesitated at an oath, however determined he might have been not to keep it. Whilst you—I can trust you: you are a man of honour, and all is not lost yet. What is the cause of your aversion? Is it a question of money, —the count's fortune?"

"Miss Brandon!"

"No, it is not that, I see; I was quite sure it was not. What can it be, then? Tell me, sir, I beseech you, tell me!"

"What could he tell her?" Silence was his only answer.

"Ah!" ejaculated Sarah, clenching her teeth convulsively, "I understand;" and she made a supreme effort to control her sobs; but, nevertheless, big tears, resembling diamonds of matchless beauty, rolled slowly down from between her quivering eyelashes. "Yes," she said, "I understand. I understand that the infamous slanders of my enemies have reached you, and that you have believed them. You have, no doubt, been told that I am an adventuress, come from nowhere; that my father, the brave defender of the Union, exists only in the painting in the drawing-room; that no one knows whence I derive my income; that Tom, that noble soul, and Mrs Brian, a saint upon earth, are my accomplices. Confess, you have been told all that, and have believed it."

Superb in her wrath, with glowing cheeks and quivering lips, she rose to her feet, and added in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "Ah! when people are called upon to admire a noble deed, they refuse to believe in it, and only grant their praise after a rigorous inquiry; but if it is a question of slander, they dispense with all ceremony, and however monstrous the thing may appear, however improbable it may sound, they believe it instantly. They do not hesitate to repeat calumnies which utterly dishonour a woman, which kill her morally. If I were a man, and had been told that Miss Brandon was an adventuress, I should have set about ascertaining the truth. America is not so far off. I should have soon found the ten thousand men who served under Gen. Brandon, and they would have told me what sort of man their leader was. I should have visited the oil-regions of Pennsylvania, and have learnt on the spot that the petroleum wells belonging to Sir Thomas Elgin, Mrs Brian, and Miss Brandon, yield a larger revenue than many a principality."

Daniel was amazed at the candour and boldness with which Sarah approached this terrible subject. For her to speak with such energy and in such a tone, she must either be possessed of unsurpassed impudence, or else—he had to confess it—she must be innocent.

Overcome by the effort she had made, she had sunk back on the sofa, and now continued in a lower tone of voice, as if speaking to herself, "But have I a right to complain? I reap what I sowed. Alas! Tom has told me so, often enough, and I would not believe him. I was not twenty years old when I came to Paris, after my poor father's death. I had been brought up in America, where young girls know no other law but that of

their own consciences. They tell us at home that our first duty is to be truthful; but in France, young girls are, before everything else, taught how to practice hypocrisy. While we are told never to blush, except when we have done wrong, they are taught to affect prudishness under all circumstances. French people labour to save appearances: whilst we Americans aim at reality. In Philadelphia, I did everything I chose, provided I did not think it wrong, and I fancied I could do the same here. Poor me! I forgot the wickedness of the world. I went out riding alone in the morning; I went to church alone; and, if I needed anything for my toilet, I ordered the carriage, and drove out alone to buy it. I did not feel bound to cast down my eyes every time a man spoke to me, and, if he was amusing and witty, I laughed at what he said. If a new fashion pleased me, I adopted it. I committed all these crimes. I was young, rich, and popular, and these were so many more offences against the social code of Paris. The result was, that I had scarcely been here a year when people said that that wretch Malgat—"She paused as she uttered the cashier's name; and, springing to her feet, bounded towards Daniel, both of whose hands she grasped as she continued, "Malgat! Have your friends talked to you about Malgat?" And, as he hesitated to reply, she added, "Ah, answer me! Don't you see that your hesitation is an insult?"

"Well,—yes," stammered the young officer.

With a gesture of despair she raised her hands to heaven, calling God, as it were, to witness her humiliation, and asking Him for an inspiration. Then, as if with sudden resolution, she exclaimed, "But I have proofs, unimpeachable proofs, of Malgat's rascality." And, without waiting for another word, she hurried into the adjoining room.

Daniel remained motionless in the centre of the boudoir. He was positively thunderstruck; and so faultlessly did Miss Brandon pass from one emotion to the other—sounding in turn each chord of passion, that he again almost asked himself if she were really acting. "What a woman!" he murmured to himself, unconsciously repeating his friend de Brévan's words,—“What a woman! And how well she defends herself!”

But Miss Brandon had already returned, carrying a small casket of costly wood, inlaid with ivory. Resuming her seat on the sofa, she exclaimed, in a sharp, curt tone, indicative of suppressed passion, "First of all, I must thank you, M. Champcey, for your frankness, for it enables me to defend myself. I knew that I had been calumniated; but it is a difficult thing to bring slanderers to book, though, fortunately, through you I am now able to face them. May I ask you to listen to me,—for I swear to you, by my mother's memory, that you shall learn the truth—the whole truth." Pausing for a moment, she opened the casket, and rummaged among the papers it contained as if in search of some particular document. Then, with feverish haste, she continued, "M. Malgat was the cashier and confidential clerk of the Mutual Discount Society, a large and powerful banking company. Sir Thomas Elgin had some business with him, a few weeks after our arrival here, for the purpose of drawing funds he had left in Philadelphia. Malgat was very obliging, and Sir Tom, to show his appreciation, invited him to dine here. This is how he became acquainted with Mrs Brian and myself. He was a man of forty or thereabouts, of medium height, neither good-looking nor ugly, but polite, though not refined in manners. I should have paid but little attention to him if a strange expression which came at times into his little yellow eyes had not fairly frightened me. I can't explain his look to you, but it was that

of a vicious man. My impression was so strong, that I could not help telling Tom that I felt sure Malgat would turn out badly, and that it was very wrong on his part to trust him in money matters. Tom only laughed at my presentiments; and I distinctly remember that even Mrs Brian scolded me for judging a man by his mere appearance, declaring that there were very honest men in the world who had yellow eyes. I must acknowledge, moreover, that M. Malgat behaved perfectly well whenever he was here. As Sir Tom was imperfectly acquainted with Parisian customs, and had some money to invest, he asked Malgat to advise him. Whenever we received drafts on the Mutual Discount Society, he always saved us the trouble of going to cash them, and brought the money here himself. After a while, when Sir Tom took it into his head to try some small speculations on 'change, M. Malgat offered his assistance; but, in point of fact, they never had any luck." While speaking, Miss Brandon had found the papers she was looking for, and she now handed them to Daniel, saying, "If you at all doubt what I say, look at these."

The documents offered for Daniel's inspection were a dozen slips of paper, on which Malgat reported his operations at the Bourse, carried on on Sir Thomas Elgin's account, and with the latter's money. They all finished in the same fashion,—“We have lost considerably; but are bound to be more fortunate next time. There is a capital chance with such and such shares: send me all the money you can spare.” Although the purport of the missives was invariably the same, the funds alluded to varied in each letter. “It's very strange,” ejaculated Daniel, speaking rather to himself than to Miss Brandon.

“Strange? Yes, indeed!” rejoined Sarah. “But please read this other letter, which is more explicit still. Read it aloud, pray.”

So speaking, she handed Daniel a note couched in the following terms:—“Paris, Dec. 5.—Sir Thomas Elgin.—Dear Sir,—In a position of great distress, and at a loss where to turn for a helping hand, I make so bold as to write to you—a man of high honour and integrity—and confess that, to my everlasting shame, I have committed a crime. Whilst carrying on your speculations, I gave way to temptation, and speculated on my own account. The little money I possessed soon disappeared, and in my endeavours to recover it I lost my head; so that, at the present hour, I owe more than fifty thousand francs, taken from the safe of the society. Will you have pity on me? Will you be generous enough to lend me that sum? I may not be able to return it in less than six or seven years; but I will repay you, I swear it, with interest. I await your answer, like a criminal waiting for the verdict of the jury. It is a matter of life and death with me; and as you decide, so I may be saved, or disgraced forever.—A. MALGAT.” On the margin, methodical Sir Tom had noted, in his angular handwriting, “Answered immediately. Sent M. M. a cheque for 50,000 francs, to be drawn from funds deposited with the Mutual Discount Society. No interest to be paid.”

“And that,” stammered Daniel, “that is the man—”

“Whom I was charged with having turned aside from the paths of honesty; yes, sir! Now you learn to know him. But wait. You see, he was saved. It was not long before he appeared here again with his false face bathed in tears. I can find no words to convey to you his exaggerated expressions of gratitude. He refused to shake hands with Sir Thomas Elgin, because, he said, he was no longer worthy of such an honour. He spoke of nothing but devotion unto death. It is true that

Sir Tom carried his generosity to extremes. He, who is a model of honesty, and would have starved rather than touch money intrusted to his care, consoled Malgat, telling him that there were some temptations too strong to be resisted, and repeating all the paradoxical phrases which have been specially invented for the justification of thieves. Malgat had still some money of his own; but Sir Tom did not ask him for it, for fear of hurting his feelings. He continued to invite him, and urged him to come and dine with us as formerly." Miss Brandon paused, laughing with that strange nervous laugh, which is often the precursor of an hysterical fit. Then in a hoarse voice, she continued, "Do you know, M. Champcey, how Malgat repaid all this kindness? Read this last note: it will restore me your esteem, I trust." With these words she produced yet another letter, written by Malgat to Sir Thomas Elgin.

"I deceived you," it began. "I had not merely taken 50,000 frs. from the bank, but more than 300,000. By means of false entries I had managed to conceal my defalcations until now; but I can do so no longer. The directors have begun to suspect me: and the chairman has just told me that to-morrow the books will be examined. I am lost. I ought to kill myself, I know; but I have not the courage to do so. I venture to ask you to furnish me with the means of escaping from France. I beseech you on my knees, in the name of all that is dear to you, for mercy's sake; for I am penniless, and cannot even pay my railway fare as far as the frontier. Nor can I return home, for I am watched. Once more, have pity on an unfortunate man, and leave your answer with the *concierge*. I will call for it at about nine o'clock.—A. MALGAT." Not on the margin, as before, but right across the lines, Sir Thomas Elgin had laconically penned, "Answered immediately. No! The scamp!" Daniel was too fearfully excited to speak a word; it was as much as he could do to return Miss Brandon the letter. "We were dining alone the day that note arrived," said she, "and Sir Tom was so indignant that he forgot his usual reserve, and told us everything. For myself I could not help pitying the wretched man, and I besought Tom to furnish him with means to escape. He was inflexible; but, perceiving my distress, he tried to reassure me by saying that Malgat would certainly not come, for he would not dare to expect an answer to such a letter." Pressing both her hands against her heart, as if to still its beating, she continued in a weaker voice, "Nevertheless he came, and, seeing his hopes disappointed, he insisted upon speaking to us. The servants allowed him to come up-stairs. Ah! if I lived a thousand years, I should never forget that fearful scene. Feeling that all was lost, this thief, this defaulter, became positively enraged: he demanded money. At first he asked for it on his knees in humble words; but, when he found that this plan did not answer, he rose to his feet in a perfect fury, and, with foaming mouth and bloodshot eyes, overwhelmed us with the coarsest insults. At last Tom's patience gave out, and he rang for the servants. They had to employ force to drag him out; and, as they forced him down-stairs, he threatened us with his fists, and swore that he would be avenged."

Miss Brandon shuddered so repeatedly while she spoke, that Daniel fancied she was about to faint. But, after an effort, she seemingly mastered her weakness, and resumed her narrative in a more decided tone. "By degrees the impression caused on us all by this horrible scene faded from our minds, until we only thought of it as a bad dream. If we mentioned Malgat at all, it was only with pity and contempt; for what could he do

to us? Nothing, you may say. Even if he dared to accuse us of some great crime, we thought no one would listen to him, and that we should never hear of it. How could we imagine that folks would question our integrity on the mere word of such a scoundrel? In the meanwhile, his crime had become known; and all the papers were full of it, adding a number of more or less reliable particulars. They exaggerated the amount he had stolen; and declared he had succeeded in escaping to England, the police having lost his traces in London. As for myself, I had nearly forgotten the whole matter. He had undoubtedly fled; but, before leaving Paris, he had schemed out the vengeance he threatened us with. I cannot say how or where he found people mean enough to serve his purposes, or even who they were; but perhaps, as Mrs Brian suggested, he contented himself with sending anonymous letters to some of our acquaintances, who did not like us, or envied us. At all events, in less than a week after his disappearance, it was reported everywhere, that I, Sarah Brandon, had been this defaulter's accomplice; and that the sums he had stolen might easily be found if my private drawers could only be searched. Yes, that is what folks said, at first in a cautious whisper, then in a louder tone, and finally openly, and before all the world. Soon the papers took the matter up. They repeated these slanders, arranging them to suit their purpose, and speaking of me with a thousand infamous insinuations. They said that Malgat had acted in the American style, and remarked that it was quite natural he should go to a foreign country, after having been associated with a certain foreign lady."

A crimson flush suffused Sarah's cheeks; her bosom heaved with emotion, and her features assumed in turn an expression of shame, indignation, resentment, and desire for revenge. "Conscious of our honesty," she resumed, "we paid no attention to these scurrilous reports. Indeed, we were as yet ignorant of them. It is true I had noticed some of our acquaintances whisper together, and smile and look at each other in a strange manner, in my presence, but I had not troubled myself as to the cause. However, one afternoon, while we were out, a paper was left at the house, and this acquainted us with the true state of things. It was a summons for me to appear before an investigating magistrate. It came like a thunderbolt. Sir Tom was so enraged that he swore I should not go. He declared he would discover my traducers, and challenge and kill everyone who repeated these abominable slanders. He insisted on going out at once, and Mrs Brian and myself were quite unable to detain him. He roughly pushed us aside, and, taking Malgat's letters, hurried out of the house. We were left in a state of suspense and anxiety till midnight, when he returned fairly exhausted. He had seen all our friends he could think of, and had everywhere been told that he was too simple to give a thought to such infamous reports: that they were too absurd to be believed." At this point of her narrative Miss Brandon nearly gave way, sobs intercepting her words; but once more she mastered her emotion, and continued, "I went the next day to the Palais de Justice, and, after being kept waiting for a long time in a dark passage, I was conducted before the magistrate in his private room. He was an elderly man, with hard features and piercing eyes, and received me as brutally as if I had been a criminal. But when I had shown him the letters you have just read, his manner suddenly changed, pity got the better of him, and I thought I saw a tear in his eye. Ah! I shall be eternally grateful to him for the words he said when I left his office,— 'Poor, young girl! Justice bows reverently before your innocence. Would

to God that the world could be made to do the same." She paused anew, and then fixing her eyes, trembling with mingled fear and hope, upon Daniel, she added in a supplicating voice, "The world has been more cruel than justice itself; but you, sir, will you be harder than the magistrate?"

Ah! Daniel was sorely embarrassed what to answer. His brain was whirling. "Sir!" begged Miss Brandon again. "M. Champcey!" Her eyes were still fixed upon him, and he instinctively turned his head aside, feeling that, when his glance met hers, all his will and energy were, as if by a strange fascination, paralysed. "Great God!" exclaimed Miss Brandon, with grieved surprise, "he still doubts me. M. Champcey, speak, I pray you? Do you doubt the authenticity of those letters? Ah, if you do, take them; for I do not hesitate to confide them to you, although they are the only proofs of my innocence. Take and show them to the clerks who sat for twenty years in the same office with Malgat, and they will tell you the handwriting is his; that he himself signed his own condemnation when penning them. And, if that is not enough, go to the magistrate who examined me: his name is Patrigent."

This last appeal failed, like the preceding ones, to elicit any reply from Daniel. In his confusion he had sunk on to a chair, and with his elbow resting on a small stand, and his brow on his hands, he was endeavouring to think and reason. As he remained thus, Miss Brandon rose, approached him softly, and, taking one of his hands, murmured gently, "I beseech you!" But as if suddenly electrified by the touch of this soft, warm hand, Daniel rose so hastily, that he upset the chair; and, trembling with mysterious terror, exclaimed, "Kergrist!"

Miss Brandon bounded back as if suddenly scorched by fire. From crimson her face turned livid; she darted at Daniel a glance of burning hatred. "Oh!" she murmured, "oh!" as if she could find no words to express her feelings. Was she going away? It seemed for one moment as if she thought of doing so, for she walked towards the door; but, apparently changing her mind, she abruptly turned and faced Daniel again. "This is the first time in my life," she said, in a quivering voice, "that I condescend to justify myself against such infamous charges; and you abuse my patience by heaping insult after insult upon me. But never mind. I look upon you as Henriette's husband; and, since I have commenced, I mean to finish." Daniel tried to say a few words of apology: but she interrupted him,—“Well, yes; one night a young man, Charles de Kergrist,—a profligate, a gambler, crowning his scandalous life in the vilest and meanest fashion,—did come and kill himself under my window. On the morrow a great outcry arose against me, and three days later the madman's brother, M. René de Kergrist, came to ask Sir Thomas Elgin for an explanation. But do you know what came of this explanation? Charles de Kergrist, it was shewn, had killed himself in a state of drunkenness after supper. He committed suicide because he had lost his fortune at Homburg and Baden; because he had exhausted his last resources; because his father, ashamed of his disgraceful conduct, refused to acknowledge him any longer. And, if he chose my window for his suicide, it was because he wished to satisfy a petty grievance. Looking upon me as an heiress, with a fortune that would enable him to continue his extravagant life, he had courted me, and had been refused by Sir Thomas Elgin. Finally, at the time the catastrophe occurred, I was sixty miles from here, at Tours, staying with one of Sir Tom's friends, Mr Palmer, who deposed—” And, as Daniel looked at her with an air of utter bewilderment, she added,—“Perhaps you will ask me

for proofs of what I state. I have none to give you. But I know a man who can give you what you want, and that man is M. de Kergrist's brother; for, since those explanations, he has continued to be our friend,—one of our best friends. And he was here to-night, and you must have seen him; for he came and spoke to me while you were standing by me. He lives in Paris; and Sir Tom will give you his address."

Casting on Daniel a glance in which pity and contempt were strangely mingled, she then concluded, in her proudest tone,—“And now, sir, since I have deigned to stand here like a criminal, sit in judgment on me. Question me, and I will answer. What else have you to charge me with?”

In the exercise of judicial functions, calmness is, of all things, most requisite, and Daniel was but too conscious of his intense excitement; he knew he could not prevent his features from expressing his utter bewilderment. Hence he gave up all discussion, and simply said, “I believe you, Miss Brandon, I believe you.”

The beautiful Sarah's eyes sparkled for a moment with joy; and in a tone of voice which sounded like the echo of her heart, she said, “Oh, thank you! now I am sure you will win me Mlle. Henriette's friendship.”

Why did she mention that name? It broke the charm which had conquered Daniel. He perceived how weak he had been, and felt ashamed of himself. “Excuse me from answering that point to-night,” he replied, with sudden sternness. “I should like to consider.”

She looked at him stupefied. “What do you mean?” she asked. “Have I removed your doubts and suspicions, or not? Perhaps you wish to consult one of my enemies?”

She spoke in a tone of such profound disdain that Daniel, stung to the quick, forgot the discretion he had intended to observe, and retorted: “Since you insist upon it, Miss Brandon, I must confess that there is one doubt which you have not removed.”

“Which?”

Daniel hesitated, regretting that he had allowed these words to escape him. But he had gone too far now to retract. “I do not understand,” he replied, “how you can marry the Count de Ville-Handry.”

“Why not?”

“You are young, and I am told you are immensely rich. Now, the count is sixty-eight years old.”

She, who had been so daring that nothing seemed likely to disconcert her, now lowered her head like a timid girl fresh from boarding-school, and a crimson flush suffused not merely her face, but even her neck and arms. “You are cruel, sir!” she stammered: “the secret into which you pry is one of those which a girl hardly dares to confide to her mother.”

Daniel's eyes brightened with anticipated triumph, for he fancied he had caught her at last. “Ah, indeed!” said he ironically.

But, without wavering, Miss Brandon replied, “You wish for an explanation; well, let it be so. For your sake, I will lay aside the reserve which girls are taught to retain in such matters. I do not love the Count de Ville-Handry.” Daniel started, for this confession seemed to him the height of imprudence. “I do not love him,—at least, not with real love; and I have never allowed him to hope for such a feeling. Still, I shall be most happy to become his wife. Do not expect me to explain to you what is going on in my mind. I myself hardly understand it as yet. I can give no precise name to the feeling of sympathy which attracts me towards him. I have been captivated by his wit and kindness: his words have an indescribable

charm for me. That is all I can tell you." Daniel could scarcely believe his ears. "And," she continued, "if you must have motives of more ordinary character, I will confess to you that I can no longer endure this life, harassed as I am by such vile slander. M. de Ville-Handry's residence appears to me an asylum, where I shall bury my disappointments and sorrow, and find peace, with a position commanding respect. Ah! you need not be afraid for that great and noble name. I shall bear it worthily and nobly, and shrink from no sacrifice to enhance its splendour. You may say that I am a calculating woman. I dare say I am; but I see nothing mean or disgraceful in my hopes."

Daniel had thought he had confounded her, and it was she who crushed him by her bold frankness; for there was nothing to say, no reasonable objection to make. Fifty out of every hundred marriages in France are contracted under very similar circumstances.

"During the last two years," resumed Miss Brandon, "I have had twenty offers; and among them three or four that would have been acceptable to the daughter of a duchess. I refused them, in spite of Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. Only yesterday, a man of twenty-five, a Gordon-Chalusse, was here at my feet. I sent him off like the others, preferring my dear count. And why?" She remained for a moment buried in thought, her eyes swimming in tears; and, answering apparently her own questions rather than Daniel's, continued,—“Thanks to my beauty, as the world calls it,—a fatal beauty, alas!—I have been admired, courted, overwhelmed with compliments. I am told that I move in the most elegant and polished society in Europe; and yet I have looked in vain for the man whose glance could, even momentarily, disturb the peace of my heart. On all sides I have met with men of similar stereotyped perfection: men whose characters have no more creases than a new coat, all equally eager and gallant: capital card-players, capital talkers, capital dancers, capital horsemen. But I had dreamed of something above the ordinary attainments of society.” She paused, and then with a gesture of energy, and eyes beaming with enthusiasm, she exclaimed, “What I dreamed of was a man of noble heart, with an inflexible will, capable of attempting what others dared not,—what, I do not know, but something grand, perilous, impossible. I dreamed of one of those ambitious men, with a pale brow, a longing look, whose eyes sparkle with genius,—one of those strong men who dictate to the multitude, and who remove mountains by the force of their will. Ah! to repay the love of such a man I would have found treasures of tenderness in my heart, which must remain unapplied, like wealth buried beneath the sea. I would have drunk deep from the cup of hope; my pulse would have kept time with the fever of his excitement. For his sake, I would have made myself small, humble, useful: I would have watched his looks for the shadow of a desire. But how proud I would have been,—I, his wife,—of his success and glory, of the reverence paid him by his admirers, and the hatred of his enemies!”

As she spoke, there was a ring in her voice that would have stirred the heart of a stoic, and the splendour of her beauty seemed to illuminate the room. Gradually, one by one, Daniel's suspicions fell to pieces. Who could have questioned the sincerity of such a defence? As if ashamed of her passing vehemence, it was in a calmer and slower tone that she continued, “Now, sir, you know me better than any other person in this world. You alone have read the innermost heart of Sarah Brandon. And yet I see you to-day for the first time in my life. And yet you are

the first man who has ever dared to speak harshly to me, harsh unto insult. Will you cause me to repent of my frankness? Surely you will not be so cruel. I know you to be a man of honour and high principles; I know how, in order to save a name which you revere, you have risked your prospects in life, the girl you love, and an enormous fortune. Yes, Mlle. de Ville-Handry has made no ordinary choice." And with a gesture of utter despondency she concluded, "And I,—I know my fate."

Then followed a pause, a terrible pause. They were standing face to face, quivering with excitement, their eyes eloquent with deep feeling.

The air was impregnated with intoxicating floral perfumes, charged as it were with all the subtle vapours of passion; and, indeed, so enervating was the atmosphere, that Daniel became almost unconscious of the surroundings: he had lost all control over his mind, the blood was rushing to his head, and his temples throbbed as if with some mysterious delirium.

"Yes," Miss Brandon began once more in a tremulous tone,—“Yes, my fate is sealed. I must become the Countess de Ville-Handry, or I am lost. And once more, sir, I beseech you to induce Mlle. Henriette to receive me like an elder sister. Ah! if I were the woman you think I am, what should I care for Mlle. Henriette and her enmity? You know very well that the count will go on at any hazard. And yet I beg,—I, who am accustomed to command everywhere. What more can I do? Do you want to see me at your feet? Here I am.” And as she said this, she really sank upon her knees; and clutching hold of Daniel’s hands, pressed them against her burning brow. “Great God!” she sighed, “to be refused by him—*by him!*”

Her hair, which had become partially loosened, streamed over Daniel’s hands. He quivered from head to foot; and, leaning forward, raised and held her, half inanimate, with her head resting on his shoulder. “Miss Brandon!” he gasped in a hoarse, low voice. They were so near each other that their breath mingled, and Daniel could feel her bosom throbbing tumultuously against his heart, and burning him as it were with its unnatural heat. Drunk, so to say, with sudden passion, oblivious of everything, he pressed his yearning lips upon those of this strange girl. But with a sudden start she drew back, and cried, “Daniel! you unhappy man!” Then bursting into tears, she stammered, “Go! I beg you, go! I ask for nothing now. If I must be lost, I must.”

With the vehemence of delirium he replied, “Your will be done, Sarah: I am yours. You may count upon me.” And then like a madman he rushed from the room, bounded down the stairs, and finding the front door open, he hurried out into the street.

X.

It was an early winter that year; there was a cold, biting wind, and the opaque clouds hung so low that it seemed as if they nearly touched the house-tops. As the blast whistled through the trees lining the Champs Elysées, and rustled among the shrubbery, Daniel feverishly hastened onward without aim or purpose—solely bent upon flight. But at last the keen wind and prolonged motion restored him to some degree of consciousness, and he realised that he was bareheaded, and scantily clothed—having left both his hat and overcoat at Miss Brandon’s house. Almost simultaneously he remembered that the Count de Ville-Handry was wait-

ing for him in the grand drawing-room, together with Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. What would they say and think? In what an awful predicament he had placed himself! There might have been some means of escaping from this labyrinth, and now, in his folly, he had closed all outlets. It seemed as if he had had some singular, terrible dream; he was like a drunkard, suddenly sobered, and seeking to remember what he has done whilst under the influence of alcohol. One by one he recalled the emotions through which he had passed during that hour just spent with Miss Brandon—an hour of madness which would weigh heavily upon his future fate, and whose sixty minutes had for him been fraught with more experience than all his life so far. What! He had been warned, put upon his guard, fully apprized of all Miss Brandon's devices. De Brévan had acquainted him with the weird power of her eyes: and he himself had caught her that very evening openly deceiving others. And yet, despite all this, like a feeble, helpless fool, he had allowed himself to be fascinated by her. He had forgotten everything,—even his darling Henriette, his sole thought for so many years. “Fool!” he said to himself, “what have I done?”

Unmindful of the persistent blast, and of the snow now beginning to fall, he sat down on the steps of one of the houses at the end of the Rue du Cirque, and, with his elbows on his knees, he pressed his hands to his brow, as if to force his brain to suggest to him some means of salvation. He tried to retrace the various phases of his interview with Miss Brandon in order to find out how, after beginning like a battle, it had ended as a love-scene. And thus recalling to memory all she had told him in her soft, sweet voice, he asked himself if she had not really been slandered. If there was truly anything amiss in her past life, it might be that the fault rested with the equivocal personages watching over her,—Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. What boldness she had displayed in her defence! but also, what lofty nobility! How penetrating was her accent of sincerity when she admitted that she did not love the Count de Ville-Handry with real love—adding that, until now, no man had even succeeded in quickening her pulse! Was she then of marble, delighting only in foolish vanity? No; a thousand times no! The most accomplished artist could never have spoken with that glowing convincing intonation which is the sublime gift of truth alone. Despite all Daniel's efforts, he could not forget her, and he trembled as he remembered certain words which had virtually betrayed the secret of her heart. Could she have said more pointedly, “The only man I could love is yourself?” At this thought Daniel's heart bounded with eager, unspeakable desires; for, after all, he was a man, neither worse nor better than his fellows; and there are but too many men now-a-days who would value a few hours of happiness with such a woman as Miss Brandon more highly than a whole lifetime of pure love beside a chaste and noble woman. “Still, even if she loves me,” he repeated, as his better nature regained the upper hand, “what is it to me? Can I love her—I?”

He then tried to divine what might have happened since his flight from the house. How had Miss Brandon explained his escape? How had she accounted for her own excitement? Influenced by an invincible impulse, he rose and approached the house, and ensconced in the shadow of a doorway opposite, he stood anxiously watching the windows, as if they could tell him what was going on inside. The grand drawing-room was still brilliantly illuminated, and the shadows of people passing to and fro within were cast repeatedly upon the white curtains. At one moment a man

approached one of the windows, and, after looking out, suddenly drew back; Daniel distinctly recognised him as the Count de Ville-Handry. What did it mean? Had Miss Brandon been suddenly taken ill, and were her people anxious about her? Such were Daniel's thoughts, when the *porte cochère* of the house grated on its hinges. A servant threw it wide open, and then a small brougham drawn by a single horse emerged from inside and turned rapidly towards the Champs Elysées. Before this was accomplished, however, the light of one of the lamps affixed to the gateway had illuminated the interior of the vehicle, and, as at the beginning of the evening, Daniel recognised in its occupant—Miss Brandon. The shock was so great that he staggered.

"She has deceived me!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth with rage: "she has treated me like an imbecile, an idiot!" Then suddenly conceiving a strange plan, he added,—"I must know where she is going at four o'clock in the morning. I will follow her."

Unfortunately for him Miss Brandon's coachman had apparently received special orders; for he drove down the avenue as fast as the horse could go, and the animal was an admirable trotter, carefully selected by Sir Tom, who, as previously mentioned, was one of the best judges of horse-flesh in Paris. Still, Daniel was nimble; and the hope of vengeance lent him wonderful strength and speed.

"If I could only meet a cab!" he thought. But no vehicle was to be seen; so with his elbows against his sides, and husbanding his breath, he bounded after the brougham—so successfully, indeed, that for a moment he actually gained ground. When Miss Brandon reached the *Place de la Concorde*, he was only a few yards behind her carriage. But here the coachman touched up his horse, which suddenly increased its pace, crossed the place, and trotted swiftly up the *Rue Royale*. Daniel felt his breath failing him, and a stitch in his side, growing more acute every moment, impeded his further progress. He was on the point of abandoning the pursuit, when he perceived a cab approaching him from the *Madeleine*, the driver half-asleep on the box. Throwing himself before the horses, he cried: "Driver, a hundred francs for you if you follow that brougham!"

But the driver, suddenly roused in the middle of the street by a man with a bare head, and in evening costume, and who moreover offered him such an enormous fare, thought that some drunkard was trying to play him a practical joke, and furiously replied, "Look out, you rascal! Get out of the way, or I'll drive over you." And so saying, he whipped up his horse with such effect that Daniel would have been driven over if he had not promptly jumped aside. This incident, brief as it may seem in words, had occupied some time, and when he looked for the brougham, he perceived that it was already turning into the boulevard. It would have been arrant folly to attempt continuing pursuit. He must submit to his defeat. What could he do? It occurred to him that he might wake up *Maxime*, and ask him for advice. But no,—fate was against him, and he gave up the idea. He walked slowly home, and threw himself into an arm-chair, determined not to go to bed till he had found some means of extricating himself from the consequences of his folly. But he had now spent two days in a state of scarcely imaginable excitement and anxiety. He had not closed his eyes for forty-eight hours, and despite himself, he could not keep awake. Thus he fell asleep, dreaming that he was prosecuting his investigations concerning Miss Brandon's antecedents, and that he had found the right track at last.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, chilled and stiffened : for he had not changed his clothes on returning home, and his fire had gone out. His first impulse was one of wrath against himself for having slept. What ! he had succumbed so easily ?—he, a sailor, who remembered well having remained forty, and even sixty, hours on deck when his vessel was threatened by a hurricane ? Had his peaceful and monotonous office life during the last two years weakened him to such a point ?

He did not realise that the greatest physical fatigue is trifling in comparison with deep moral excitement, which at times shakes the human system to its very foundations. However, whilst he busied himself in kindling a large fire, he grew conscious that the rest had done him good. The last evil effects of his excitement the night before had passed away ; the charm that had fascinated him was broken ; and he once more felt master of all his faculties. His folly now seemed to him so utterly inexplicable, that, if he had but tasted a glass of lemonade at Miss Brandon's house, he would have been inclined to believe they had given him one of those drugs which set the brain on fire, and produce a kind of delirium. But he had taken nothing, so that he must look elsewhere for the cause of his weakness. After all the cause was nothing, it was the consequences that required his attention, and he had every reason to fear they would be fatal. Whilst he was busy speculating as to the future, his servant entered the room carrying a hat and an overcoat on his arm. "Sir," said the valet, smiling maliciously, "you forgot these things at the house where you spent the evening yesterday. A servant on horseback has just brought them, together with this letter, and is waiting for an answer."

Daniel took the letter handed to him, and for a minute or more examined the direction. The handwriting was a woman's, small and delicate, and having no affinity whatever with the hideous long angular style of penmanship which English and American ladies habitually affect. At last he tore open the envelope, whence escaped a delicate but penetrating perfume, which he had inhaled, as he well remembered, in Miss Brandon's rooms. The letter was indeed from her, and on the top of the page appeared her name, Sarah, in small blue Gothic characters. "Is it really so, O Daniel?" she wrote, "that you are entirely mine, and that I can count upon you ! You told me so to-night. Do you still remember your promises ?"

Daniel was thunderstruck. Miss Brandon had told him that she was imprudence personified ; and here she gave him positive proof of it. Might not these few lines become a terrible weapon against her ? Did they not admit of the most extraordinary interpretation ? He was roused from his reverie by his servant asking, "What shall I tell the man, sir ?"

"Ah, wait !" answered Daniel angrily, and sitting down at his writing-table, he penned the following lines :—"Certainly, Miss Brandon, I remember the promises you extorted from me when I was not master of myself : I remember them but too well." At this point a strange thought flashed through his mind, and he abruptly paused. What ! After being caught in the very first trap she had set for his inexperience, was he to risk falling into a second one ? He tore his unfinished letter to pieces, and, turning to his servant, exclaimed, "Tell the man I'm out ; and make haste and get me a cab !" Then, when he was once more alone, he murmured, "Yes, it is better so. It is much better to leave Miss Brandon in uncertainty. She cannot even suspect that I know of her driving out this morning. She imagines I am still in the dark ; well, let her believe it."

Still, this letter of hers seemed to presage some fresh intrigue, the idea of

which troubled Daniel exceedingly. Miss Brandon was certain of achieving her end: what more did she want? What other mysterious aim could she have in view? "Ah! I cannot make it out," sighed Daniel. "I must consult de Brévan." On his writing-table, in an unfinished state, lay the important and urgent work which the minister had entrusted to him. But the minister, the department, his position, his preference,—all these considerations weighed nothing whatever at such a moment. After swiftly changing his clothes, he hurried down-stairs, and whilst driving to his friend's house, pondered over the surprise that Maxime would undoubtedly evince at the news he had to communicate. When Daniel reached the Rue Lafitte he found M. de Brévan standing in his shirt-sleeves before an immense marble table, covered with pots and bottles, combs, brushes, and sponges, pincers, polishers, and files, engaged, in fact, in a most elaborate toilette. If Maxime in some degree expected Daniel, he had certainly not expected him so early, for his features assumed an expression which seemed to prohibit all confidential talk. But Daniel was too preoccupied to notice this. He shook hands with his friend, sank heavily into an arm-chair, and exclaimed, "I went to see Miss Brandon last night. She made me promise all she wanted. I cannot imagine how it came about!"

"Let us hear," said M. de Brévan.

Without the least hesitation Daniel then related how Miss Brandon had taken him into her boudoir, and exculpated herself from all complicity in Malgat's defalcations by showing him the letters the wretched man had written. "Strange letters!" said he, "which, if authentic—"

M. de Brévan shrugged his shoulders. "You were warned," he said, "and yet you promised all she wanted! Don't you think she might have made you sign your own death-sentence?"

"But Kergrist?" exclaimed Daniel. "Kergrist's brother is her friend."

"I dare say. But do you imagine he is any cleverer than you are?"

Although he was by no means satisfied, Daniel proceeded with his narrative, describing his amazement when Miss Brandon told him that she did not really love the Count de Ville-Handry.

"Ah! ha!" exclaimed Maxime, with a loud ironical laugh. "Of course! And then she went on, telling you that she had never yet loved anybody, having vainly looked for the man she dreamed of. She so described the phoenix to you, that you asked yourself, 'What does she mean? Why, she must mean me!' And that idea tickled you prodigiously. Then she threw herself at your feet, and you raised her up; she had fainted; she sobbed like a distressed dove in your arms; and you,—well, you lost your head."

Daniel was overcome. "How could you know that?" he stammered.

Maxime could not look his friend in the face, but his voice was as steady as ever as he replied, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "I guess it. Didn't I tell you I knew Miss Brandon? She has only one card in her hand; but it suffices; it always makes a trick."

To be deceived, and made ridiculous, is one of those misfortunes which we confess to ourselves; but it is a very different matter to hear another person relate our ill-luck, and laugh at our stupidity. Daniel could not conceal his impatience, and dryly responded, "If I have been Miss Brandon's dupe, my dear Maxime, I am so no longer, as you yourself can see."

"Ah, ah! indeed?"

"No, not in the least. And, thanks to her; for she herself destroyed my illusions."

"Pshaw!"

"Unconsciously, of course. After running away from her like a fool, I was wandering about the streets near her house, when I saw her drive away in her brougham."

"Oh, come, now!"

"I saw her distinctly. It was four o'clock in the morning, mind!"

"Is it possible? And what did you do?"

"I followed her."

M. de Brévan nearly dropped the brush with which he was polishing his finger-nails, but he mastered his confusion so promptly that Daniel did not perceive it. "Ah! you followed her," he exclaimed in a voice which all his efforts could not completely steady. "Then, of course, you know where she went."

"Unfortunately no; for she drove so fast, that, quick as I am, I lost sight of her near the Madeleine."

M. de Brévan was certainly breathing more freely as he rejoined, "How provoking, you lost a fine opportunity. However, I am by no means astonished that you are at last enlightened."

"Oh! I am so; you may believe me. And yet—"

"Well, yet?"

"Daniel hesitated, as if in fear of another sardonic smile from Maxime. However, making an effort, he resumed, "Well, I am asking myself whether all that Miss Brandon says about her childhood, family, and fortune might not, after all, be true."

Maxime assumed the expression of a sensible man who is forced to listen to a lunatic's nonsense.

"You think I am absurd," said Daniel. "Perhaps I am; but then, pray explain to me how is it that Miss Brandon, who, if she is an adventuress, must be anxious to conceal her past, has pointed out to me the very means of ascertaining everything about her, and even of learning the precise amount of her income? America is not so far off!"

M. de Brévan's face no longer expressed astonishment: he looked absolutely bewildered. "What!" cried he, "do you seriously think of undertaking a trip to America?"

"Why not?"

"Ah, my dear friend, excuse my saying it, but really you are altogether too simple for your age. What! haven't you yet been able to divine the meaning of that suggestion? And yet it is patent enough. When Miss Brandon saw you, and had taken your measure, she said to herself, 'This excellent young man is in my way, he must try a change of air a few thousand miles off.' And thereupon she suggested to you that pleasant trip to America."

After what Daniel had heard of Miss Brandon's character, this explanation sounded by no means improbable. Still, as he was not quite satisfied, he exclaimed, "Whether I go or stay, the wedding will still take place, so that she has no real interest in my being abroad. Believe me, Maxime, there is something else underneath. Besides this marriage, Miss Brandon must be pursuing some other plan."

"What plan?"

"Ah! That's what I can't find out. But, depend upon it, I am not mistaken. I need no better evidence than the fact that she wrote to me this morning."

"What! She has written to you?" exclaimed Maxime, starting up.

"Yes: and it is that cursed letter, more than anything else, that brings

me here. Just read it; and, if you can understand its meaning, you are more fortunate than I am."

M. de Brévan read the five lines of Miss Brandon's missive at a glance. "It is incomprehensible," said he, turning very pale. "A note, and such an indiscreet one too, from a woman who never writes!" Glancing at Daniel as if he wished to penetrate his innermost thoughts, he slowly added, "Suppose she really loved you, what would you say then?"

"It is hardly generous for you to make sport of me, Maxime," answered Daniel, with a look of disgust. "I may be a bit of a fool, but I am not such a fool as to be conceited to that point."

"That's no answer to my question," rejoined de Brévan; "and I repeat it. What would you say?"

"I would say, that I execrate her!"

"Oh! oh! If you hate her so bitterly, you are very near loving her."

"I despise her; and without esteem—"

"That's an old story; but it's no impediment."

"Finally, you know how fondly I love Mlle. de Ville-Handry."

"Certainly I do: but it's not the same thing."

M. de Brévan had at last finished his careful toilet. Donning a dressing-gown, he now adjourned with Daniel into his sitting-room, where, ensconcing himself in an easy-chair, and assuming the professional air of a physician questioning a patient, he asked, "And what have you said in reply?"

"Nothing."

"That's right; and for the future I advise you to follow the same plan. Don't say a word. Can you do anything to prevent Miss Brandon from carrying out her purpose? No! Let her go on, then."

"But—"

"Let me finish. It is not only your own interest to act in this fashion, but Mlle. Henriette's interest as well. You will be inconsolable on the day you are parted; but you, yourself, will at least be free to act. Mlle. Henriette, on the other hand, will be compelled to live under the same roof with Miss Brandon; and you don't know what a stepmother can do to torture her husband's child." Daniel trembled. He had already thought of that contingency, and the idea had made him shudder. "For the present," continued de Brévan, "the most important thing is to find out how your flight has been explained. We may be able to draw our conclusions from what has been said on the subject."

"I'll try to find that out at once," replied Daniel; and, after shaking hands with Maxime, he hurried down-stairs to his cab, and bade the driver convey him as fast as possible to the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion.

The count was at home—walking up and down his study in the most excited manner. Something serious had evidently occurred, for although it was nearly noon he had not yet entrusted himself to his valet's artistic hands. Directly Daniel was ushered into the room he stopped short, and, crossing his arms over his chest, angrily exclaimed, "Ah! here you are, M. Champcey. Well, you are behaving nicely!"

"I, count? How so?"

"How so? Who else overwhelmed Miss Sarah with insults at the very time when she was trying to explain everything to you? Who else, ashamed of his scandalous conduct, ran away, not daring to remain in the house?" What had the count been told? certainly not the truth. "And do you know, M. Champcey," he continued, "what was the effect of your brutality? Miss Brandon was seized with such a terrible nervous attack,

that they had to send the carriage for a doctor. You unlucky man, you might have killed her! Of course, I was not allowed to enter her room; but from the drawing-room even I could at times hear her painful moans and sobs. It was only at eight o'clock this morning that she grew calmer and was able to rest; and then Mrs Brian, taking pity on my grief, allowed me to see her, sleeping like an infant."

Daniel listened to this narrative in a state of amazement, stupefied, so to say, by the impudence displayed by Sir Tom and Mrs Brian, and hardly able to understand the count's astonishing credulity. "How abominable!" thought he. "Here am I acting, despite myself, as Miss Brandon's accomplice. Must I actually aid her in obtaining possession of this unlucky man?" But what could he do? Should he speak? Should he tell the count, that if he had really heard moans and sobs, they were certainly not uttered by Miss Brandon? Should he tell him that, while he was dying with anxiety, his chaste innamorata was driving about Paris, Heaven knows where and to whom? The thought of doing so occurred to Daniel. But what would have been the good of it? Would the count believe him? Most probably not. He would only increase his entanglement, which was already complicated enough. Besides, it was impossible for him to tell the whole truth and show that letter he carried in his pocket. Still, he tried to excuse himself, and began,—“Believe me, count, I am too much of a gentleman to insult a woman.”

“Oh, pray, spare me a useless rigmarole,” cried M. de Ville-Handry, rudely interrupting him. “Besides, I don't blame you particularly. I know the heart of man well enough to realize that you did not so much follow your own inspirations as my daughter's suggestions.” Such an idea on the count's part was ominous, and Daniel hastily made another effort at explanation. But the count stamped his foot and fiercely cried, “No more! I mean to put a stop to all this absurd opposition at once. Am I no longer master in my own house? Am I to be treated like a servant, and laughed at into the bargain? Ah! I'll show you all who's the master.” Growing a trifle calmer after this outburst, he continued—“Ah, M. Champeey! I didn't expect this from you. Poor Sarah! To think that I could not spare her such a humiliation! But it is the last; and this very day, as soon as she wakes, she shall know that all is ended. I have just sent for my daughter to tell her that the wedding-day is fixed. All the formalities are fulfilled. We have the necessary papers—”

He paused, for at this moment Henriette entered the room. “You wish to speak to me, papa?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Greeting Daniel with a sweet glance, Henriette approached the count, and offered him her forehead to kiss; but he waived her back, and assuming an air of supreme solemnity, exclaimed, “I have sent for you, my daughter, to inform you that to-morrow fortnight I shall marry Miss Brandon.” Henriette must have been prepared for something of the kind, for she did not evince any great emotion. Her feelings only betrayed themselves in her sudden pallor, and the ray of wrath which for one second shot from her eyes. “Under these circumstances,” continued the count, it is not proper or decent that you should remain a stranger to the angel who is to be your mother, and I shall therefore introduce you to her this very afternoon.”

“The young girl gently shook her head, and replied, “No!”

“What!” cried the count, flushing crimson, “You dare! What would you say if I threatened to carry you forcibly to Miss Brandon's house?”

“I should say, father, that that is the only way to make me go there.”

Her attitude was firm, though not defiant. She spoke in a calm, gentle voice, but it was evident that she had taken an unchangeable resolution.

"Then you detest, you envy Miss Brandon?" rejoined M. de Ville-Handry, quite amazed at the audacity shewn by this usually timid girl.

"I, father? Why should I? I only know that she cannot become the Countess de Ville-Handry, after filling all Paris with evil reports."

"Who has told you so? M. Champcey, no doubt."

"Everybody has told me so, father."

"So, because she has been slandered, the poor girl—"

"I am willing to think she is innocent; but the Countess de Ville-Handry should be above suspicion." As she spoke Henriette raised herself to her full height; and then in a louder voice, she added, "You are master here, father, and can do as you choose. But I—I owe it to myself, and to my mother's memory, to protest by all the means in my power; and I shall protest."

The count stammered and stared. The blood was rising to his head. "At last I know and understand you, Henriette," cried he. "I was not mistaken. It was you who sent M. Champcey to Miss Brandon, to insult her at her own house."

"Sir!" interrupted Daniel in a threatening tone.

But the count could not be restrained; and, with his eyes almost starting from their sockets, he continued,— "Yes, I read your innermost heart, Henriette. You are afraid of losing a part of your inheritance."

Stung by this insult, Henriette rejoined, "But don't you see, father, that it is this woman who wants your fortune, and that she does not love you, and cannot do so."

"Why, if you please?"

The Count de Ville-Handry had asked this question of his daughter once before, and in almost the same words. Then she had not dared to answer him; but now, insulted by a woman she despised, and carried away by her feelings, she momentarily forgot all filial respect. Grasping her father's arm and drawing him towards a looking-glass, she exclaimed in a hoarse voice, "You ask my why? Well, look there! look at yourself!"

If the count had contented himself with trusting nature he would have looked barely sixty—or some ten years younger than he really was; but his partiality for the artifices of the toilet table had spoilt everything; and on this occasion, with his scanty hair half white and half dyed, with the rouge and paint of yesterday cracked and fallen away in places, he was certainly a sorry spectacle indeed. Did he see himself in the looking-glass as he really was,—hideous? At all events he turned livid; and, with bitter, concentrated rage, exclaimed, "You infamous girl." Then, as she burst into sobs, terrified as much by her own audacity as by his words, he continued—"No acting please. At four o'clock precisely I shall send for you. If I find you dressed, and ready to accompany me to Miss Brandon's house, all right. If not, M. Champcey has been here for the last time in his life; and you will never—do you hear?—never be his wife. Now I will leave you alone together; you can reflect." So saying he left the room, closing the door so violently that the whole house seemed to shake.

No more hope;—both Henriette and Daniel were crushed by this certain conviction. The crisis could no longer be postponed. In a few hours' time the mischief would be done. Daniel was the first to shake off the stupor of despair; and, taking Henriette by the hand, he asked her, "You have heard what your father said. What will you do?"

"What I said I would, whatever it may cost me."

"But could you not—"

"Yield?" exclaimed the young girl. And, looking at Daniel with grieved surprise, she added, "Would you really dare to give me that advice,—you who had only to look at Miss Brandon to lose your self-control so far as to overwhelm her with insults?"

"Henriette, I swear—"

"And this to such an extent that my father accused you of having done so at my bidding. Ah, you have been very imprudent, Daniel!"

The unhappy man wrung his hands with despair. How terribly he was punished for a moment's forgetfulness! He had already blamed himself for not revealing the infamous trickery practised on the count by Sir Tom and Mrs Brian while Miss Brandon was driving about Paris. And now he was in a still more difficult position: he could not even give a glimpse of the true state of things. He made no rejoinder; and Henriette gloried in his silence. "You see," she said, "that, if your heart condemns me, your reason and your conscience approve of my decision."

Without replying, he rose and paced the room like a wild beast searching for some outlet from its cage. He felt he was caught, hemmed in on all sides, that he could do nothing,—nothing at all. "Ah, we must surrender!" he exclaimed at last, in a tone of bitter grief: "we must do so, for we are helpless. Let us give up the struggle: reason demands it. We have done enough; we have done our duty." Trembling with emotion, he spoke on for some time, bringing forward the most conclusive arguments he could think of one by one, love lending him the while all its persuasive power. And at last it looked as if Henriette's determination were giving way, as if she were beginning to hesitate. It was so; but she still struggled against her own emotion, and exclaimed in a low tone, "No doubt, Daniel, you think I am not yet wretched enough." And giving him a long, anxious glance, she added, "Say no more, or I shall begin to fear that you dread the interval that must elapse till we can be united, and that you doubt me—or yourself."

He blushed, finding himself thus half detected; but still impelled by his presentiments, he insisted,—"No, I do not doubt; but I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of your having to live under the same roof with Miss Brandon, Elgin, and Mrs Brian. Since this abominable adventuress must triumph, let us fly. I have a respectable old kinswoman of mine living in Anjou who will be very proud to offer you her hospitality."

Henriette raised her hand to interrupt him. "In other words," said she, "I, who risk my happiness in order to avoid a blot upon the name of Ville-Handry, I ought to tarnish it in an almost ineffaceable manner. That cannot be. I occupy a post of honour which I shall not abandon. The more formidable Miss Brandon is, the more it becomes my duty to remain here in order to watch over my father." At these words Daniel trembled, for he now remembered what M. de Brévan had told him of Miss Brandon's devices for getting rid of troublesome people. Did Henriette's instinct lead her to anticipate a crime? No, not such a crime, at least. "You will understand my decision all the better," she continued, "when I tell you what a strange discovery I have made. This morning a gentleman, who said he was a lawyer, called here, and asked to see the Count de Ville-Handry, with whom, he declared, he had a most important appointment. The servants told him their master was out; whereupon he became angry, declared it wasn't possible, and talked so loud, that I came to see what was the matter. Directly he saw me, and found out who I was, he quieted

down, and begged me to take charge of the draft of a legal paper which he had been directed to prepare, and which he desired me to hand to my father. I promised to do so; but, as I was carrying the paper up-stairs to lay it on my father's writing-table, I happened to look at it. Do you know what it was? The statutes of a new speculative company, of which my father was to be chairman."

"Good heavens! Is it possible?"

"Yes, unfortunately. Just under the title of the company I read "The Count de Ville-Handry, Chairman and Chief Director," after which all his other titles and dignities were enumerated, together with the high offices he has filled, and the French and foreign decorations he has received."

Daniel could no longer doubt. "Ah!" said he, "we knew that they would try to obtain possession of your father's fortune, and now we have proof of it. But what can we do against their cunning manœuvres?"

Bowing her head, she answered in a tone of resignation, "I have heard it said that the mere presence of an inoffensive child is often sufficient to intimidate the boldest criminals, and frighten them away. If God wills it so, that shall be my part." Then, as Daniel tried once more to insist, she resumed, "You forget, my dear friend, that this is, perhaps for many years, the last time we shall ever be alone together. Let us think of the future. I have secured the services of one of my maids, to whom you must direct your letters. Her name is Clarisse Pontois. If any grave, unforeseen emergency should necessitate our seeing one another, Clarisse will bring you the key of the little garden-gate, and you will come."

Both of them had their eyes filled with tears; and the anguish of their hearts increased as the hands of the clock revolved round the dial. They knew they would have to part; and could they hope ever to meet again? It had just struck four o'clock, when M. de Ville-Handry reappeared. Stung to the quick by what he called his daughter's insulting remarks, he had stimulated his valet's zeal with such effect that the latter had evidently surpassed himself in the arrangement of his master's hair, and especially in freshening his complexion. "Well, Henriette?" asked the count.

"My decision remains unchanged, father."

The count was probably prepared for this answer, for he momentarily succeeded in controlling his temper. "Once more, Henriette," he said, "consider! Don't decide rashly, relying simply upon odious slanders." So saying he drew from his pocket a photograph, gave it a loving look, and handing it to his daughter, added,— "Here is Miss Brandon's portrait. Look at it, and tell me if the woman to whom God has given such a charming face and such sublime eyes can have a bad heart."

Henriette examined the likeness attentively, and, returning it to her father, coldly replied, "This woman is certainly beautiful. Now I can explain to myself that new company of which you are to be the chairman."

The count turned pale at this unexpected answer: "Unhappy child! Unhappy child!" he cried, "You dare insult an angel?"

Mad with rage, he had raised his hand, and was about to strike his daughter, when Daniel seized his wrist and threateningly exclaimed, "Ah, sir, have a care! have a care!"

Giving the young officer a look of concentrated hatred, the count freed himself, and pointed to the door. "M. Champey," he said, "I order you to leave this house instantly; and I forbid your ever entering it again. My servants will be informed, that, if one of them ever allows you to cross the threshold of this house, he will be instantly dismissed. Go, sir!"

XI.

FOUR-AND-TWENTY hours after Daniel, pale and staggering, turned his back on the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion, he had not yet recovered from this last blow. The situation was desperate indeed. He had made a mortal enemy of the man whom it was his greatest interest to conciliate ; and the latter, who of his own accord would have parted with him regretfully, had now turned him disgracefully out of his house. Daniel could hardly account to himself for the way in which all this had happened. Indeed, when he recalled the events of the last few days, he asked himself whether he were dreaming or awake. His own conduct had been pitiful, and then fate had been against him,—Fate, the blind goddess which we all accuse when frightened with our own responsibility. He was still cursing fortune, and shrinking from contact with the future, when, to his great surprise, a letter reached him from Henriette. Thus it was she who anticipated him, and who, realising how desperate he must be, had sufficient tact to write to him almost cheerfully. “Immediately after your departure, my dear Daniel, my father ordered me to my own room, and decided that I should stay there till I became more reasonable. I know I shall remain there a long time. What we need most of all, oh, my only friend ! is courage. Will you have as much as your Henriette ?”

“She is right,” exclaimed Daniel, moved to tears ; “what we need is courage,—I must be brave.” And with the view of shaking off his despair, and recovering that calmness which would be requisite when the hour of action sounded, he vowed he would return to work. But this was more easily said than done, for he found that he could not divert his thoughts from his misfortunes. He was disgusted now with the studies which had once delighted him. It seemed as if the balance of his life was utterly destroyed. Thus he still led the existence of a desperate man. Early every morning he hurried to M. de Brévan, and remained in his company as long as possible. When left to himself, he wandered at hap-hazard along the boulevards, or up the Champs Elysées. He dined early, hurried home again, and donning a rough overcoat which he had worn on board ship, went to roam round about the palace of his beloved, hoping that by some chance he might obtain a glimpse of her. He was dying of inaction ; and yet, what could he do ? His situation was not unlike that of the purchaser of a lottery ticket, who is constrained to cross his arms and wait till the prizes are drawn to know his fate. He had spent a week or so in this condition, when one morning, just as he was going out, his bell rang. He went to the door, and was confronted by a lady, who, without saying a word, swiftly walked in, and promptly shut the door behind her. Although she was enveloped in a long cloak which completely hid her figure, and wore a thick veil before her face, Daniel recognized her at once. “Miss Brandon !” he exclaimed.

In the meantime she had raised her veil. “Yes, it is I,” she replied, “risking another slander in addition to all the others that have been raised against me, Daniel.”

Amazed at a step which seemed to him the height of imprudence, he remained standing in the ante-chamber, and did not even think of inviting Miss Brandon to enter his sitting-room. She entered it of her own accord, however ; and when he had followed her, she resumed :—“I came,

sir, to ask you what you have done with the promise you gave me the other night at my house?" A pause followed, and as Daniel did not reply, she continued—"Come, I see you are like all the others. When men pledge their word to other men, who are a match for them, they consider it a point of honour to keep it; but if the promise is given to a woman, they toss it aside, and boast of having done so." Whilst she was speaking, Daniel could scarcely control himself, but she pretended not to notice his agitation, and coldly pursued: "I—I have a better memory than you, sir; and I mean to prove it to you. I know what has happened at M. de Ville-Handry's house: he has told me everything. You allowed yourself to be carried away so far as to raise your hand against him."

"He was going to strike his daughter, and I withheld his arm."

"No, sir! my dear count is incapable of such violence; and yet his own daughter had dared to taunt him with his weakness, pretending that he had been induced by me to establish a speculative company." Daniel made no rejoinder, so she continued; "And you—you allowed Mlle. Henriette to say all these absurd offensive things. The idea of me inducing the count to engage in an enterprise where money might be lost! What interest could I have in doing so?" Her voice began to tremble; and her beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Interest!" she resumed. "Money! The world can think of no other motive now-a-days. Money! I have enough of it. If I marry the count, you know why I do it,—you! And you also know that it depended, and perhaps, at this moment, still depends, upon one single man whether I break off that match this very day or not." As she spoke she looked at him in a manner which would all but have caused a statue to tremble on its pedestal.

But he, with his heart full of hatred, retained his previous frigid manner, enjoying the revenge which was thus presented to him. "I will believe whatever you wish to say," he replied in a mocking tone, "if you will answer me a single question."

"Ask, sir."

"The other night, when I left you, where did you go in your carriage?"

He expected she would become confused, turn pale, and stammer. Not at all. "Ah! you know that?" she said, with an accent of admirable candour. "Ah! I committed almost as imprudent an act as I am doing now. Suppose some fool only saw me leave your rooms?"

Excuse me, but that is no answer. Where did you go?" And as she remained silent, surprised by Daniel's firmness, he added, sneeringly, "Then you confess it would be madness to believe you? Let us break off here, and pray God that I may be able to forget all the wrong you have done me."

Miss Brandon's beautiful eyes filled with tears of grief or rage. Folding her hands she exclaimed, in a suppliant tone, "I beg you, M. Champcey, grant me only five minutes. I must speak to you. If you knew—"

He could not lay hands on a woman to turn her out, so making her a low bow, he withdrew into his bedroom, closing the door behind him. Then at once applying his eye to the keyhole, he perceived Miss Brandon, whose features were convulsed with rage, threaten him with her clenched hand, and hastily leave the room. "She was going to dig another pit for me," thought Daniel. And the idea that he had avoided it made him, for at least some hours, forget his sorrow.

On the following day, however, on returning home from one of his usual rambles, he found an official package awaiting him. It contained two letters, one of which informed him that he was promoted to the rank of a lieutenant;

while the other ordered him to report four days hence at Rochfort, on board the frigate "Conquest," now lying in the roadstead, and waiting for two battalions of marines to be transferred to Cochin China. Daniel had for long years, and with all a young man's eager ambition, desired the promotion now granted him—the first *étape* towards distinguished rank. But now that his oft-repeated wishes were realised, far from experiencing delight, he almost gave way to a feeling of despair. For with the news of his promotion came the fatal order to a distant land. Why was such an order sent to him? He occupied at the Ministry a post in which he could render valuable services, while so many of his comrades, idly waiting in port, were anxiously watching for a chance to go into active service. "Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, as a fresh thought filled his heart with rage, "Miss Brandon has had a hand in this, I ought to have seen it at once." She had begun by having him banished from the Count de Ville-Handry's house, so that he and Henriette might neither meet nor speak together, and now she was intent on raising another barrier between them—one of those obstacles which no lover's ingenuity could overcome,—a thousand miles of ocean. "No, no!" he cried in his anguish, "It shall not be. Rather give up my career,—rather send in my resignation."

Hence, on the following morning he donned his uniform, determined to lay the matter, first of all, before the officer who was his immediate superior, and resolved, if he did not succeed with him, to apply to the minister in person. Daniel's superior was a worthy old captain, an excellent man in reality, but who had so long assumed the manner of a stern official, that he had finished by altogether becoming what he merely wished to appear. When Daniel entered his office, he fancied he came to inform him of his promotion, so making a great effort to smile, he hailed him with these words, "Well, Lieut. Champcey, we are satisfied, I hope?" But perceiving immediately afterwards that Daniel did not wear the epaulets of his new rank, he added,—“Why, how's that, lieutenant? Perhaps you have not yet heard—”

"I beg your pardon, captain," answered Daniel.

"Why on earth, then, have you no epaulets?" rejoined the official, frowning, as if he thought such carelessness augured ill for the service.

Daniel excused himself as well as he could, which was very little, and then boldly approached the purpose of his visit. "I have received an order for active service."

"I know,—on board 'The Conquest,' now in the roadstead at Rochfort, and bound for Cochin China."

"I have to be at my post in four days."

"And you think the time too short? It is short. But impossible to grant you ten minutes more."

"I don't ask for leave of absence, captain: I want the favour—to be allowed to keep my place here."

The old officer could hardly retain his seat. "You would prefer not to go on board ship," he exclaimed, "the very day after your promotion? Ah, come, you are mad!"

Daniel shook his head sadly. "Believe me, captain," he replied, "I obey the most imperative duty."

Leaning back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, the captain seemed as if he were looking for some such duty. "Is it your family that keeps you?" he suddenly asked.

"I have no family."

"Are you going to be married immediately?"

"Unfortunately, no!"

"Perhaps your fortune is in danger?"

"No, captain."

"Then what the devil do you mean with your imperative duty?" cried the old officer; adding, in his gruffest tone, "You mean no doubt that your position here is more agreeable than service on board ship. I understand it. You come to the office at eleven o'clock; if the weather is cold, you have a nice warm room to shelter you. Even supposing that there is anything to do, you take it easy; and at five o'clock you are free. In the evening you can stroll along the boulevards; you have your *café*, your friends, and your favourite theatre. All that is no doubt a great deal more pleasant than having to pace deck in the midst of a gale. Finally, to crown everything, you have no doubt some pretty little friend who says she loves you dearly, and begins to weep like a Magdalen at the mere thought of your leaving her."

"But, captain—"

"Silence, sir! That is the universal story with you young officers; as soon as you have been six months in Paris, nothing can move you away again. Upon my word, when people prefer living like private citizens, they ought to change their profession. In the meantime, however, you are a sailor; you have received your orders; and you must go. You have still three days to make your arrangements, and say good-bye."

This meant that Daniel might retire, but the young officer was determined to carry matters to extremes. "Excuse me for one moment, captain," said he. "If my place can't really be filled by one of my comrades, I shall be compelled to send in my resignation."

"I told you you were a fool!" furiously ejaculated the old official, bounding from his chair.

"It is a matter of life and death with me, captain," pleaded Daniel. "And if you only knew my reasons; if I could tell them—"

"Reasons which can't be told are always bad ones. I insist upon what I have told you."

"Then, captain, I shall be compelled, to my infinite sorrow, to insist upon offering my resignation."

The old sailor's brow grew darker and darker. "Your resignation, your resignation!" he growled. "You talk of it very lightly. It remains to be seen whether it will be accepted. 'The Conquest' is not sailing on a pleasure-party: she is sent out to take part in a serious campaign, and will probably be absent for some time. We have unpleasant complications in Cochin China, and are sending out reinforcements. You are still in France; but are actually under orders to meet the enemy. Now, men don't resign in the face of the enemy, Lieut. Champcey!"

Daniel turned very pale. "You are severe, captain," he said.

"I have no idea, I assure you, of being gentle; and if my severity can induce you to change your mind—"

"Unfortunately, I cannot alter my decision."

The old officer rose, and paced the room, giving vent to his anger in oaths of various kinds; then suddenly halting in front of Daniel, he drily remarked, "If that is so, the case is serious: I must report it to the minister in person. What time is it? Eleven o'clock. Come here again at half-past twelve. I shall have settled the matter then."

Quite certain that his superior would say nothing in his favour, Daniel

retired, and was hurrying out of the building, down a narrow passage, when he heard a voice calling him by name. On looking up he found himself face to face with a couple of comrades, young fellows of his own age, with whom he had been most intimate at the Naval Academy. "So you are our superior now?" said one of them; and then, in all sincerity, they both began to congratulate him on his promotion, expressing their delight that he should be distinguished in accordance with his merits. Their compliments and praises galled Daniel excessively. Each of their good wishes was in reality a stroke of sarcasm. "You are going out as a lieutenant," said one of them at last, "and no doubt you will come back a captain."

"But I am not going out," replied Daniel fiercely; "I have handed in my resignation." And leaving his two friends looking at each other in amazement, he strode rapidly away. He had certainly not foreseen all these difficulties; and in his wrath he accused his superior of injustice and tyranny. "I must stay in Paris; and I will stay," he said to himself. Reflection, far from calming him, only excited him the more. On leaving home he had only intended to offer his resignation as an extreme measure, but now he was determined to leave the service, no matter what the minister might say. Had he not an ample income of his own? and could he not always find honourable employment? This course would be far preferable to continuing in a profession where a man is never his own master, but always liable to be ordered, at a moment's warning, to heaven knows what part of the world. Thus did he reason while lurching in the neighbourhood; and when he returned to the Ministry, shortly after noon, he already looked upon himself as no longer belonging to the navy.

It was the audience hour, and the ante-room was crowded with officers of every rank, some in uniform, and others in civilian costume. The conversation was very animated, for Daniel could hear the hum of voices from the vestibule. He entered the ante-chamber, however, and at once all became silent. Plainly enough the assembled officers had been talking about him. Additional evidence of this was furnished by the forced smiles and cautious glances with which he was received. "What can it mean?" he asked himself, inwardly disturbed.

At this moment a young fellow in civilian dress, with whom Daniel was unacquainted, called out across the room to an old officer in a seedy uniform, — a lean, sunburnt, wrinkled old seadog, whose eyes bore traces of recent ophthalmia—"Why do you stop, lieutenant? We were much interested, I assure you."

The officer appealed to hesitated for a moment, as if he were making up his mind to perform a disagreeable duty, and then resumed: "Well, we got there, convinced that we had taken all necessary precautions, and that there was, consequently, nothing to fear—fine precautions they proved! In the course of a week the whole crew was laid up; while as for the staff, little Bertram and myself were the only officers able to appear on deck. Moreover, my eyes were in a state. You see what they are now. The captain was the first to die, and the same evening five sailors followed suit, and seven the next day. The day after we lost our first lieutenant and two non-commissioned officers. The like was never seen before."

Daniel turned to his neighbour. "Who is that officer?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Dutac of 'The Valorous,' just returned from Cochin China."

Light was dawning in Daniel's mind: "When did 'The Valorous' come in?" he asked again.

"She made the port of Brest six days ago."

"And so, you see," continued the old lieutenant, "we had heavy losses out there. The fighting wasn't of so much account, though the people are true gallow birds, and gave us some little trouble. But the climate, ah! Algeria is nothing in comparison!"

"Ay," quoth the young fellow in civilian dress, "I've heard that said before. Well, no doubt, you are glad to be home again."

"As for that, of course, one can hardly be sorry. Still, if they order me out again, I must naturally go. Some one must go, as you know, for reinforcements are sadly needed. Perhaps I shouldn't mind seeing another man in my place—but, after all, as we sailors are bound to be eaten by the fish some time or other, it doesn't much matter when it happens."

Under a trivial form this remark conveyed to Daniel a most impressive lesson. An officer does not resign when under orders to face the enemy. Plainly enough the loungers in the ante-room had been discussing his resignation prior to his arrival, and no doubt they attributed it to fear. The idea that he might be suspected of cowardice fairly unnerved Daniel. What could he do to prove that he was not a coward? Should he challenge every one of these men, and fight a score of duels? Would that prove that he had not shrunk from the unknown perils of a distant campaign—from hardship, privation, and disease? No; unless he was determined to remain a marked man for life, he must withdraw his resignation, and start at once. Accordingly, stepping towards Lieutenant Dutac, he exclaimed, in a voice loud enough to be heard by every one in the room, "I had just been ordered to the place you come from, lieutenant, and had sent in my resignation; but after what you have said—things I really knew nothing of—I shall go."

There was a murmur of approbation, and some one was heard to exclaim, "Ah! I was sure of it." Daniel at once realised, by the sudden change of everyone's manner, that he had chosen the only way to save his honour, seriously compromised a moment before. However, although satisfied with himself, he could not help thinking that the scene he had just witnessed was, on the whole, a very extraordinary one. Was he not the victim of some diabolical intrigue? Assuming that Miss Brandon had caused the minister to order him into active service, might she not also have taken every step to compel him to obey that order? Were all the individuals in civilian dress, lounging about the ante-room, really naval officers? The young fellow who had asked Lieutenant Dutac to go on with his story had disappeared, and despite Daniel's repeated enquiries, no one present could say who he was. Soon afterwards Daniel was summoned into his superior's presence. "I'll follow your advice, captain," he said, as he crossed the threshold of the office, "and in three days I shall be on board 'The Conquest.'"

The captain's face cleared up, and he replied approvingly, "Very good! You did well to change your mind; for your business began to look ugly. The minister is very angry with you."

"The minister? And why?"

"*Primo*, he had charged you with a very important duty."

"To be sure," stammered Daniel, hanging his head; "but I have been suffering so severely." The fact is, he had totally forgotten his work.

"*Secundo*," continued the old officer, "he was doubtful whether you were in your senses; and I agree with him, for he tells me that you yourself solicited this appointment on foreign service in urgent terms."

"His Excellency is mistaken," stammered Daniel in amazement.

"Ah! I beg your pardon: I have myself seen your letter."

Daniel already realised a portion of the truth. "I wish I could see it too!" cried he. "Captain, I beseech you, show me that letter!"

The old officer almost began to think that Champcey was really not in his right mind. "I have not got it," he answered. "It's among your papers in the Bureau for Personal Affairs."

Daniel hurried to the office mentioned to him, and, after some little trouble, obtained permission to look at his papers. On opening the portfolio handed to him, the first thing he perceived was a letter, dated two days before, in which he urgently requested the minister to grant him the special favour of being despatched with the expedition to Cochin China on board the frigate "Conquest." Daniel was, of course, quite sure that he had written no such letter. But the handwriting was so precisely like his own, letter for letter, and the signature particularly was so admirably imitated, that he felt for a moment utterly bewildered, mistrusting, as it were, his own eyes and reason. The forgery was so admirable, that if the matter had been one of ordinary importance, and the letter had been dated a fortnight or so previously, he would certainly have suspected his memory rather than the document before him. Plainly enough this letter had been written at Miss Brandon's instigation, and, no doubt, one of her accomplices, perhaps the great Sir Tom himself, had penned it. Ah! now Daniel understood the adventuress's insolent assurance when she insisted upon his taking poor Malgat's letters, saying, "Go and show them to the clerks who knew him during so many years, they will tell you if they were written by him or not." No one would have opined that Malgat's letters were forgeries; and yet, no doubt, the unfortunate cashier's handwriting had been imitated with the same distressing perfection as his own. Could he profit by this strange discovery? Ought he to mention it? What would be the use? Would he be believed if he charged Miss Brandon with forgery? Would an investigation even be consented to? and if so, what would be its result? Could he hope to find an expert prepared to swear that he had not written this letter, when he himself, if each line had been presented to him separately, would have felt bound to acknowledge it as his own handwriting? Was it not far more probable, on the contrary, that, after his conduct in the morning, his charges would be ascribed to a mistake, or interpreted as some weak invention on his part to cover his retreat. Hence, it was best to remain silent, and defer revenge till a later day, when his plans being fully matured, he would be able to crush Sarah Brandon and her accomplices once and for ever. Still, he did not wish the false letter, which might become a formidable piece of evidence against him, to remain among his papers; for no doubt Miss Brandon would soon find an opportunity of having it withdrawn. He obtained permission to copy it; and having done so, succeeded, without being seen, in substituting his copy for the original. Then, knowing he had no time to lose, he hurried away, and jumping into a passing cab drove to M. de Brévan's.

XII.

DESPITE the thought of his approaching separation from Henriette, Daniel felt wonderfully relieved now that he had taken an irrevocable decision. But for his rankling hatred of Sarah Brandon, his mind would almost have

been at peace. On reaching the Rue Lafitte he found that Maxime had just returned home after breakfasting with some friends at the Café Anglais. In a dozen words he told him everything, and then producing the forged letter, which he attributed to Miss Brandon's literary attainments and Sir Tom's penmanship, he handed it to his friend. While Maxime launched forth into exclamations of wonder and indignation, he resumed, "Now, my dear fellow, pray, listen to me. It may be that I may have to entrust you with my last will and testament."

"Don't take such a gloomy look of things," pleaded M. de Brévan.

"Oh, I know what I'm saying. I certainly do not hope to die out there; but the climate's murderous, and I may encounter a bullet or a shell. It is always best to be prepared. Now, you alone, Maxime, are acquainted with all my private affairs. I have no secret from you. If I have friends whom I have known longer, at all events, I have none in whom I feel more confidence. Besides, my old friends are all sailors,—men who, like myself, may be at any moment despatched Heaven only knows where. Now, I need a safe, reliable, and experienced man, possessing both prudence and energy, and who is certain not to leave Paris. Will you be that man, Maxime?"

Rising from his seat, and pressing his right hand against his heart, M. de Brévan warmly replied, "Between us, Daniel, oaths are useless: don't you think so? Therefore, I will simply say, you may count upon me."

"And I do count upon you," exclaimed Daniel,—"yes, blindly and absolutely; and I am going to give you striking proof of it." For a moment it seemed as if he were trying to find some brief and yet impressive form for his communication; and then speaking very rapidly, he continued,—"In leaving France, my one great source of torment is that I am compelled to leave Henriette in the hands of the enemy. God can only know what persecution she will have to endure! My heart bleeds at the mere thought. Miss Brandon must be meditating some terrible blow, or she would not have been so anxious to exile me." So great was his distress that he almost sobbed, and it was only after a moment that he could control his emotion. "Now, Maxime, I ask you to watch over Henriette. I entrust her to you as I would intrust her to my brother, if I had one." M. de Brévan seemed about to raise some objection, but Daniel cut him short, resuming, "I will tell you how you can watch over Mlle. de Ville-Handry. To-morrow evening I shall see her, and acquaint her with the new misfortune which has befallen us. I shall take leave of her at the same time. I know she will be terrified; but, to reassure her, I shall explain to her that I leave a friend behind me—my *alter ego*—ready to assist her at her first summons, and prepared to incur any danger when her interests are at stake. I shall tell her to appeal to you as if to myself; to write to you as she used to write to me; to keep you informed of all they may attempt; to consult and obey you without hesitation. As for what you will have to do, Maxime, I can only speak in a general way, as I know nothing of Miss Brandon's plans. I rely upon your experience to do what is most expedient. Still, there is one possibility which I can already foresee. It may be that life at home will become intolerable, and that Henriette will be anxious to leave her father's house. Even if she should not wish to do so, you may think it inexpedient for her to remain there, and have to advise escape. In either case, you must confide Henriette to the care of an old lady, a relative of mine, who lives at Rosiers, a little village in the department of Maine-et-Loire, and whose address I will give you before starting. At the same time I will inform her of what may

happen." He paused, trying to remember if there was anything else, and, recalling nothing, concluded, "This, my dear Maxime, is all I expect you to do for me."

"Friend Daniel, you may sail without fear," solemnly answered M. de Brévan, with the air of a man who feels that he deserves the confidence placed in him.

But Daniel had not done yet. Pressing his friend's hand, he thanked him, and then seeking to assume a careless air, so as to hide the embarrassment he really felt, he resumed—"The only question now is to provide means for carrying out these measures, and other possible contingencies. You are not rich, my dear Maxime—I mean, rich in comparison with many of your friends: you told me so more than once."

In speaking thus, he touched a wound which was always sore. "Ay," answered M. de Brévan, "in comparison with most of my friends, with men like Gordon-Chalusse, for instance, I am a very poor devil indeed."

Daniel did not notice Maxime's bitterness of manner. "Now," said he, "suppose, at a given moment, that a sum of money, perhaps a large one, should be needed to assure Henriette's safety. Are you sure you will always have sufficient at your disposal, and be able to disburse it without inconvenience?"

"Ah! you expect too much of me; but I have friends."

"And you would apply to them? And expose yourself to the humiliation of those set excuses which serve to conceal refusals! I could never allow that."

"I assure you—"

"Let me tell you that I have forgotten nothing. Although my means are modest, I can, by selling some shares, realize enough to secure you against any urgent embarrassment. Besides, I have property in Anjou, worth from two to three hundred thousand francs, and I mean to sell it."

"Eh?" ejaculated de Brévan with surprise.

"Yes, I mean to sell it. You heard right. I shall only retain my old home, my father's house, with the little garden in front, and the adjoining orchard and meadow. My father and my mother lived and died in that house, and I find them there, so to say, whenever I enter it. Their memory still fills the rooms after so many years. The garden and the orchard are the first little bits of land my father bought with his earnings as a ploughboy. He dug and planted them in his leisure hours, and there is literally not a foot of soil he did not moisten with his sweat. They are sacred to me; but, as for the rest—I have already given orders."

"And you expect to sell everything before your departure?"

"Oh, no! But won't you be there?"

"What can I do?"

"Take my place, I should think. I will leave you a power-of-attorney. You will have to be quick, but perhaps you may get 250,000 francs for the property. Invest the proceeds so as to be able to use them at any moment. And, if ever Henriette is compelled to leave her father's house, hand the money over to her."

M. de Brévan had turned very pale. "Excuse me," he said, "excuse me."

"What?"

"Well, it seems to me it would be more suitable to leave some one else in charge of that."

"Whom?"

"Oh! I don't know,—a more experienced man! It may be that the

property will not bring as much as you expect. Or I might make a mistake in investing the money. Money questions are so delicate !”

“I really don't understand why you should hesitate to undertake so simple a thing,” replied Daniel, shrugging his shoulders, “when you have already consented to render me so signal and difficult a service.”

So simple a thing ! That was certainly not M. de Brévan's opinion. A nervous shiver, which he could hardly conceal, ran down his backbone ; perspiration gathered on his temples ; and he turned ashy pale. “Two hundred and fifty thousand francs ! That's a very large sum,” said he.

“No doubt,” rejoined Daniel carelessly ; and, glancing at the clock, he added, “Half-past three. Come, Maxime, be quick. I've a cab waiting, and we must see my notary before four o'clock.”

This notary was an exceptional man. He took an interest in his clients' affairs, and sometimes even listened to their explanations. When Daniel had told him what he intended doing, he replied, “Well, you only have to give M. de Brévan a power-of-attorney in proper form.”

“Can it be drawn up at once ?” asked Daniel.

“Why not ? It can be recorded this evening ; and to-morrow—”

“Well, then, lose no time.”

The notary called his chief clerk, briefly gave him his instructions, and then drew Daniel into a recess, not unlike an enormous cupboard, where, to quote his own expression, he was wont to “confess” his clients. “How is it, M. Champcey ?” he asked ; “do you really owe so much money to this M. de Brévan ?”

“I don't owe him a sou.”

“And yet you place your entire fortune in his hands ! You must have marvellous confidence in the man.”

“As much as in myself.”

“That's a good deal. And suppose he ran away with the proceeds of your property during your absence ?”

For a moment Daniel was a little shaken ; but he nevertheless replied, “Oh, there are still some honest folks in the world.”

“Ah !” laughed the notary. And from the manner in which he shook his head, it was evident that experience had made him very sceptical indeed on that subject. “If you would only listen to me,” he resumed, “I could prove to you—”

“I have no wish to change my mind,” interrupted Daniel ; “and even if I did wish to do so, I cannot retract my word. There are particular circumstances in this case which I cannot explain to you in so short a time.”

The notary raised his eyes to the ceiling, and rejoined in a tone of deep commiseration, “At least, let me make him give you a deed of defeasance.”

“As you please, sir.”

This was done, but in such carefully guarded terms, that Maxime's susceptibility could not possibly have been offended. When the power-of-attorney and the deed were signed, and the two friends left the worthy notary's office, it was five o'clock, and consequently too late for Daniel to write to Henriette to send him the key of the little garden-gate for that same evening. However, he wrote to obtain it for the following night. Then, after dining with M. de Brévan, he hurried hither and thither in search of the thousand little things which have always to be purchased on the eve of a long journey.

He returned home late, and was fortunate enough to fall asleep directly he was in bed. The next morning he partook of déjeuner in his rooms,

so as to guard against being absent when the key was brought him. It came towards one o'clock, and was handed to him by a tall woman on the wrong side of twenty, whose eyes were perpetually turned to the ground, and whose thin lips seemed to be always engaged in reciting a *Pater* or an *Ave*. This was Clarisse, whom Henriette considered to be the safest of her maids, and whom she had taken into her confidence. "Mademoiselle," said the messenger, "has given me this key and this letter for you, sir. She expects an answer."

Daniel tore open the envelope and read as follows :—"Take care, my dear friend ! in resorting to this dangerous expedient, which we ought to reserve for the last extremity. Is what you have to tell me really as important as you say ? I can hardly believe it ; and yet I send you the key. Tell Clarisse the precise hour at which you will be here." Ah ! the poor girl had no idea of the terrible news that was in store for her. "Request Mlle. Henriette," said Daniel to the maid, "to expect me at seven o'clock."

Slipping the key into his pocket he then hurried away. He had only a short afternoon to himself, and there were still a thousand things to get, and countless preparations to make. On calling at the notary's, he found the papers ready : all the formalities had been fulfilled. But, as the worthy notary produced the deeds, he exclaimed in a prophetic tone, "Take care, M. Champey, reflect ! I call it tempting a man pretty strongly to hand him over such an amount of property on the eve of starting on a long and dangerous expedition."

"Ah ! What do I care for my fortune, if I only see Henriette again ?"

The notary looked discouraged. "Ah ! if there is a woman in the affair," he remarked, "I have nothing more to say."

A moment later, and Daniel had quite forgotten his legal adviser's gloomy presentiments. Seated in M. de Brévan's little sitting-room, he was handing over his deeds and papers to his confidant, explaining to him how he might make the most of the different parcels of land that were to be sold, how certain woods might be disposed of together, and how, on the other hand, a large farm, now held by one tenant, might be advantageously divided into small lots, and offered for auction. M. de Brévan did not look so pale now. He had recovered his self-possession, and, laying aside his usual reserve, shewed himself all eagerness to study his friend's affairs. He promised to do his utmost so that Daniel might be no loser, and with this object would go to Anjou himself, so as to call on likely purchasers and be present at the sale. In his opinion, it would be wiser to sell piecemeal, without hurry. If money were needed, why, a loan could always be obtained of the *Credit Foncier*. Daniel was deeply touched by his friend's expressions of devotion, the more so as he had always fancied that Maxime was inclined to be selfish ; and he was especially gratified when M. de Brévan told him that, with the view of helping matters, he would endeavour to overcome his aversion for Miss Brandon, and try and obtain an introduction to the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion, so as to be a constant visitor there as soon as the approaching marriage had taken place. No doubt he would have to play a disagreeable part ; but, on the other hand, he would have frequent opportunities of seeing Mlle. Henriette ; he would hear of everything that happened, and be at hand whenever she needed advice or assistance. "My dear Maxime," exclaimed Daniel, "my dear friend, how can I ever thank you for all you are doing for me !"

As on the previous day, they dined together at one of the restaurants on the boulevard ; and after dinner M. de Brévan insisted upon escorting his

friend as far as the Count de Ville-Handry's house. It was a cold, clear night. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the moon shone so brightly that one could have read by its light. Seven o'clock was just striking at a neighbouring convent. "Come, courage, my friend!" said M. de Brévan, and cordially pressing Daniel's hand, he walked away.

Daniel had not answered a word. Terribly excited, he had approached the little garden door, at the same time anxiously glancing round him. The street was deserted. But he trembled so violently, that for a moment he thought he would never be able to turn the key in the rusty lock. At last, however, he succeeded in doing so, and then noiselessly slipped into the garden. He was the first on the spot. Hiding himself in the shade of some tall trees, he waited. A couple of minutes elapsed, and he was growing terribly anxious, when at last he heard some dry twigs crackle under the pressure of rapid footsteps. A shadow passed between the trees. He walked forward, and found Henriette standing before him. "What is the matter?" she asked anxiously. "Clarisse said you looked so pale and careworn, that I have been terribly frightened ever since she returned."

Daniel had come to the conclusion that the plain truth would be less cruel than the most skilful prevarications. "I have been ordered on active service," he replied, "and must be on board the day after to-morrow."

And then, without concealing anything, he told her all he had suffered since the day before. The blow was so terrible that she leant against a tree for support. It seemed as if she did not even hear Daniel, but she must have done so, for, suddenly rousing herself, she said, "You will not obey that order. It is impossible for you to obey it."

"Henriette, my honour is at stake."

"Ah, what does it matter?" He was about to reply, when she resumed in a broken voice, "You will certainly not go when you have heard me. You think I am strong, brave, and capable of breasting the storm? You are mistaken. I was only drawing upon your energy, Daniel. I am a child, full of daring as long as it rests on its mother's knee, but helpless as soon as it feels that it is left to itself. I am only a woman: I am weak."

The unhappy man felt his own strength failing him, and could no longer bear his self-restraint. "You insist upon sending me off in utter despair?" he cried. "Ah, I have hardly courage enough for myself!"

"It would be courage to stay, to despise public opinion," retorted Henriette, with a nervous laugh. And, as if anything appeared to her preferable to such a separation, she added,—"Listen! If you will stay, I will yield. Let us go together to my father, and I will tell him that I have overcome my aversion to Miss Brandon. I will ask him to present me to her: I will humble myself before her."

"That is impossible, Henriette."

She bent towards him, joining her hands; and repeated in a suppliant voice, "Stay, I beg you, in the name of our happiness! If you have ever loved me, if you love me now, stay!"

Daniel had foreseen this heart-rending scene; but he had vowed that, even if his heart should break, he would have sufficient firmness to resist Henriette's prayers and tears. "If I were weak enough to give way now," he said, "you would despise me before the month is over; and I, desperate at having to drag out a life of disgrace, would have no other resource but suicide." Henriette listened, standing as motionless as a statue. She felt in her heart that Daniel's resolution was not to be shaken. "I am going, my love," he resumed in a gentle voice, "but I leave you a friend

of mine,—a true and noble friend, who will watch over you. You have heard me speak of him often,—Maxime de Brévan. He knows my wishes. Whatever may happen, consult him. Ah! I should leave more cheerfully if you would promise me to trust this faithful friend, to listen to his advice, and follow his directions."

"I promise you, Daniel, I will obey him." She would have said more, but at this moment a rustling of dry leaves was heard. They turned, and perceived a man cautiously approaching them. "My father!" cried Henriette, and pushing Daniel towards the gate, she begged him to fly.

To remain would only have been to risk a painful explanation, insults, and perhaps even a personal collision. Daniel understood this only too well. "Farewell," said he, "farewell! To-morrow you will receive a letter from me." And with these words he made his escape; but not swiftly enough to avoid hearing the count angrily exclaim: "Ah, ah! Is this the virtuous young lady who dares to insult Miss Sarah?"

As soon as Daniel had locked the door again he listened for a moment, hoping that he might hear something important. But he could only detect a few indistinct exclamations, and then nothing,—nothing more. It was all over now. He would have to sail without seeing Henriette again, without holding her once in his arms. And yet he had told her nothing of all he had meant to tell her: he had not spoken to her of half his recommendations, nor given her a thousandth part of his tender farewells. How had they been surprised? How was it that the count had staid at home, instead of hurrying off immediately after dinner, as was his custom? Why had he inquired after his daughter, he who generally took no more trouble about her than if she had not existed? "Ah, we have been betrayed!" thought the unhappy man. By whom? No doubt by that unpleasant looking maid whom he had seen in the afternoon, by that very Clarisse in whom Henriette placed such confidence. If that were so,—and it was only too probable,—how would they be able to correspond in the future. Here again Maxime de Brévan seemed his only resource. Ah! how plainly he recognised in all this Miss Brandon's execrably cunning policy. "The wretch!" he cried. "The infamous woman!" Wrath, mad wrath, set his brains on fire. To think he could do nothing against that woman! "But she does not stand alone!" he suddenly exclaimed. "There is a man who shelters her under his responsibility,—Sir Tom!" The latter might be insulted; struck in the face, and thus compelled to fight. And without thinking for one moment of the folly of this plan, Daniel hurried off to the Rue du Cirque.

Although it was barely eight o'clock, no lights could be distinguished in the windows of Miss Brandon's house, and it looked as if everybody were asleep. He rang the bell, however, and asked for Sir Thomas Elgin. Sir Tom was out, so the door-keeper said; whereupon Daniel enquired—"At what hour will he be back?"

"He is not coming home to-night." And whether he had received special instructions, or was only acting upon general orders, the servant added,—"Mrs Brian is at the theatre; but Miss Brandon is at home."

Daniel's wrath changed into a kind of cold fury. "They expected me," he murmured, and the thought made him hesitate. Should he see Miss Brandon? What would be the good of it? He was just turning away, when a new idea suddenly occurred to him. Why should he not talk with her, try and come to an understanding, and perhaps make a bargain with her? "Show me to Miss Brandon's rooms," he said to the servant.

As usual, when left alone in the house, she was in the little boudoir,

where Daniel had already once conversed with her. Dressed in a long peignoir of pale blue cashmere, her hair scarcely taken up at all, she was reclining on a sofa, reading a new novel. As the door opened, she carelessly asked, without even turning her head, "Who's that?" But directly the servant announced M. Champcey, she rose with a bound, apparently almost terrified, dropping the book she held in her hand. "You!" she murmured, as soon as the servant had left. "Here, and of your own accord?"

Firmly resolved this time to remain master of his emotions, Daniel had paused in the middle of the room, and stood there as stiff as a statue. "Don't you know, madam, what brings me here?" he asked. "All your combinations have succeeded: you triumph, and we surrender."

"I do not understand you," she stammered, looking at him with seeming amazement. "I don't know what you mean."

He shrugged his shoulders, and continued in a frigid tone,—“Pray, do me the honour not to think me altogether a fool. I have seen the letter, signed with my name, which you sent to the minister, my superior. I have held that masterpiece of forgery in my hand, and know now how you propose to free yourself of my presence.”

"So it's true!" cried Miss Brandon, with an angry gesture. "He has done it; he has dared to do it!"

"Who is this 'he'? Sir Thomas Elgin, no doubt?"

"No, not he; another man."

"Name him!"

She hesitated, hung her head, and then, apparently making a great effort, replied: "I knew they wished to separate us; and, without knowing precisely what means they would employ, I suspected them. And when I came to you the other day, I wanted to say to you, 'Have a care!' but you drove me from your presence, M. Champcey." He looked upon her with such an ironical smile that she broke off, and exclaimed, "Ah, he does not believe me! Tell me that you don't believe!"

He bowed ceremoniously, and answered in his gravest manner, "I believe, Miss Brandon, that you desire to become the Countess de Ville-Handry; and you clear everything out of your path that can hinder you in your plans." She tried to interrupt him, but without allowing her to do so, he continued,—“Pray, note, that I make no charges. Come, let us play openly. You are too sensible and too practical to hate us—Mlle. Henriette and myself—from gratuitous and purely platonic motives. You hate us because we are in your way. How are we in your way? Tell me; and, if you will promise to help us,—we—Henriette and I—pledge ourselves not to stand in your way.”

Miss Brandon looked as if she could not trust her ears. "But, sir, this is a bargain, I should say, which you propose?"

"Yes, indeed! And, so that there may be no misunderstanding, I will mention the precise terms of it: if you will swear to be kind to Henriette during my absence, to protect her against all violence on her father's part, and never to force her to act contrary to her sentiments for me, I will give you, in return, my word that I will abandon to you, without dispute or reserve, the whole of the Count de Ville-Handry's fortune."

Miss Brandon heard these words with every sign of emotion. The tears rolled down her cheeks, and she responded in a low voice, "Have I not yet been humiliated enough. Must you add shame to shame? Daniel, can you possibly think me so mean?" And checking the sobs which impeded

her utterance, she proceeded,—“And yet I cannot blame you for it, I cannot. No, you are right! Everything is against me: everything bears witness against me. Yes, I must appear a very wicked woman in your eyes. But if you only knew the truth, Daniel—if I could, if I dared, tell you everything.” With a trembling step she drew nearer to him, and then continued in a still lower tone, as if she feared to be overheard,—“Cannot you yet understand that I am no longer my own? Do you not realise that I am bound and fettered? I have no longer the right to have a will of my own. If they say, ‘Do this!’ I must needs do it. What a life I lead! Great God! Ah, if you had been willing, Daniel! if you were willing even now!” As she spoke she grew more and more excited; her eyes, moist with tears, shone with matchless splendour; passing blushes suffused her face; and her voice had a strange entrancing vibration. Was she forgetting herself? Was she really about to betray her secret, or merely inventing some new falsehood? Why not let her go on?

At last, however, he was obliged to speak. “That is no answer, Miss Brandon,” he said. “Will you promise me to protect Henriette?”

“Do you really love her so dearly, your Henriette?”

“Better than life!”

Miss Brandon turned as white as the lace on her dress: her eyes flashed indignation; and, drying her tears, she curtly ejaculated, “Oh!”

“You will give me no answer, Miss,” repeated Daniel? And, as she persisted in her silence, he resumed, “Very well, then, I understand. You declare open war. Let it be so! Only listen to me carefully. I am setting out on a dangerous expedition, and you hope I shall never return. Undeceive yourself, Miss Brandon, I shall return. With a passion like mine, with so much love in one’s heart, and so much hatred, a man can defy everything. The murderous climate will not touch me; and, if I had ten bullets in my body, I should still have the strength to return, and hold you to account for your conduct towards Henriette. And if you have touched a hair on her head, if you have made her shed a single tear, by all that is holy, it will bring misfortune to you, and to others also!” He turned to leave, but, on reaching the threshold, added, “I ought to tell you, moreover, that I leave a faithful friend behind me; and if the count or his daughter should happen to die very suddenly, the authorities will be duly warned. And now, madame, farewell—or rather, till we meet again!”

At eight o’clock on the following evening, after leaving with M. de Brévan a long letter for Henriette, and giving him his last instructions, Daniel took his seat in the train which was to convey him to Rochefort and “The Conquest.”

XIII.

It was a week after Daniel’s departure, a Wednesday, and about half-past eleven o’clock. Some thirty equipages, certainly the most elegant of all Paris, were ranged around the aristocratic church of St. Clotilde. In the pretty little square facing the edifice a couple of hundred idlers stood gaping and staring, and every passer-by paused to enquire what was going on. “A wedding, and a very grand one,” was the invariable answer. “In fact, the grandest thing you ever saw. The bridegroom is a nobleman of fabulous wealth—the Count de Ville-Handry—and the bride is an

American lady. They have been inside the church for some time already, and will soon come out again !”

Under the porch a dozen swells, clad in orthodox black,* with yellow kid gloves, and white cravats showing under their overcoats—evidently members of the wedding-party—were chatting together while waiting for the end of the ceremony. If they were amused, they hardly showed it ; for several of them could hardly help yawning, and the others only continued to keep up a broken conversation. Suddenly, however, a small pill-box brougham drove up, and stopped at the gate of the square.

“ Ah ! ah,” said a young man—one of the party under the porch. “ Here comes M. de Brévan.”

The speaker was not mistaken. Maxime leisurely alighted from his carriage, and approached the church in his usual phlegmatic manner. He shook hands with such of the party as he knew—that is, with most of them—and then in an easy tone enquired, “ Who has seen the bride ?”

“ I !” replied an old beau, who smiled perpetually so as to display the thirty-two teeth his dentist had furnished him with.

“ Well, what do you think of her ?”

“ She is always sublime in her beauty, my dear fellow. When she walked up the aisle to kneel down at the altar, a murmur of admiration followed her. Upon my word, I thought they would applaud.”

This was too much enthusiasm, and M. de Brévan cut it short by asking, “ And the Count de Ville-Handry ?”

“ Well, really,” replied the old beau ironically, “ the dear count can boast of having a valet who is almost as expert as Rachel, the famous English enameller. At a little distance you would have sworn he was only sixteen, and that he was going to be confirmed instead of married.”

“ Ah ! ah ! But what was his expression ?”

“ Oh—well—he seemed restless.”

“ I can understand that,” observed a stout, elderly gentleman, who was said not to be very happily married.

Everybody laughed, except a very young man, a mere youth, who, not catching the joke, enquired, “ Why so ?”

A man of thirty or thereabouts, of most distinguished mien, and whom the others addressed, according to the degree of intimacy they could claim, either as “ monseigneur,” or “ my dear duke,” was gracious enough to reply, “ Because, my dear viscount, Miss Brandon is one of those ladies who, under ordinary circumstances, are never married. They are courted and worshipped ; they make us commit a thousand follies ; allow us to ruin ourselves ; and finally, to blow our brains out for them,—all well and good. But as for allowing them to bear our name, never !”

“ No doubt a number of stories have been told about her,” observed de Brévan ; “ but now-a-days there’s such a lot of gossip. However—”

“ You certainly would not ask me to prove that she had been in the dock, or had escaped from prison,” interrupted the duke. “ People say that good society is very exclusive in France ; but really it does not deserve that reputation. Except, perhaps, at a score of mansions, where old traditions are still respected, every street door is open to the first

* Despite one or two attempts in a contrary sense, the Parisians, and even those of the highest social standing, still persist in attending matrimonial celebrations in evening dress. They frequently act in a similar fashion at funerals ; and to the British eye, this display of swallow tails, opera hats, and patent leather boots, in the open sunlight, naturally has a peculiar, not to say distressing, effect.—*Trans.*

person, man or woman, who drives up in a carriage. And the number of those who do so is steadily increasing. Where do they all come from? Who knows? From Russia, Turkey, America, Hungary, from any country providing it's a long way off. How do they live? That's a mystery. But they do live, and live well into the bargain. They are rich, or at least they seem to be so; and they shine and sparkle, intrigue, conspire, and extort. I verily believe that this cosmopolitan crowd of adventurers will end by making itself master of everything. You may say that the matter is of little interest to me, and perhaps that's true. I don't mingle as a rule in what boulevardian journalists call 'High Life,' or fraternize with the mob which is termed 'All Paris.' I willingly shake hands with the workmen who work for me, and who earn their living worthily; but I do not shake hands with those ambiguous personages who have no title but their impudence, and no means of living but their underhand intrigues."

He addressed himself apparently to no one in particular, for as he spoke he gazed listlessly at the crowd in the square, and yet his manner was sufficiently peculiar to justify the surmise that he wished his words to be heard by some one among his listeners. It was evident enough, however, that the loungers in the porch considered his doctrines to be utterly out of season, and, indeed, almost ridiculous. One young man, who was extremely well-dressed, and sported such a darling black moustache, even turned to a neighbour, and asked, "Who is our friend, the preacher?"

"What! don't you know him?" replied the other. "That's the Duke de Champdoce, who married a Princess de Mussidan. Quite an original."

M. de Brévan, who had remained perfectly impassive, now remarked: "At all events, Miss Brandon can scarcely have married the count from motives of interest, for she is immensely rich herself."

"I consider her most disinterested," remarked another bystander, one of M. de Ville-Handry's intimate friends. "I have it from the count himself that none of his property is settled upon Miss Brandon."

"That certainly is marvellously disinterested," ejaculated the Duke de Champdoce, who, having said what he meant to say, now entered the church, leaving the others to carry on the conversation.

"Well, I fancy I know some one who is not particularly pleased with this marriage," said the old beau with the artificial teeth.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The Count de Ville-Handry's daughter. I have looked for her all over the church, and she is certainly not there."

"I am told she has been suddenly taken ill," rejoined another loungeur.

"So they say," interposed a young man; "but the fact is, that a friend of mine saw her just now, driving out in an open cab, in full dress. It appears she intended this pretty piece of scandal as a wedding-present for her step-mother."

"Upon my word, I should not like to stand in the count's shoes," observed M. de Brévan, shrugging his shoulders.

The remarks exchanged under the porch of St. Clotilde faithfully re-echoed the conversation going on in society. Public opinion was decidedly in Miss Brandon's favour, and those who remembered the past; like that eccentric nobleman the Duke de Champdoce, were few and far between. So brilliant was Sarah's success, that it even shed lustre on her relatives; and one young Anglomaniac sung the praises of Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian in glowing strains. He was interrupted by the announcement that the ceremony was now over, and that the bride and

bridegroom were in the vestry receiving the congratulations of their friends. On hearing this, everyone ceased talking and hurried into the church. The vestry was crammed to overflowing. The Count de Ville-Handry's more intimate friends were in turn inscribing their names on the marriage-register placed on a table near the window; while leaning against one of the cupboards appropriated to the vestments and holy vessels stood Miss Brandon—now Countess de Ville-Handry—with grim Mrs Brian and tall, stiff Sir Tom close beside her. Her admirers had certainly not exaggerated her beauty. Her white bridal robe was wonderfully becoming, and she had assumed for the occasion an exquisite look of ingenuous innocence. Some eight or ten young *élégantes* stood round her, and overwhelmed her with congratulations and compliments, which she acknowledged in a slightly tremulous voice, and with modestly cast-down eyes. The "happy man" was in the meantime airing his felicity in the centre of the room, blissfully repeating the words "my wife" at least a dozen times every minute. Nevertheless, at intervals a shadow crossed his victorious brow, especially when some awkward blunderer remarked, "How unfortunate that Mlle. Henriette is indisposed! How pleased she would have been to attend the ceremony!" It was not, perhaps, merely the blunderers who spoke in this fashion, but the malicious ones as well. Nearly every one was aware that there were unpleasant complications awaiting the count at home. Indeed, something had been suspected since the beginning of the ceremony, for just as the count was about to kneel down by the bride's side in front of the high altar, a servant, wearing his livery, hurried into the church and whispered a few words in his ear. The guests who were nearest to him saw him turn very pale and clench his fist with rage. What the servant had told him was easily guessed, when a notorious old gossip, the Countess de Bois, who arrived late, informed all her friends that she had just met Mlle. de Ville-Handry driving about in an open cab. Thus, when the congratulations had been hurriedly got through in the vestry, no one was surprised to hear the count order his coachman to drive home as swiftly as possible. He had invited some twenty guests to a grand great wedding-breakfast; but he seemed to have forgotten them. And once in his carriage, alone with Mrs Brian, Sir Tom, and the young countess, he burst into loud imprecations and absurd threats. On reaching the house, he did not wait for the coachman to drive as usual round the sweep, but springing out of the vehicle he cut right across the open space, leapt up the steps, and bounded into the hall. Wrath momentarily lent him the muscles of youth. "Ernest, send Ernest here," he cried, entering a small drawing-room, the door of which was open. Ernest was the count's valet, the skilful artist to whom he was indebted for his roseate complexion. "Where is mademoiselle?" he asked, directly Ernest appeared.

"Gone out, sir."

"When?"

"Immediately after you, sir."

The young countess, Mrs Brian, and Sir Tom had now entered the room. "Do you hear that?" asked the count, turning towards them; and addressing his valet again, he enquired, "How did it happen?"

"Very naturally. The gates had not been closed behind your carriage, sir, when the young lady rang her bell. A servant went to see what she wanted, and she ordered the landau to be brought round. She was told very respectfully that all three coachmen were out, and that there

was no one to drive her. 'If that's the case,' she answered, 'I want you to run and get me an open cab.' And, when the servant hesitated, she added, 'If you don't go instantly, I shall go myself.'

The count trembled with rage. "And then?" he asked, seeing that his valet paused.

"Then the servant was frightened, and did what she wanted."

"He is dismissed, the fool!" exclaimed M. de Ville-Handry.

"But allow me to say, sir," commenced Ernest.

"No. Let his wages be paid. And you go on."

Without showing any embarrassment, the valet shrugged his shoulders, and blandly continued—"When the cab entered the courtyard we saw the young lady come down in a splendid toilet, such as we had never seen her wear before,—not pretty exactly, but so conspicuous, that it must have attracted everybody's attention. She settled herself coolly on the cushions, while we looked at her in amazement; and then turning to me, she said, 'Ernest, tell my father that I shall not be back to lunch. I have a good many calls to make; and, as the weather is fine, I shall afterwards go to the Bois de Boulogne.' Thereupon the gates were opened, and off she went. It was then that I took the liberty to send you word, sir."

In all his life the Count de Ville-Handry had never been so furious. The veins in his neck began to swell, and his eyes became bloodshot, as if he were about to have an apoplectic fit. "You ought to have kept her from going out," he said hoarsely. "Why didn't you do so? You ought to have made her go back to her own room, used force if necessary—locked her up—bound her—anything!"

"You had given no orders, sir."

"You ought not to have required orders to do your duty. To let a mad woman run about! an impudent girl, whom I caught the other day in the garden with a man!" He spoke so loud that his voice was heard in the adjoining reception-room, where his guests were beginning to assemble. The unhappy man! He disgraced his own child.

"I beseech you, my dear friend, be calm!" exclaimed the young countess, approaching him.

"No, this must end; and I mean to punish the wicked girl."

"I beseech you, my dear count, don't destroy the happiness of the first day of our married life. Henriette is only a child: she did not know what she was doing."

Mrs Brian was not of the same opinion. "The count is right," said she. "The young lady's conduct is perfectly shocking."

"Ah, ah! Brian, how about our bargain?" interrupted Sir Tom. "Was it not understood that we should not meddle with the count's private affairs?"

Thus every one at once took up a preassigned part. The countess advocated forbearance; Mrs Brian advised discipline; and Sir Tom assumed an attitude of impartiality. After this the count was soon calmed, but with such a scene as its preface, the wedding-breakfast could not be very merry. The guests, who had overheard nearly everything, exchanged strange looks with each other. "The count's daughter," they thought, "and a lover? That can hardly be!"

In vain did M. de Ville-Handry try to look indifferent; in vain did the young countess display all her rare gifts. Everybody was embarrassed; nobody could summon up a smile; and every five minutes the conversation broke down. At half-past four o'clock the last guest escaped, and

the count remained alone with his new family. It was growing dark, and lamps were just being brought in, when wheels were heard rolling in the courtyard. The count rose to his feet, and turned pale. "Here she comes!" he said. "Here is my daughter!"

It was indeed Henriette. It may be asked how a young girl, usually so reserved, and naturally so timid, could have made up her mind to cause such a scandal? But the most timid people are precisely the boldest on certain occasions. Forced to abandon their natural course, they neither reason nor calculate, but, losing all self-possession, rush blindly into danger, impelled, as it were, by a kind of madness. Now, for nearly a fortnight Henriette had experienced the most bitter emotions. After her interview with Daniel in the garden her father had overwhelmed her with insults and reproaches,—speaking even in presence of the servants, as if anxious to have it reported on all sides that his daughter had disgraced herself. When Henriette had declined to be present either at the reading of the marriage contract between himself and Miss Brandon or at their wedding, he again flew into a violent passion, and each day, as the decisive moment drew nearer, a fresh lamentable scene occurred. Perhaps Henriette might have modified her opposition if her father had only used a little discretion, tried the powers of persuasion, or sought to touch her heart by speaking to her of herself, of her future happiness and peace. But no! he invariably spoke to her in a threatening manner, and the consequence was that Henriette determined to make her protest as public as she could by showing herself to all Paris whilst her father and Miss Brandon were being married at St. Clotilde. She had no one to whom she could confide her grief, no one to tell her that all the disgrace of such a scandal would fall back upon herself. Donning a very showy costume, so as to attract as much attention as possible, she spent the day in driving about to all the places where she thought she would meet most of her acquaintances. Night alone compelled her to return; and although physically exhausted, she was morally upheld by the absurd idea that she had done her duty, and shown herself worthy of Daniel. She had just alighted, and was about to pay her driver, when the count's valet came up, and said, as disrespectfully as he dared, "My master has ordered me to tell you to come to him as soon as you returned."

"Where is my father?"

"In the large reception-room."

"Alone?"

"No. The countess, Mrs Brian, and Sir Thomas Elgin are with him."

"Very well. I am coming;" and mustering all her courage, and looking whiter and colder than the marble statues in the vestibule, she opened the door of the reception-room and entered, stiffly erect.

"Ah, here you are?" exclaimed the count, restored to a certain degree of calmness by the very excess of his wrath,—"Here you are!"

"Yes, father."

"Where have you been?"

She had at a glance taken in the whole scene; and on perceiving the new countess, and those whom she called her accomplices, resentment conquered every other feeling. With a haughty smile she answered, "I have been to the Bois de Boulogne. In the morning I went out to make some purchases; later, knowing that the Duchess de Champdoce is unwell, and does not go out, I went to lunch with her; after that, as the weather was so fine—"

But the Count de Ville-Handry could endure it no longer. Seizing his

daughter by the wrists, he lifted her bodily, and, dragging her towards the Countess Sarah, he cried, "On your knees, unhappy child! on your knees, and ask the best of women to pardon you for all these insults!"

"You hurt me terribly, father," was Henriette's only reply.

But the countess had already thrown herself between them. "For heaven's sake, mademoiselle," she said, "spare your father!" And, as Henriette measured her from head to foot with an insulting glance, she continued, "Dear count, don't you see that your violence is killing me?"

On hearing this, M. de Ville-Handry promptly let his daughter go, and, drawing back, exclaimed, "Thank her, thank this angel of goodness who intercedes on your behalf! But have a care! my patience is at an end. There are such things as houses of correction for rebellious children and perverse daughters."

"Let it be so, father," answered Henriette with startling energy. "Choose the very strictest of these houses, and send me there. Whatever I may have to suffer there, it will be better than remaining here to see my mother's place occupied by that—woman!"

"Wretch!" gasped the count, who was nearly suffocating. Making a violent effort he tore off his cravat; and conscious that he was no longer master of himself, he cried to his daughter, "Leave me, leave me! or I answer for nothing."

She hesitated for one moment; and then giving the countess one more look of defiance, she slowly retired from the room.

XIV.

"WELL, I am sure the count can boast that he has had a curious wedding-day." So said the footmen standing in the hall, just as Henriette left the reception-room. She heard them, and without knowing whether they approved of her conduct, or laughed at it, she felt gratified, so eager is passion for encouragement, no matter whence it comes. She had not gone half-way up-stairs to her own rooms, when all the bells of the house began to ring. Greatly surprised, she bent over the balusters to listen. The servants were rushing about; hurried steps could be heard in the vestibule, and the imperious voice of the count's valet could be distinguished, exclaiming, "Salts, quick! Fresh water. The countess has a nervous attack."

Henriette's lips curved into a bitter smile. "At least," she said to herself, "I shall have poisoned this woman's joy." And fearing to be caught listening, she went up-stairs. But, when she was alone once more, the poor girl was obliged to recognize the utter futility of her fancied triumph. Whom had she wounded after all? Her father. However unwell the countess might be to-night,—and perhaps she was not really unwell,—she would certainly be well again in the morning; and then what would be the advantage of the scandal she had caused in hopes of ruining her? Henriette perceived the folly of her course now when it was too late. Still, she fancied that what she had done that day pledged her for the future. The road she had taken evidently led nowhere, and yet it seemed to her miserable cowardice to shrink from going on.

Rising at daybreak, she was deliberating on what weak point she might make her next attack, when there came a knock at the door, and Clarisse, her own maid, entered. "Here is a letter for you, mademoiselle," she said. "I have received it this moment, in an envelope addressed to me."

Henriette examined the missive for some minutes studying the handwriting, which she did not know. Who could write to her in this fashion, except Maxime de Brévan, the friend whom Daniel had told her to rely on, and who had, so far, given her no sign of life? Her surmise was correct. It was M. de Brévan who wrote as follows:—"MADAM,—Like all Paris, I have heard of your proud and noble protest on the day of your father's unfortunate marriage. Egotists and fools will perhaps blame you. But you may despise them; for all the best men are on your side. And my dear Daniel, if he were here, would approve and admire your courage, as I do myself." She drew a full breath, as if her heart were relieved of a heavy burden. Daniel's friend approved her conduct. This sufficed to stifle the voice of reason, and dispel every idea of prudence. Moreover, M. de Brévan advised obstinate, dogged resistance in well-nigh every line of his letter. Towards the close, however, he turned to another subject. "At the moment of taking the train, Daniel handed me a letter, in which he expresses his innermost thoughts. With a sagacity worthy of such a heart, he foresees and solves in advance all the difficulties with which your step-mother will no doubt seek to embarrass you. This letter is too precious to be intrusted to the post. I shall therefore procure an introduction to your father's house before the end of the week, and will then have the honour of placing that letter in your own hands. I may add, that tomorrow I shall have an opportunity of sending Daniel news from here. If you wish to write to him, send me your letter to-day, to No. 62 Rue Lafitte, and I will enclose it in mine." Finally, there came a postscript couched as follows:—"Above everything, mistrust Sir Thomas Elgin."

This last recommendation filled Henriette's mind with vague and terrible apprehensions. "Why should I mistrust him more than the others?" she asked herself. But a more pleasing thought dispelled her anxiety. Here was an opportunity to send Daniel news promptly and safely, and she must make haste to write to him. Seating herself at her little writing-table she went to work, to acquaint her only friend on earth with all her bitter sufferings and uncertain hopes. Eleven o'clock struck just as she had finished filling eight long pages with all she felt uppermost in her heart. She was about to rise, when suddenly she felt a sensation of faintness and giddiness steal over her. What could it mean? Ah! now she remembered that she had eaten nothing since noon the day before. "I mustn't starve myself," she exclaimed almost merrily as she promptly recovered herself. Her long chat with Daniel had evidently rekindled her hopes. She rang the bell, and bade her maid bring her some breakfast.

Mlle. de Ville-Handry occupied three rooms. The first, her sitting-room, opened upon the landing; on the right was her bed-chamber, and on the left a boudoir, containing her piano and bookcase. When Henriette took her meals up-stairs, as had often happened of late, she had them served in the sitting-room. Entering that apartment, she proceeded to clear the table of the albums and little trifles which were lying about, so as to expedite matters, when the maid reappeared with empty hands. "Ah, mademoiselle, the count has given orders not to take anything up-stairs."

"That cannot be."

But a mocking voice outside responded, "It is so!" and a moment later M. de Ville-Handry made his appearance, already dressed, curled and painted, and having the expression of a man who is about to enjoy his revenge. Bidding the maid leave the room, he turned towards his daughter and resumed: "Yes, indeed, my dear Henriette, I have given strict

orders that your meals are not to be served to you up here. Why should you indulge in such fancies? Are you unwell? If you are, we will send for the doctor. If not, you will do me the favour to come down and take your meals in the dining-room with the family,—that is, with the countess and myself, Sir Thomas Elgin, and Mrs Brian."

"But, father!"

"There is no father who could stand this. The time of weakness has gone by, like the time of passion: so you must come down. You will do so whenever you please; for a day or two you'll pout, perhaps: but hunger drives the wolf into the village; and on the third day we shall see you come down as soon as the bell rings. I have appealed to your heart in vain: you see I am forced to appeal to your stomach."

Tears of shame and humiliation glistened in Henriette's eyes, despite all her efforts to remain impassive. Could this idea of starving her into obedience have originated with her father? No, he would never have thought of it! It was evidently a woman's thought, and the result of bitter, savage hatred. The poor girl felt that she was conquered; and her heart revolted at the thought that she would be forced to yield. She could imagine the exultation of the new countess when she, Count de Ville-Handry's daughter, appeared in the dining-room, brought there by want—by hunger. "Father," she begged, "send me nothing but bread and water, but spare me that exposure."

But if the count was repeating a lesson, he had learned it well. His features retained the same sardonic expression; and he coldly rejoined, "I have told you what I desire. You have heard it, and that is enough."

He was turning to leave the room, when his daughter held him back. "Father," she said, "listen to me."

"Well, what is it now?"

"Yesterday you threatened to shut me up."

"Well?"

"To-day it is I who beseech you to do so. Send me to a convent. However harsh and strict the rules may be, however sad the life, I shall find there some relief in my sorrow, and will bless you with all my heart."

"A fine idea," said he, shrugging his shoulders; "why, directly you reached the convent, you would at once write to every one we know that my wife had turned you out of the house; that you had been obliged to escape from threats and bad treatment: you would repeat all the stock complaints of the innocent young girl who is persecuted by a wicked step-mother. Not so, my dear, not so!" The breakfast bell, which was ringing below, interrupted him. "You hear, Henriette," he said,— "consult your stomach; and, according to what it tells you, come down, or stay here."

He left the room, quite proud at having performed what he called an act of paternal authority, without vouchsafing a glance at his daughter, who had sunk back on to a chair—for she was overcome, poor child! It was all over: she could struggle no longer. People who did not shrink from such measures to conquer her might resort to the last extremities. Whatever she did, sooner or later she must succumb. Hence, why not as well give way at once? She saw clearly that, the longer she postponed surrender, the sweeter victory would be to the countess, and the more painful the sacrifice to herself. Mustering, therefore, all her energy, she went down into the dining-room, where the others were already at table.

She had imagined that her appearance would be greeted by some

insulting remark. Not at all. The others hardly seemed to notice her. The countess paused in her previous talk to say "Good-morning, made-moiselle!" and then went on without betraying the slightest emotion. Henriette had even to acknowledge that they had been considerate. Her place had not been laid next to her stepmother, but between Mrs Brian and Sir Thomas Elgin. She sat down, and, while eating, stealthily observed these strangers, who were henceforth the masters of her destiny. She was at once struck with the marvellous dazzling beauty of Countess Sarah, of which the photograph shown her by her father afforded but a faint idea. The young countess had barely taken time to put on a wrapper before coming down to breakfast. Her complexion was more animated than usual, and she exhibited all the touching confusion of a young bride, being constantly more or less embarrassed. Henriette realised only too well the influence such a woman was likely to have over an old man who had fallen in love with her. The thought made her tremble. Again, grim Mrs Brian seemed hardly less formidable; for her dull, heavy eyes, and lean, yellow face spoke of nothing but wickedness and obstinacy. Still, judging by appearances, it seemed, after all, that the least to be feared was tall, stiff Sir Tom. Seated by her side, he discreetly paid her some little attentions; and, on observing him more closely, she detected in his eyes something like a gleam of commiseration. "And yet," she thought, "M. de Brévan warned me particularly against him."

Directly breakfast was over Henriette rose, and, having bowed without saying a word, was returning to her room, when she met some of the servants on the stairs carrying a heavy wardrobe. Upon inquiry she learned that, as Sir Tom and Mrs Brian were henceforth to live in the house, they were bringing in their furniture. Shaking her head sadly, she hurried into her rooms, where a still greater surprise was awaiting her. Three servants were hard at work taking down her furniture, under the superintendence of Ernest, the count's valet. "What are you doing here?" she asked. "Who has allowed you?"

"We are only obeying the count's orders, replied M. Ernest. "We are getting your rooms ready for Madame Brian." And turning to his colleagues he said—"Go on, you fellows! Take out that sofa."

"What?" thought Henriette, "these eager adventurers had taken possession of the house and reigned there absolutely, and yet that was not enough for them! They meant even to turn her out of her rooms." This impudence seemed so monstrous, that, unable to believe her eyes and ears, she yielded to a sudden impulse, returned to the dining-room, and asked her father: "Is it really true that you have ordered my furniture to be removed?"

"Yes, my daughter. My architect will transform your three rooms into a large reception-room for Mrs Brian, who had not space enough for—"

"I cannot understand," exclaimed the young countess with a gesture of displeasure, "how Aunt Brian can accept that."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Mrs Brian, "the count is doing this entirely without my consent."

"Sarah, my darling," rejoined the count, "permit me to be sole judge in all arrangements that concern my daughter." Count M. de Ville-Handry's tone was so firm as he said this, that one would have sworn the idea of dislodging Henriette had sprung from his own brains. "I never act thoughtlessly," he continued, "and always take time to mature my decisions. In this case I act from motives of the most ordinary propriety. Mrs Brian

is no longer young : my daughter is a mere child. If one of the two has to submit to some slight inconvenience, it is certainly my daughter."

All of a sudden Sir Thomas Elgin rose. "I should like," he began, and then, unfortunately, the rest of his phrase was lost in an indistinct murmur. He was no doubt at that moment recalling a promise he had made. Determined to keep his word not to interfere in the count's family affairs, and yet, on the other hand, indignant at what he considered an odious abuse of power, he abruptly left the room. His looks and gestures so clearly evinced these conflicting sentiments that Henriette was quite touched.

In the meantime M. de Ville-Handry had resumed speaking. "I have decided," said he, "that my daughter shall in future occupy the rooms formerly used by her mother's companion. They are small, but more than sufficient for her. Besides, they have this advantage, that they can be easily overlooked from one of our own rooms, my dear Sarah ; and that is an important point in dealing with an imprudent girl, who has so sadly abused the liberty she enjoyed, thanks to my blind confidence."

What could Henriette answer ? If she had been alone with her father she would certainly have defended herself, tried to induce him to reconsider his decision, and possibly have begged him to do so on her knees. But here, in the presence of these two women, with the Countess Sarah's mocking eyes upon her, it was impossible ! Ah ! she would have died a thousand times over rather than give these miserable adventurers the joy and satisfaction of such self-humiliation. "Let them crush me," she thought, "they shall never hear me complain, or cry for mercy." So when her father, who had been quietly watching her, asked, "Well ?" She simply replied, "You shall be obeyed this very night," and calmly left the room, holding her head erect, and without having shed a tear.

God knew, however, what she suffered. It certainly caused her no little sorrow to have to give up those little rooms where she had spent so many hours, and which recalled such sweet memories, but that was nothing in comparison with the prospect of having to live under the Countess Sarah's very eyes. They would not even leave her at liberty to weep. On the other side of the partition the countess would hear and delight in every sigh that escaped her.

She was suddenly roused from her distress by the recollection of the letter she had written to Daniel. If M. de Brévan was to have it that same day, there was not a moment to lose. Already it was too late for post, and she would have to send it by messenger. Accordingly, she rang the bell for Clarisse, her confidente, for the purpose of sending it to the Rue Lafitte. But, instead of Clarisse, one of the housemaids appeared, saying, "Your own maid is not in the house, mademoiselle. Mrs Brian has sent her to the Rue du Cirque. If I can do anything for you—"

"No, I thank you !" replied Henriette.

It seemed, then, that she counted for nothing any more in the house. She was not allowed to take her meals by herself ; she was turned out of her own rooms ; and the maid, long attached to her service, was taken from her. And she was forced to submit to these humiliations without a chance of repelling them. Time was passing, however, and it was growing each minute more difficult to let M. de Brévan have her letter in time for the night mail. "Well," said Henriette to herself, "I will take it myself." And although in all her life she had, perhaps, not been more than twice alone in the street, she put on her bonnet, wrapped herself up in a cloak, and swiftly went down-stairs. The door-keeper, a tall, imposing

funkey, who was very proud of his richly laced livery, was sitting in front of the little pavilion where he lived, smoking, and reading his paper. "Open the gate!" said Henriette.

But without taking his pipe from his mouth, or even rising from his seat, the fellow answered, "The count has sent me orders never to let you go out without a verbal or written permission from him, so that—"

"You impudent fellow!" exclaimed Henriette; and she resolutely walked towards the ponderous gate, and stretched out her hand to pull the bolt. But the man, divining her intention, and quicker than herself, rushed up to the gate, bawling as loud as he could, "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, I have my orders, and I shall lose my place."

On hearing his cries, a dozen servants idling about the stables, the vestibule, and the inner court, hastened to the spot. A moment later Sir Tom appeared, ready to go out on horseback, and finally the count himself. "What do you want? What are you doing there?" he asked.

"You see, I wish to go out."

"Alone?" laughed the count; and, pointing to the door-keeper, he harshly resumed: "This man would be instantly dismissed if he allowed you to leave the house alone. Oh, you need not look at me in that way! Henceforth you will only go out when and with whom it pleases me. And don't hope to escape my watchful observation. I have foreseen everything. The little gate you had a key of has been nailed up. And, if ever a man should dare to steal into the garden, the gardeners have orders to shoot him down like a dog, whether it be the man with whom I caught you the other night, or some one else."

Henriette staggered under this mean and cowardly insult; but, immediately collecting herself, she exclaimed: "Great God! Am I delirious? Father, are you aware of what you are saying?" And, as the suppressed laughter of the servants reached her, she added with almost convulsive vehemence, "At least, say who the man was with whom you saw me in the garden, so that everyone may hear his name. Tell them that it was M. Daniel Champey,—he whom my mother chose for me among all,—he whom you received daily at your house during long years, and to whom you solemnly promised my hand, who was my betrothed, and who would now be my husband if we had chosen to approve of your unfortunate marriage! Tell them that it was M. Daniel Champey, whom you had sent off the day before, and whom a crime, a forgery committed by your Sarah, forced to go to sea,—for he had to be got out of the way at any cost. As long as he was in Paris you would never have dared to treat me as you do now."

Overcome by this unexpected violence, the count could only stammer out a few incoherent words. Henriette was about to continue, when she felt herself taken by the arm, and gently but irresistibly led towards the house. It was Sir Tom, trying to save her from her own excitement. She looked at him, and noticed that a big tear was slowly rolling down the usually impassive baronet's cheek.

He led her as far as the staircase, and then, when she had laid hold of the balusters, he murmured, "Poor girl!" and hurried rapidly away.

Ay, poor girl, indeed! Her reason was giving way under all these terrible blows; and seized with a kind of vertigo, she hastened up-stairs, fancying she could still hear her father's abominable charges and the servants' laughter. "O God," she sobbed, "have pity on me!" She felt in her heart that she had no hope left now but God, delivered up as she

was to pitiless enemies, sacrificed to the implacable hatred of her step-mother, abandoned by everyone, and betrayed and openly renounced by her own father. Occupied with her gloomy thoughts, the poor girl paid no attention to the flight of time, but she was roused at last by the ringing of the dinner-bell. She was free not to go down; but she revolted at the idea that the Countess Sarah might think her overcome. "That must not be," she murmured; "she shall never know how much I suffer!" And ringing for Clarisse, who had in the meantime returned, she bade her dress her quickly. While changing her attire, a paper rustled in the pocket of the dress she took off, and she then remembered her letter to Daniel. Although it was now very late, she thought it best to try and let M. de Brévan have it, and accordingly she asked Clarisse to take a cab and repair to the Rue Lafitte. "Try and find some excuse," she said, "if you are asked why you are going out; and above all, be discreet."

Then, arrayed in one of her most becoming dresses, and with her beautiful hair daintily arranged, she went down-stairs, so determined to conceal her emotion that she actually had a smile on her lips as she entered the dining-room. Fever imparted unwonted animation to her features and a strange brilliancy to her eyes. Her beauty, of recent times somewhat impaired, again became so conspicuous, that it almost eclipsed that of the countess. Even the count was struck by it, and exclaimed, glancing at his young wife,—“Oh, oh!” This was, however, the only notice taken of Henriette. No one seemed aware of her presence, except Sir Tom, whose eyes softened whenever he looked at her. But what was that to her? Affecting a composure she was far from feeling, she was making an effort to eat, when a servant entered the room, and respectfully whispered a few words in the countess's ear. "Very well," she said; "I'll be there directly." And, without vouchsafing any explanation, she left the table, remaining perhaps ten minutes away.

"What was it?" asked Count de Ville-Handry with an accent of tender interest when his young wife returned.

"Nothing, my dear," she replied as she took her seat again,—“nothing, only some orders to give.”

Still, Henriette thought she noticed an expression of cruel satisfaction under her step-mother's apparent indifference. More than that, she fancied she detected the countess and Mrs Brian exchange rapid glances, one implying, "Well," and the other answering, "All right." "These wretches," thought the poor girl, "have prepared some fresh insult for me." And her suspicions became so intense, that when dinner was over, instead of returning to her own rooms, she followed her father and his new "friends" into the drawing-room. They did not long remain alone. The count and his young wife had probably announced that they would be "at home" that evening; for soon a number of visitors arrived, some of them old friends of the Ville-Handry family, but the great majority intimates from the Rue du Cirque. Henriette was too busily engaged in watching her step-mother to notice how eagerly she herself was examined, what glances the visitors cast at her, and how careful the married ladies, as well as the young girls, were to leave her by herself. It required a brutal scene to open her mind to the truth, and to bring her thoughts back to the horrible reality of her situation. By degrees, as the number of visitors increased, the conversation ceased to be general, and little groups were formed. In this way two ladies came and sat down near Henriette. She did not know them, but judged them to be friends of the Countess Sarah, noting

especially that one of them had a strong foreign accent. They were talking together, and Henriette instinctively listened to them. "Why didn't you bring your daughter?" asked one of them.

"How could I?" replied the other. "I would not bring her here for the world. Don't you know what kind of a girl the count's daughter is? It is incredible, and almost too scandalous. On the day of her father's marriage, and with the connivance of a servant, who has since been dismissed, she ran away with some one, and the police had to be employed to find out where she was, and bring her back home. If it had not been for our dear Sarah, she would have been sent to a house of correction."

A stifled cry interrupted them, and, on looking round, they perceived that Henriette had suddenly fainted, and fallen to the ground. Instantly, and with one impulse, everybody was up. But the honourable Sir Thomas Elgin was swifter than all the others, and rushed to the spot with such surprising promptness at the very moment when the accident happened, that it almost seemed as if he had had a presentiment, and was watching for the precise moment when his assistance would be needed. Raising Henriette with a powerful arm, he laid her on a sofa, not forgetting to slip a cushion under her head. At once the countess and the other ladies crowded around the fainting girl, rubbing the palms of her hands, moistening her temples with aromatic vinegar and cologne, and persistently holding bottles of salts to her nostrils. Still, all efforts to revive her proved fruitless; and this was so extraordinary, that even the Count de Ville-Handry began to be moved, although at first he had been heard to exclaim,—“Pshaw! Leave her alone. It's nothing.” Senile love had not yet entirely extinguished all fatherly instincts; and anxiety rekindled the affection he had formerly felt for his child. Accordingly, rushing into the hall, he called to the footmen there on duty,—“Quick! Let some one run for a doctor; never mind which,—the nearest!”

This acted as a signal for the guests to scatter. Finding that this fainting-fit lasted too long, and fearing perhaps a fatal termination, a painful scene, and tears, they one by one slyly slipped out of the house. In this way the countess, Mrs Brian, Sir Tom, and the unhappy father, found themselves soon once more alone with Henriette, who was still unconscious. “We ought not to leave her here,” said Sarah: “she will be better in bed.”

“Yes, that's true: you are right!” replied the count. “I shall have her carried to her room.”

He was stretching out his hand to pull the bell, when Sir Tom interposed, and exclaimed in a voice of deep emotion, “Never mind, count, I'll carry her myself.” And, without waiting for an answer, he took her up like a feather and carried her to her room, followed by the count and countess. He could not, of course, remain in Henriette's room; but it looked as if he could not tear himself away. For some time the servants, quite amazed thereat, saw him walk up and down the passage with feverish steps, and, in spite of his usual impassiveness, evince every sign of extraordinary excitement. Every ten minutes he paused in his walk to ask at the door, in an anxious voice: “Well?”

“She is still in the same condition,” was the answer. In the meantime two physicians had arrived, but without obtaining any better result than the countess and her friends. They exhausted all the usual remedies for such cases, and evidently began to be surprised at the persistency of the symptoms. Nor could the Count de Ville-Handry suppress his growing anxiety as he saw them consulting in the recess of one of the windows,

discussing more energetic means to be employed. At last, towards midnight, Sir Tom perceived the young countess come out of Henriette's room. "How is she?" he eagerly asked. "She's coming to," replied the countess, in a loud voice, so as to be heard by the servants,—“and that is why I am leaving her. She dislikes me so terribly, poor unhappy child, that I fear my presence might do her harm.”

Henriette had indeed recovered consciousness. First, a shiver ran through her whole frame, and then she tried painfully and repeatedly to raise herself on her pillows, and look around. She evidently did not remember what had happened, and mechanically passed her hand to and fro across her forehead, as if to brush away the dark veil hanging over her mind: at the same time, looking with haggard eyes at the doctors, her father, and her confidante, Clarisse, who knelt by her bedside, weeping. At last when, all of a sudden, the horrid reality broke upon her mind, she threw herself back, and cried out,—“O God!”

But she was saved; and the doctors soon withdrew, declaring that there was nothing to apprehend now, provided their prescriptions were carefully observed. The count then approached his daughter, and, taking her hands, asked with an air of unusual affection, “Come, child. What has happened? What was the matter?”

She looked at him in utter despair, and then in a low voice replied:—“Nothing! only you have ruined me, father.”

“How, how?” asked the count. “What do you mean?” And embarrassed, perhaps angry with himself, and trying to find an excuse for what he had done, he added, simpering,—“Is it not your own fault? Why do you treat Sarah so badly, and do all you can to exasperate me?”

“Yes, you are right. It is my fault,” murmured Henriette. She spoke in a tone of bitter irony now; but afterwards, when she was alone and quiet, she had to acknowledge and confess to herself, that it was as she had said. The scandal by which she had intended to overwhelm her step-mother had fallen back upon herself and crushed her.

Still, the next morning she was a little better; and, in spite of all that Clarisse could say, she would get up, and go down-stairs, for all her hopes henceforth depended on that letter written by Daniel. She had been waiting day after day for M. de Brévan, who was to bring it to her; and would not have missed him for anything in the world. However, she waited for him in vain that day, and, indeed, during the remainder of the week. Attributing his delay to some new misfortune, she was thinking of writing to him, when at last, on Tuesday evening—when the countess held her second reception,—a servant suddenly announced, “M. Palmer,—M. de Brévan!” Such was Henriette's emotion that she abruptly turned towards the door, eager to see the man Daniel had called his second self. The first of the two visitors was an elderly individual, with grey hair, and looking as grave and solemn as a member of parliament; the other, who might be thirty or thirty-five years old, had a cold and haughty appearance, his thin lips curving into a sardonic smile. “That is the man!” said Henriette to herself: “That's Daniel's friend!” Upon examining him, she thought his composure affected, and his whole appearance lacking in frankness. Still, she never thought for a moment of distrusting M. de Brévan. Daniel had blindly recommended him to her: and that was enough. She had been too severely punished when trying to follow her own inspirations ever to think of repeating the experiment. She kept M. de Brévan in view, and noticed that, after being presented to the Coun-

ness Sarah and her husband, he threw himself into the throng of visitors. At that moment the reception was at its height. After awhile, steering through the various groups, he managed to approach her, gaining a vacant chair by her side. The air of perfect indifference with which he sat down shewed that he had fully measured the danger of risking a confidential talk with a young lady under the eyes of fifty or sixty persons. He commenced with some of those set phrases current in society, speaking loud enough to be heard by the people near them, and to satisfy their curiosity if they had a fancy for listening. Noticing that Henriette had turned very red, and fixed her eyes most anxiously upon him, he ventured to say in an undertone, "I beg you, mademoiselle, affect a little more indifference. Smile: we may be watched. Remember that we must not seem to know each other." And then in a loud voice he began to sing the praises of the last new play that had been performed, until finally, thinking that he had quieted all possible suspicions, he drew a little nearer, and, casting down his eyes, remarked, "It is useless to tell you, mademoiselle, that I am Maxime de Brévan."

"I heard your name announced, monsieur," replied Henriette.

"I took the liberty of writing to you, mademoiselle, under cover to your maid, according to Daniel's orders; but I hope you will excuse me."

"I have nothing to excuse, monsieur, but to thank you very much, from the bottom of my heart, for your generous devotion." No man is perfect; and when M. de Brévan heard these words, a passing blush suffused his cheeks; he coughed two or three times, and passed his hand between his collar and his neck, as if troubled in his throat. "You must have thought," she continued, "that I was not in any great haste to avail myself of your kind offer; but—there were difficulties—in my way—"

"Oh, yes! I know," broke in M. de Brévan, sadly shaking his head: "your maid has told me. For she found me at home, as no doubt you have heard; and your letter arrived just in time to be sent on with mine. They will gain a fortnight in this way; for the mail for Cochin China does not leave more than once a month,—on the 29th." But he paused suddenly, or rather raised his voice to resume his account of the new drama, for two young ladies had stopped just before them. As soon as they had moved on, he resumed,— "I bring you Daniel's letter, mademoiselle. I have folded it up very small, and I have it here in my hand: if you will let your handkerchief fall, I'll slip it into it as I pick it up." The trick was not new; and it was by no means difficult of accomplishment. Still, so far as Henriette was concerned, it was performed awkwardly enough. She failed to let her handkerchief fall in a natural manner, and when she took it back again, she made a far too eager gesture. Moreover, as she felt the crisp paper under the cambric folds, she blushed perceptibly. Fortunately, M. de Brévan had the presence of mind to rise, and move his chair so as to help her in concealing her embarrassment. Then, when he saw her calm again, he sat down once more, and resumed in a tone of deep interest, "Now, allow me to inquire after your position here."

"It is terrible."

"Do they harrass you?"

"Oh, fearfully!"

"No doubt, your step-mother?"

"Alas! who else would do it? But she dissembles, veiling her malignity under affected gentleness. In appearance she is all kindness to me. And my poor father becomes a willing instrument in her hands,—my poor father, formerly so kind, and so fond of me!"

She was deeply moved; and M. de Brévan perceived that tears were starting from her eyes. "Mademoiselle," said he in a frightened tone, "for heaven's sake control yourself!" And, anxious to turn Henriette's thoughts from her father, he asked, "How does Mrs Brian behave towards you?"

"She always sides against me."

"Naturally. And Sir Tom?"

"You wrote to me that I ought to mistrust him particularly, and so I do; but, I must confess, he alone seems to be touched by my misfortunes."

"Ah! that is the very reason why you ought to fear him."

"Why so?"

"For a moment M. de Brévan hesitated, and then, after cautiously glancing round, he rapidly replied, "Because he might very well cherish the hope of replacing Daniel in your heart, and of becoming your husband."

"Great God!" exclaimed Henriette, sinking back in her chair with an expression of horror. "Is it possible?"

"I am quite sure of it," replied M. de Brévan. And, as if he had frightened himself by this revelation, he added, "Yes, I am quite sure of it. I have read that man's heart; and before long you will have some terrible evidence of his intentions. But I beg you, mademoiselle, let this remain a secret between us, to be kept religiously. Never allow yourself the slightest allusion."

"What can I do?" murmured the poor girl, "what can I do? You alone, sir, can advise me."

For some time M. de Brévan remained silent; but at last he sorrowfully replied, "My experience, mademoiselle, supplies me with but one advice,—be patient; say and do as little as possible; and endeavour to appear insensible to their insults. I would say to you, if you will excuse the triviality of the comparison, imitate those feeble insects who simulate death when they are touched. They are defenceless; and that is their only chance of escape." He rose from his seat; and, bowing deeply to Henriette, he added, "I must also warn you, mademoiselle, not to be surprised if you see me doing everything in my power to win your step-mother's good-will. Believe that such duplicity is very distasteful to my character. But I have no other means of obtaining the privilege of coming here frequently, of seeing you, and being useful to you, as I promised your friend Daniel I would."

XV.

DURING Daniel's last visits to Henriette, he had not concealed from her the fact that Maxime de Brévan had formerly been on intimate terms with Sarah Brandon and her friends. However, in explaining his reasons for wishing to renew these relations, M. de Brévan had acted with his usual diplomacy. Otherwise, Henriette might have conceived some vague suspicions when she saw him, soon after leaving her, enter into a long conversation with the countess, then speak with Sir Tom, and finally chat most confidentially with austere Mrs Brian. But, under the circumstances, she was by no means surprised. Moreover, her mind was now thousands of miles away. She was indeed thinking of Daniel, and the precious letter in her pocket, and regretted that she had not the right to run away and read it at once. For adversity was gradually teaching her the advantages

of circumspection; and she realised that it would be unwise to leave the room before the last guests had retired. Thus it was past two o'clock in the morning before she could open the missive, after dismissing her maid *Clarisse*. Unfortunately, she did not find it to contain what she had hoped for,—advice, or rather directions for her future conduct. The fact is, that, in his terrible distress, Daniel was no longer sufficiently master of himself to look calmly into the future, and weigh the probabilities. In his despair he had filled three pages with assurances of his love, with promises that his last thoughts would be for her, and with prayers that she would not forget him. Hardly twenty lines were devoted to advice, and yet he ought to have entered into the most precise and minute details. All his suggestions amounted to this,—arm yourself with patience and resignation till my return. Do not leave your father's house unless at the last extremity—if threatened, for instance, with immediate danger,—and under no circumstances do so without first of all consulting *Maxime*. To complete Daniel's blunder, his excessive delicacy had made him shrink from saying anything likely to wound his friend's over-sensitive feelings, and thus he had omitted to acquaint *Henriette* with certain most important circumstances. For instance, he merely told her that if flight became her only resource, she need not hesitate from pecuniary considerations, for he had foreseen everything, and made all needful provision. These words were by no means precise enough for her to guess that her lover had blindly entrusted his entire fortune to his friend *Maxime*. However, both *M. de Brévan* and Daniel expressed the same opinion as to her future course, and this sufficed to reassure her. She determined to follow their advice, and to submit without a word of complaint or a gesture of resistance to all the insults and outrages her enemies might heap upon her. She meant to follow the example which *Maxime* had drawn from insect life.

During the following weeks it was not so difficult for her to adhere to this resolution. Whether it wore weariness or calculation, her enemies seemed to forget her. Except at meals, they took no more notice of her than if she had not existed. The sudden impulse of affection which had actuated the Count de *Ville-Handry* on the evening when he thought his daughter's life in danger had long since passed away. He only honoured her now with ironical glances, and never addressed a word to her. The countess observed a kind of affectionate reserve, like a well-disposed person who has seen all her advances repelled, but who, although hurt, is quite ready to make friends at the first sign from the opposite side. As for grim *Mrs Brian*, she never opened her thin lips but to make some unpleasant remark, of which a single word was intelligible: "shocking!" There remained *Sir Thomas Elgin*, whose sympathetic pity daily became more manifest. But, since *Maxime's* warning, *Henriette* anxiously avoided him. She led a truly wretched life, despite the absence of any fresh "scene;" for she was virtually kept a prisoner, being only occasionally allowed to take even a stroll in the garden. Months elapsed, and she never went beyond the garden walls, save on Sunday mornings to attend mass at a neighbouring church. Her father could scarcely refuse her that, and yet he only allowed her to absent herself escorted by his valet, who had express orders not to allow her to speak to anyone whatsoever, and to "apprehend" her (this was *M. de Ville-Handry's* own expression), and bring her home by force if she made the least attempt to escape. They were not merely afraid of her escaping, but even seemed to dread her having any secret communication with the outer world. To fix her suspicions on that

point, she one morning asked her father's permission to send to the Duchess de Champdoce, and beg her to come and spend the day with her. But the Count brutally replied, that he did not desire to see the Duchess de Champdoce; and that, besides, she was not in Paris, as her husband had taken her south to hasten her recovery from a long illness. On another occasion, towards the end of February—spring was early that year, and there had been a succession of several fine days—the poor child could not help expressing a desire to take exercise and breathe a little fresh air, whereupon her father replied: "Every day your mother and I drive for an hour or two in the Bois de Boulogne. Why don't you go with us?"

Henriette made no rejoinder. She would sooner have suffered martyrdom than have appeared in public, seated in the same carriage as the countess, and by her side.

In the meanwhile she had no other assistance or support than such as she received from M. de Brévan, who, in accordance with the plan he had mentioned to her, had succeeded in acquiring the right to be a frequent visitor. He was on the best terms with Mrs Brian; and the count invited him to dinner several times. By this time Henriette had quite overcome all prejudice against him. He displayed such a respectful interest in her welfare, such almost feminine delicacy, and so much prudence and discretion, that she blessed Daniel for having left her this friend upon whose devotion she counted as on a brother's. Had he not on certain evenings, when she was well-nigh overcome with despair, restored her courage by whispering, "Be brave: here is another day gone! Daniel will soon be back!"

The greater Henriette's isolation became, the more she observed what was going on around her. And she thought she noticed some very strange changes. Her mother would never have been able to recognise her reception-rooms. What had become of the select society the count's first wife had gathered together and fashioned into something like a court, over which her husband towered like a king? Now-a-days the mansion had, so to say, become the headquarters of that motley society which forms the "Foreign Legion" of pleasure and scandal. Sarah Brandon, now Countess de Ville-Handry, was surrounded by the members of that strange cosmopolitan aristocracy which the corrupt government of that arch adventurer, the Third Napoleon, welcomed to Paris—an aristocracy often owing its titles to disgraceful services rendered to some crowned debauchee, and oftener still having no real right to noble rank, and yet, nevertheless, by its extravagance and splendour, dazzling the multitude and puzzling the police. The notoriously tainted members of this set, which journalists, forgetful of the national dignity, have christened "All Paris," were certainly not received by the young countess, who was too clever to commit such a blunder; but she welcomed to her house many and many of those equivocal cosmopolitan personages whose revenues come less from good acres in the broad sunlight than from the credulity and folly of mankind. At first the Count de Ville-Handry had been rather shocked by this new society, whose manners and customs were unknown to him, and whose language even he hardly understood. But it had not taken long to acclimatize him. He was the flag that covers the merchandise, the nominal master, although, in reality he exercised no authority whatever. He was treated with the most profound respect, and all Sarah's subjects and allies vied with each other in flattering him. They displayed such abject admiration for his talents that he fancied he had regained the prestige he had enjoyed in former days, thanks to his first wife's skilful management, and assumed an

air of grotesque importance on a par with his revived vanity. He was, moreover, again occupying all the lawyers and agents who had been in the habit of calling upon him before his marriage. They now reappeared, with a legion of those famished speculators whom the mere report of a great enterprise attracts as invincibly as a fly is attracted by a lump of sugar. The count would shut himself up in his study with these men, and often spend the whole afternoon with them there. Henriette was wondering what new misfortune was about to happen, when, to her amazement, her father unhesitatingly gave up the splendid apartments on the ground floor of the house, and allowed them to be cut up into an infinite number of small rooms. On the doors there soon appeared various inscriptions, of a kind seldom found in aristocratic mansions, such as "Office," "Board Room," "Secretary," "Cashier's Room," &c. Then cartloads of office-furniture arrived,—tables, desks, and chairs; next, mountains of huge volumes, ledgers, day-books, and so on; and finally, two huge safes, as large as many a bachelor's lodging.

Henriette was now seriously alarmed, and knowing beforehand that no one in the house would answer her questions, she turned to M. de Brévan, who, in an off-hand manner, assured her that he knew nothing about the matter, but would inquire, and let her know as soon as possible. There was no necessity, however, for him to do so, for one morning, while Henriette was wandering listlessly round the offices, she noticed a huge poster affixed to one of the doors. On approaching she read as follows:—

THE FRANCO-AMERICAN COMPANY,
For the development of the
PENNSYLVANIA PETROLEUM WELLS.

Capital,—TEN MILLIONS OF FRANCS.

In Twenty Thousand Shares of 500 Francs each.

The Charter may be seen at the Office of M. Lilois, public notary.

Chairman: THE COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour; Member of the Corps Legislatif, &c., &c., &c.

Applications for shares will be received on and after the 25th of March.

Principal Office at the

COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY'S MANSION, RUE DE VARENNES.

Branch Office—RUE LEPELLETIER, No. 79.

At the foot, in small print, followed a most elaborate prospectus, setting forth, in glowing terms, the imperative necessity which had led to the establishment of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company, the nature of its proposed operations, the immense services it would render to the world at large, and, above all, the huge profits which would promptly accrue to the shareholders. Then came a semi-scientific account of the nature of petroleum, in which it was clearly demonstrated that this admirable product represented, in comparison with other oils, a saving of more than sixty per cent.; that it gave a light of matchless purity and brilliancy; that it burnt without the least smell; and, above all, that, in spite of the statements made by interested persons, there was no possible danger of explosion connected with its use. "In less than twenty years," continued the prospectus in a strain of lyric prophecy, "petroleum will have taken the place of all the primitive and useless illuminating mediums now employed. It will replace, in like manner, all the coarse and troublesome varieties of fuel of our day. In less than twenty years the whole world will be lighted and heated by petroleum; and the oil-wells of Pennsylvania

are inexhaustible." To crown the whole affair, the placard finished with an effusive eulogy of the chairman, the famous Count de Ville-Handry, who was spoken of as a man sent by Providence; especial mention being made of his colossal private fortune, which, it was suggested, would effectively screen the shareholders from any risk. Henriette was overwhelmed with surprise. "Ah!" said she, "so this is what Sarah Brandon and her accomplices were aiming at. My father is ruined!" She could not understand how he could assume the whole responsibility of such a hazardous enterprise, and deliberately run the terrible risk of failure. With his deeply-rooted aristocratic prejudices, moreover, how could he ever consent to lend his name to an industrial enterprise? "It must have required prodigious patience and cunning," she thought, "to induce him to surrender his cherished old convictions. They must have worried him terribly, and brought fearful pressure to bear upon him."

She was therefore truly amazed when, two days afterwards, she accidentally witnessed a lively discussion between her father and the countess on the subject of these famous placards, which were now scattered all over Paris, and, indeed, all over France. The countess seemed to be distressed by the whole affair, and laid before her husband all the objections which Henriette herself would have liked to have urged; and she did so with all the authority she derived from the count's passionate affection. She did not understand, she said, how her husband, a nobleman of ancient lineage, could stoop to "money-making." Had he not enough wealth already? Would he be any happier if he had twice or thrice as many thousands a-year? He met all these objections with an indulgent smile, like a great artist who hears an ignoramus criticise his work. And, when the countess paused, he deigned to explain to her in that emphatic manner which betrayed his intense conceit, that if he, a representative of the very oldest nobility, threw himself into the great industrial movement of the century, it was for the purpose of setting a lofty example. He had no desire for "filthy lucre," he assured her; but only desired to render his country a great service. "Too dangerous a service!" replied the countess. "If you succeed, as you hope, who will thank you for it? No one. More than that, if you speak of disinterestedness, people will laugh in your face. If the thing fails, on the other hand, who will have to pay? You yourself; and folks will call you a blockhead into the bargain."

The Count de Ville-Handry shrugged his shoulders; and, taking his wife by the hand, replied: "Would you love me less if I were ruined?"

She raised her beautiful eyes beaming with affection, and replied in a soft voice, "God is my witness, my friend, that I should be delighted to be able to prove to you that I did not marry you for money."

"Sarah!" cried the count in ecstasy, "Sarah, my darling, that word is worth the whole of the fortune you blame me for risking."

Much as Henriette was inclined to mistrust appearances, she never supposed that this scene had been most cunningly devised with the view of impressing the coming industrial enterprise more forcibly than ever on the count's feeble mind. She fancied that this Petroleum Company, founded at Sir Tom's instigation, was really unpleasant to the countess; and that discord reigned in the enemy's camp. The result of her meditations was a long letter to a nobleman for whom her mother had always entertained great esteem,—the Duke de Champdoce. After explaining to him her situation, she told him all that she knew of the new enterprise, and besought him to interfere whilst it was yet time. When her letter was

ready she gave it to Clarisse, urging her to carry it at once to its address; but having by chance followed the maid down-stairs, she saw her enter the countess's room and hand her the letter. So she was betrayed even by the girl whom she thought so devoted to her interests. How long had this treachery been going on? Perhaps ever since the outset of her troubles. Many things which had hitherto seemed perfectly incomprehensible were now fully explained. In her despair and wrath she forgot the reserve she had sought to impose upon herself, and rushing into the countess's room, exclaimed:—"Give me that letter, madame!"

Clarisse had fled when she saw her treachery discovered. "I shall hand this letter, mademoiselle," replied the countess coldly, "to your father, as it is my duty to do."

"Ah, take care, madame!" cried Henriette with a threatening gesture; "take care! My patience has its limits." Her attitude and accent were so ominous that the countess thought it prudent to put a table between herself and her victim. But suddenly a great revolution took place in Henriette's heart, and, in a calmer tone, she continued—"Let us have an explanation, madame, while we are alone. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

"Nothing? Who is it, then, that has meanly slandered me, and robbed me of my father's affection, who surrounds me with spies, and overwhelms me with insults? Who forces me to lead this wretched life to which I am condemned!"

The countess's features showed how deeply she was reflecting. She was evidently calculating the effect of some new plan. "You will have it so," she replied resolutely. "Very well, then, I will be frank with you. Yes, I am bent upon ruining you. Why? You know it as well as I do. I will ask you, in my turn, who did everything that could possibly be done to prevent my marriage? Who endeavoured to crush me? Who would like to drive me from this house branded with infamy? Is it not you,—always you? Yes, you are right. I hate you: I hate you unto death, and I mean to avenge myself!"

"Madame!"

"Wait! What harm had I done you before my marriage? None. You did not even know me by name. People came and told you atrocious stories invented by my enemies, and you believed them. Your father told you, 'They are wicked libels.' What did you answer? That 'only those are libelled who deserve it.' I wanted to prove to you that it isn't so. You are the purest, chastest girl I know: are you not? Very well. I admit it, but I defy you to find a single person around you who does not believe that you have had lovers."

Extreme situations have this peculiarity, that the principal actors may be agitated by the most furious passions, and still outwardly preserve the greatest calmness. Thus these two women, who were burning with mortal hatred, spoke with almost calm voices. "And you think, madame," resumed Henriette, "that sufferings like mine can be long continued?"

"They will be continued till it pleases me to put an end to them."

"Or till I come of age."

The countess made a great effort to conceal her surprise. "Oh, oh!" said she to herself.

"Or," continued the young girl, "till he whom you parted from me—M. Daniel Champcey—returns."

"Stop, mademoiselle. You are mistaken. I did not send Daniel away."

Daniel! the countess familiarly called him by his christian name. Had she any right to do so? What was the meaning of this extraordinary impudence? Henriette conjectured it to be only a new insult; no suspicion entered her mind, and she replied ironically,—“Then it wasn’t you who sent that letter to the Ministry of Marine? It wasn’t you who ordered and paid for the forged document which caused M. Champcey to be sent abroad?”

“No; and I told him so myself, the day before he left, in his own room.”

Henriette was overwhelmed. What? This woman had gone to see Daniel? Was it true? Assuredly not. It was not even plausible. “In his room?” she repeated,—“In his room?”

“Why, yes, in the Rue de l’Universite. I foresaw the trick, and I wished to prevent it, but unfortunately I failed. I had a thousand reasons for wishing that he should remain in Paris.”

“A thousand reasons? You? Tell me only one?”

The countess courtesied, as if excusing herself for being forced to tell the truth against her inclination, and added simply,—“I love him!”

As if she had suddenly seen an abyss opening beneath her feet, Henriette threw herself back, pale, trembling, her eyes starting from their sockets. “You—love—Daniel!” she stammered,—“you love him!” And, agitated by a nervous tremor, she added, laughing painfully,—“But he—he? Can you hope that he will ever love you?”

“Yes, any day I wish it. And I shall wish it the day when he returns.”

Was she speaking seriously? or was the whole scene only a bit of cruel sport? This is what Henriette asked herself, as far as she was able to control her intellect; for she felt her head growing dizzy, and her thoughts rushed wildly through her mind. “You love Daniel!” she repeated once more, “And yet you were married the very week after his departure!”

“Alas, yes!”

“And what was my father to you? A magnificent prey, which you did not like to let escape,—an easy dupe. After all, you acknowledge it yourself, it was his fortune you wanted. It was for his money’s sake that you—you,—the marvellously-beautiful young woman,—married the old man.”

A smile curved the countess’s lips, revealing all the deep treachery of her secret calculations. “I? I coveted the dear count’s fortune?” said she, with an ironical laugh. “You can’t mean it, mademoiselle? Have you so completely forgotten how, only the other day in your presence, I tried my utmost to turn him from this enterprise in which he is about to embark all he possesses?”

Henriette hardly knew whether she was awake or asleep. Was she not, perhaps, under the influence of some hallucination caused by fever? “And you dare tell all these things to me, to the Count de Ville-Handry’s own daughter, your husband’s daughter,” she said.

“Why not?” asked the countess. And, shrugging her shoulders, she added in a careless tone,—“Do you think I am afraid of your reporting me to him? You are at liberty to try it. Listen. I think I hear your father’s footstep in the hall: call him in, and tell him what we have been talking about.” And, as Henriette made no rejoinder, she laughed, and resumed,—“Ah! you hesitate. You don’t dare do it? Well, you are wrong. I mean to hand him your letter, and I shall call him.”

There was no need for it; for at the same moment the count entered, followed by grim Mrs Brian. On perceiving his wife and daughter

together, his face lighted up immediately, and he exclaimed—"What? You are here, both of you, chatting amicably like two charming sisters? My Henriette has come back to her senses, I trust." They were both silent; and then noting how fiercely they looked at each other, he continued in a bitter tone—"No, I see I'm mistaken! I am not so fortunate. What is the matter? What has happened?"

The countess shook her head sorrowfully, and replied,—"Your daughter has written a letter to one of my cruellest enemies—to a man who, as you know, slandered me meanly on our wedding-day,—in short, to the Duke de Champdoce!"

"And has any one of my servants dared to carry that letter?"

"No, my friend! It was brought to me in obedience to your orders; and the young lady haughtily summoned me to return it to her."

"That letter?" cried the count, "Where is it?"

"Perhaps it would be better to throw it into the fire without reading it," said the countess, as she handed it to him.

But he had already torn the envelope open, and was reading the first lines. Almost immediately a flush suffused his forehead, and his eyes became bloodshot, for Henriette, sure of the Duke de Champdoce, had not hesitated to open her heart to him, but had described her situation as it really was; painting her step-mother as he had anticipated she would be; and at frequent intervals came phrases which were so many dagger-thrusts to the poor infatuated count. "This is unheard of!" he growled with a curse. "This is incomprehensible! Such perversity has never been known before." And approaching his daughter, with crossed arms, he cried with a voice of thunder,—“You wretch! Will you disgrace us all?”

She made no reply. As immovable as a statue, she did not even tremble under the storm. Besides, what could she do? Defend herself? She would not stoop to do that. Repeat the countess's impudent avowals? What would be the use? Did she not know beforehand that her father would never believe her.

In the meantime grim Mrs Brian had taken a seat by the side of her beloved Sarah. "If for my sins," said she, "I were afflicted with such a daughter, I would get her a husband as soon as possible."

"I have thought of that," replied the count; "and I believe I have even hit upon an arrangement which—" But, when he noted his daughter's watchful eye fixed upon him, he paused, and, pointing towards the door, brutally exclaimed: "You are in the way here!"

Without saying a word she left the room, much less troubled by her father's fury than by the countess's strange confessions. She only now began to measure the full extent of her step-mother's hatred. She knew that she was too practical a woman to waste her time in making idle speeches. Hence, if she had stated that she loved Daniel,—a statement which Henriette believed to be untrue,—if she had impudently confessed that she coveted her husband's fortune, she had a purpose in view. What was that purpose? How could anyone unearth the truth from among such a mass of falsehood and deception? At all events, the scene was strange enough to confound any one's judgment. And when Henriette that evening found an opportunity to tell M. de Brévan what had happened, he trembled in his chair, and was so overwhelmed with surprise that he forgot his usual precautions, and exclaimed almost aloud,—“That isn't possible!” He—usually so impassive—was certainly terribly excited, and

in less than five minutes he changed colour fully a dozen times. It seemed as if he perceived the edifice of all his hopes crumbling to pieces. At last, after a little reflection, he remarked, "Perhaps it would be wise, mademoiselle, for you to leave the house."

"What? How can I do that?" she answered sorrowfully. "After such odious slander, my honour and Daniel's honour oblige me to remain here. He recommends me only to fly at the last extremity, and when there is no other resource left. Now, I ask you, shall I be more unhappy or more seriously threatened to-morrow than I am to-day? Evidently not."

XVI.

THE confidence which Henriette expressed was not real. She had terrible presentiments, and a secret voice seemed to tell her that this scene—no doubt carefully prepared beforehand—was but another step leading to the final catastrophe. Some days, however, passed by, and nothing unusual happened. It seemed as if her persecutors had resolved to give her a short respite. She was not even so carefully watched as usual. The countess kept out of her way, and Mrs Brian no longer frightened her with her incessant taunts. Her father she seldom saw, for he was entirely absorbed in the preparations for launching the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company; and thus a week later, it seemed as if everyone had forgotten the terrible explosion caused by her letter to the Duke de Champdoce. It should be mentioned, however, that on the very evening after that distressing scene, Sir Thomas Elgin's generous indignation so far got the better of his usual reserve, and repeated pledges of neutrality, that he took the Countess Sarah aside, and sharply reproached her. "You will have to eat your own words," he said among other things, "if you use such abominable means to gratify your spite." It is true that, while speaking to his kinswoman, he took pains to be overheard by Henriette. And, indeed, as if fearing that she might not fully appreciate his sentiments, he stealthily pressed her hand, and whispered into her ear,—“Poor, dear girl! Fortunately I am here, and will watch.”

This sounded like a promise to afford her protection, which certainly would have proved efficacious if it had been sincere. But was it sincere? "No: most assuredly not!" replied M. de Brévan when he was consulted. "It can be nothing but vile hypocrisy, and the beginning of an abominable farce. However, you will see, mademoiselle."

The first spectacle offered to Henriette's view was a complete transformation in Sir Tom's manner. He, once so frigid and reserved, lately so sympathetically benevolent, now began to shew signs of a yet more tender sentiment. It was not pity now which beamed forth from his big, blue-china eyes, but the suppressed flame of a discreet passion. In public he did not particularly commit himself; but there was no little attention which he did not stealthily pay Henriette. He never left the room before her; and, on the reception-evenings, he always took a seat by her side, and remained there till the end. The most unpleasant consequence of these manœuvres was that it prevented her from speaking to M. de Brévan. The latter naturally became very indignant, and conceived so violent a dislike for Sir Tom that he could hardly contain himself. "Well, mademoiselle," he said to Henriette, on one of the few occasions when he

was able to speak to her,—“well, what did I tell you? Does the scamp show his hand clearly enough now?”

Henriette did all she could to discourage her eccentric lover; but it was impossible for her to avoid him, as they lived under the same roof, and sat down twice a-day at the same table. “The simplest way,” was M. de Brévan’s advice, “would be, perhaps, to provoke an explanation.”

However, Sir Tom did not wait to be asked. One morning, after breakfast, he waited for Henriette in the hall; and, directly she appeared, he exclaimed in an embarrassed manner, “I must speak to you, mademoisellé, it is absolutely necessary.”

She did not manifest any surprise, but simply replied, “Follow me, sir.”

They both entered the drawing-room, and remained a minute standing face to face without exchanging a word, she striving to keep up her spirits, and he, so overcome, that he had apparently lost the use of his voice. At last, all of a sudden, and after making, as it were, a supreme effort, Sir Tom began in a panting voice to inform Henriette that it was in her power to make him the happiest or most miserable of mortals. Touched by her innocence, and the persecutions to which she was exposed, he had at first pitied her; and then, daily discovering her more excellent qualities, her unusual energy blended with charming bashfulness, he had no longer been able to resist such marvellous attractions.

Henriette, who was convinced that Sir Tom was only acting a wretched farce, observed him as closely as she could, and at the first pause he made began,—“Believe me, sir—”

“Oh! I beseech you, mademoiselle,” he resumed with unusual vehemence, “Let me finish. Many in my place would have spoken to your father; but I thought that would hardly be fair in your exceptional position. Still, I have reason to believe that the Count de Ville-Handry would look upon my proposals with favour. But then he might try to do violence to your feelings; and I wish to be indebted to you alone, mademoiselle; I wish you to decide freely, for—” An expression of intense anxiety contracted his usually impassive features; and he added with great earnestness, “Mademoiselle Henriette, I am an honourable man: I love you. Will you be my wife?”

By a stroke of instinctive genius he had found the only argument calculated to prove his sincerity. However, what did that matter to Henriette? “Believe me, sir,” she replied, “I fully appreciate the honour you do me; but I am no longer free—”

“I beseech you—”

“I have freely chosen M. Daniel Champeey from among all others. My life is in his hands.”

Sir Tom tottered as if he had received a heavy blow, and stammered, “Will you not leave me a glimpse of hope?”

“I should act wrongly in doing so, sir; and I have never yet deceived any one.”

Sir Thomas Elgin was not one of those men who easily despair of effecting their object, although on the morrow he became a changed man, as if Henriette’s refusal had withered the very roots of his life. His attitude, gestures, and tone of voice were most dejected. He looked as if he had grown taller and thinner. A bitter smile curved his lips; and his magnificent whiskers, usually so admirably cared for, hung uncombed down either side of his chest. And his intense melancholy increased every day, till at last it became so evident that people asked the countess, “What is the matter with poor Sir Tom? He looks as gloomy as a mourning coach.”

"Ah! he's very unhappy," was the answer, accompanied by a sigh, intended to increase curiosity, and stimulate people to observe him more closely. Several persons did so, and soon noted that he no longer took his seat by Henriette as formerly, and that he, indeed, avoided every occasion of speaking to her. However, he was not resigned—far from it. He had merely modified his tactics. He only laid siege from a distance now, spending whole evenings looking at her in mute ecstasy. He followed her everywhere, as if he had been her shadow, and one might have fancied that he was ubiquitous, for he was inevitably seen wherever she might be—at times leaning against the door-frame, at others resting his elbow on the mantelpiece, and invariably with his eyes fixed upon her. Even when she did not see him, she felt his looks still weighing, as it were, upon her. When M. de Brévan was informed of the honourable baronet's importunate attentions, he seemed to have great difficulty in checking his indignation, and even spoke of challenging Sir Tom—only abandoning the idea when Henriette pointed out that, after such an encounter, he would no longer be able to visit the house, and would thus deprive her of the only friend to whom she could look for assistance. He yielded; and then, after careful consideration, remarked, "This abominable persecution must not be allowed to go on, mademoiselle. You ought to complain to the Count de Ville-Handry."

She reluctantly decided to do so; but the count stopped her at the first word she uttered. "Your vanity must lead you astray, girl. Before thinking of a little, insignificant person like yourself, Sir Thomas Elgin, who is one of the most eminent financiers I have ever met, would certainly look a long time elsewhere."

"Excuse me, father—"

"Stop! If, however, you don't deceive yourself, it would be the greatest piece of good-luck you could hope for, and an honour of which you ought to be very proud indeed. Do you think it would be easy to find a husband for you after all the unpleasant talk your conduct has occasioned?"

"I don't wish to marry, father."

"Perhaps not. However, as such a marriage would meet all my wishes, and tighten the bonds which already unite us to this honourable family, and if Sir Thomas Elgin really has such intentions as you mention, I think I should know how to compel you to marry him. However, I shall speak to him, and see."

He spoke to him indeed, and soon enough, for the very next morning the countess and Mrs Brian purposely went out, so as to leave Henriette and Sir Tom alone. The honourable baronet looked sadder than usual. "Is it really true, mademoiselle," he asked, "that you have complained to your father?"

"Your pertinacity compelled me to do so," replied Henriette.

"Is the idea of becoming my wife so very revolting to you?"

"I have told you, sir, I am no longer free."

"Yes, to be sure! You love M. Daniel Champcey. You love him. He knows it; for you told him so, no doubt: and yet he has forsaken you."

Sometimes, in her innermost heart, Henriette had for a moment doubted Daniel; still, she would allow no one else to do so. So she haughtily replied, "It was a point of honour with M. Champcey, and so it was with me. If he had hesitated, I should have been the first to say to him, 'Duty calls: you must go.'"

Sir Tom shook his head with a sardonic smile, and rejoined:—"But he did not hesitate. It is ten months now since he left you; and no one

knows how many more months, or, indeed, how many years, he will be absent. For his sake you suffer martyrdom; and when he returns, he may have long since forgotten you."

Henriette's eyes beamed with faith as she rose to her full height, and replied, "I believe in Daniel as surely as in myself."

"And if it were proved that you were mistaken?"

"The person who did so would render me a very sad service, which would bring no reward to any one."

Sir Tom's lips parted as if he were about to answer. But some hidden thought seemingly made him pause, and he merely remarked, with a gesture of despair. "Keep your illusions, mademoiselle,—farewell."

He was about to leave the room, when she intercepted him, and imperatively exclaimed, "You have gone too far, sir, to retrace your steps. You are bound now to justify your insidious insinuations, or to confess that they were false."

"You will have it so?" said he. "Well, let it be so. Know then, since you insist upon it, that M. Daniel Champcey has been deceiving you most wickedly; that he does not love you, and probably never did love you."

"That's what you say," replied Henriette.

Her haughty bearing, and the disdain with which she spoke, could not fail to exasperate Sir Tom. He checked himself, however, and resumed in a curt, incisive tone, "I say so because it is so; and any one but you, possessing a less noble ignorance of evil, would long since have discovered the truth. To what cause do you attribute Sarah's implacable enmity? To the recollection of your conduct on her wedding-day? Ah! if that had been everything, her resentment would have died out months ago. Jealousy alone is capable of such fierce and insatiable hatred—a hatred which neither tears nor submission can disarm, which time increases instead of diminishing. Between Sarah and you, Mlle. Henriette, there stands a man."

"A man?"

"Yes,—M. Daniel Champcey."

Henriette felt as if a sharp knife had been plunged into her bosom. "I don't understand you, sir," he said.

Shrugging his shoulders, and assuming an air of commiseration, he resumed, "What? Can't you understand that Sarah is your rival; that she loves M. Champcey; that she is madly in love with him? Ah! they cruelly deceived both Mrs Brian and myself."

"How so?"

He turned his head aside and murmured, as if speaking to himself, "Yes, his mistress."

"That's false," retorted Henriette, with almost masculine fierceness.

"You asked me to tell the truth," said Sir Tom coldly, "and I have done so. Try to remember. Have you forgotten that little scene, after which M. Champcey fled from our house in the middle of the night, bare-headed, and without even taking his overcoat?"

"Sir?"

"Didn't you think that was extraordinary? That night, you see, we discovered the whole thing. After being one of the foremost to advise Sarah to marry your father, M. Champcey came and asked her to give up all idea of such a marriage. He had previously tried to break it off through your agency, mademoiselle, thus using his influence over his betrothed for the benefit of his passion."

"Ah! what an impudent lie!" ejaculated Henriette.

"I have proofs," coldly rejoined Sir Tom, apparently disdaining the insult.

"What proofs?"

"Letters written by M. Champcey to Sarah. I have obtained two of them, and have them here in my pocket-book."

He was feeling in his pocket when she stopped him. "These letters would prove nothing to me, sir," said she.

"But—"

Giving him a withering glance, she continued in a contemptuous voice, "The persons who sent a letter to the Minister of Marine, purporting to have come from Daniel, can have no difficulty in imitating his signature. Let us break off here, sir. I forbid you ever to speak to me again."

"Is that your last word?" asked Sir Tom with a fierce laugh.

Instead of answering him, she drew a step aside, and pointed to the door.

"Well," said Sir Tom, in a threatening manner, "remember this: I have sworn you shall be my wife, whether you will or not; and my wife you shall be!"

"Leave the room, sir, or I must give it up to you!"

He retired, swearing; and then, more dead than alive, Henriette sank into an arm-chair. As long as she had been in presence of the enemy her pride had enabled her to retain the appearance of absolute faith in Daniel; but, now she was alone, terrible doubts beset her mind. Might there not be something true at the bottom of Sir Tom's evident exaggerations? Had not Sarah also boasted that she loved Daniel, and that she had been to see him at his rooms? Finally, when Daniel told her of his adventure in the Rue du Cirque, had he not grown embarrassed towards the end of his narrative, and failed to fully explain the reasons of his flight? To crown the matter, when she had tried to obtain additional information on the subject from M. de Brévan, she had been struck by his confusion, and the lame way in which he defended his friend. "Ah, now all is really over!" she thought. "The measure of my sufferings is full indeed!"

Unhappily for her, such was not the case. A new infamous, monstrous, persecution awaited her, by the side of which all the others amounted to nothing. "Whether you will or not, you shall be mine." Such had been Sir Tom's words, and from that moment he seemed bent upon convincing her that he would shrink from nothing—not even from violence. He was no longer the sympathetic defender of former days, nor the timid lover, nor the sighing, rejected suitor, following Henriette all over the house like a pet dog. He became a kind of wild beast, ever harassing and persecuting her, and glaring at her with lustful eyes; he lay in wait for her in all the passages, seemingly seeking an opportunity to throw himself upon her; projecting his lips as if to touch her cheeks, and extending his arms as if to seize her round the waist. A drunken lackey pursuing a scullion would not have looked or acted more impudently. In her terror, the poor girl threw herself at her father's feet, and besought him to protect her. But he pushed her back, and reproached her for slandering a most honourable and inoffensive man. Blindness could go no farther. Sir Tom probably knew of her failure; for the next day he laughed in her face, as if he felt that he might now venture upon anything. And he did venture upon something that so far had seemed impossible. One evening, or

rather one night, when the count and countess were at a ball, he came and knocked at Henriette's bedroom door. In her fright she rang the bell, and the servants who came up freed her from her persecutor. But from that moment her terrors had no limit; and whenever the count went out at night with his wife, she barricaded herself in her room, and spent the whole night, dressed, on a chair. Could she remain any longer standing on the brink of an abyss without name? She thought she could not; and after long and painful hesitation, she said one evening to M. de Brévan, "My mind is made up: I must fly."

Taken aback, as if he had received a blow, with open mouth and glaring eyes, M. de Brévan turned deadly pale; and the perspiration pearly in large drops on his temples, while his hands trembled like those of a man who is about to seize a long-coveted prize. "So, you are decided," he stammered, "you will leave your father's house?"

"I must," she replied; and her eyes filled with tears. "And the sooner I can do so the better—for every moment I spend here now may bring a new danger. And yet, before risking anything decisive, it might be better first to write to Daniel's aunt in order to ask her about the directions she may have received, and to tell her that I shall soon come to ask for her pity and protection."

"What? Do you think of seeking refuge at that estimable lady's house?"

"Certainly."

M. de Brévan, now master of himself again, and calculating with his usual calmness, gravely shook his head, and said,—“You ought to be careful, mademoiselle. It might be very imprudent to seek an asylum at the house of our friend's relative.”

“But Daniel recommended me to do so in his letter.”

“Yes; but he did not consider the consequences of the advice he gave you. Don't deceive yourself: the wrath of your enemies will be terrible when they discover you have escaped. They will pursue you; employ the police; and search for you all over France. Now, it is evident that the very first persons they may suspect of harbouring you will be Daniel's relatives. The old lady's house will be watched at once. How can you escape from inquiry and pursuit there? It would be folly to hope for safety there.”

Henriette hung her head pensively. “Perhaps you are right, sir,” said she.

“Now,” continued M. de Brévan, “let us see what they would do if they discovered you. As you are not of age, you are entirely dependent on your father's will. At your step-mother's instigation he would attack Daniel's aunt on the charge of abducting a minor, and would bring you back here.”

She seemed to reflect, and then suddenly exclaimed: “I can implore the assistance of the Duchess de Champdoce.”

“Unfortunately, mademoiselle, you were told the truth. For a year now the Duke de Champdoce and his wife have been travelling in Italy.”

A gesture of despair revealed the poor girl's dejection. “Great God! ” she said, “what can I do?”

A smile flitted across M. de Brévan's face, and he answered in his most persuasive manner,—“Will you permit me to offer you some advice, mademoiselle?”

“Ah, sir! I beg you to do so, for heaven's sake.”

“Well, this is the only plan that seems to me feasible. To-morrow

morning I will rent a suitable lodging, a modest little chamber in some quiet house, where you may live till you come of age, or till Daniel returns. No detective will ever think of seeking for the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter in a poor needlewoman's garret."

"And must I stay there alone, forsaken and lost?"

"It is a sacrifice which seems to me necessary for safety's sake."

She remained for a moment weighing the two alternatives—should she remain at home, or accept M. de Brévan's proposition. At last she spoke. "I will follow your advice, sir; only—"

She blushed deeply, and was evidently painfully embarrassed. "You see," she said, after long hesitation, "all this will cost money. Formerly I always used to have a thousand francs or so somewhere in my drawers; but now—"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted M. de Brévan, "is not my whole fortune entirely at your disposal?"

"To be sure, I have my jewels; and they are valuable."

"For that very reason you ought not to take them with you. We must guard against everything. We may fail. My share in the attempt may be discovered, and who knows what charges might be brought against me?"

This remark would have sufficed to enlighten many people as to Maxime's real character, but it failed to enlighten Henriette. "Well, prepare everything as you think best, sir," she said sadly. "I rely entirely upon your friendship, devotion, and honour."

M. de Brévan had a slight attack of coughing, which prevented him from answering at first. Then, finding that Henriette was bent upon escaping, he tried to devise a plan. She proposed that they should wait for a night when the count might take the countess to a ball. She might then slip into the garden, and climb the wall. But the attempt seemed too dangerous in M. de Brévan's eyes. "I think," said he, "that I can manage something better. Isn't the Count de Ville-Handry soon going to give a grand entertainment?"

"Yes, on the day after to-morrow,—Thursday."

"All right. On Thursday morning, mademoiselle, you must complain of a bad headache, and send for the doctor. He will prescribe something, I dare say, which you will not take; but the others, thinking you are indisposed, will watch you less carefully. At night, however, towards ten o'clock, you must come down and conceal yourself at the foot of the back-stairs, in the corner of the courtyard. You can do that, I presume?"

"Very easily, sir."

"In that case, all will be right. I will be here with a carriage at ten o'clock precisely. My coachman, whom I will instruct beforehand, will pretend to make a mistake, and drive to the side door instead of drawing up at the grand entrance. I shall jump out at once, and you,—you must spring swiftly into the carriage."

"Yes, that can be done."

"As the curtains will be down, no one will see you. The carriage will drive out again, and wait for me outside; and ten minutes later I shall have joined you." The plan being agreed upon, M. de Brévan then regulated his watch by Henriette's, for everything depended on punctuality, and rising, he said,—**"We have already conversed longer than was prudent. I shan't speak to you again to-night. Till Thursday."**

And in a faint voice she replied, **"Till Thursday."**

XVII.

THIS one phrase sealed Henriette's fate, and she knew it. She was fully aware of the terrible rashness of her plan. The voice of conscience seemed to whisper that she was staking her honour, life, and every earthly hope upon one card. She clearly foresaw what the world would say after her flight. She would be lost, and could only hope for rehabilitation when Daniel returned. Ah! if she could only have been as sure of his heart now as formerly! But the countess's cunning innuendoes, and Sir Tom's impudent assertions, had fulfilled their mission, and shaken her faith. Daniel had been absent for nearly a year now, and she had written to him regularly every month; but in reply she had only received from him two letters through M. de Brévan,—and what letters they were! Very polite, very cold, and almost without a word of hope. What if Daniel abandoned her when he returned? And yet the more she reflected, the more she was impressed with the absolute necessity of flight. Yes, she must face unknown dangers to escape a peril which she realised full well. In doing so, she had to rely upon a man who was almost a stranger to her; but then, he was the only one who could help her to escape the persecution of a scoundrel who had become her father's boon-companion, friend, and counsellor! She had to sacrifice her reputation,—that is, the semblance of honour; but she saved the reality,—honour itself. Still, it was very hard, and she passed the whole of the next day—Wednesday—in a state of unspeakable anguish. On Thursday morning, however, she followed M. de Brévan's directions, and complained of a violent headache. The doctor who was sent for found her very feverish, and ordered her to keep her bed. He little knew that he was thus restoring the poor girl to liberty. On being left alone she rose and tidied her drawers, carefully going through all her letters and papers, putting aside all those that she wished to take with her, and burning such as she did not wish the countess to find and read. As M. de Brévan had recommended her not to take her jewels, she merely kept about her person such as she wore every day, and left the others openly displayed on a *chiffonnier*. It was impossible for her to take much baggage; and yet some linen was indispensable. Upon reflection, she decided to take a travelling-bag which her mother had given her—inside which, in addition to a few articles of clothing, she slipped a dressing-case, with gold fittings of exquisite workmanship. Then, having finished her preparations, she sat down and wrote her father a long letter, in which she fully explained the motives of her desperate resolution. After that she waited. Night had fallen long since; and the last preparations for a princely entertainment filled the mansion with noise and motion. She could hear the hasty steps of busy servants, the loud orders of her father's valet and steward, and the hammering of upholsterers giving a final touch here and there. By-and-bye carriage wheels were heard rolling into the courtyard, and the first guests arrived. Henriette had now but a short time to wait, and she counted the last minutes with mingled dread and impatience. At last her watch pointed to a quarter to ten, and then rising almost automatically, she threw a long cashmere shawl over her shoulders, and, taking her bag in her hand, left her room, and slipped along the passages to the servants' staircase. Holding her breath she paused, peered down

the stairs, listened anxiously, and then neither hearing nor perceiving any-one, hastened down to the little hall below. She remained here in the darkness seated on her bag—her breath coming short and faint, and her hair moist with cold perspiration. At last she heard a clock strike ten; and the final vibration had not yet died away, when M. de Brévan's carriage drew up at the door.

Maxime's coachman was certainly a skilful driver. Pretending to lose control over his horse, he made it turn, and forced it back with such admirable awkwardness, that the vehicle finally stopped close beside the wall, the right hand door being just in front of the dark little vestibule where Henriette was standing. M. de Brévan at once jumped out. Henriette sprang forward unperceived, and a moment later the carriage slowly drove out of the courtyard, and drew up along the footway of the Rue de Varennes some little distance off. The scheme had succeeded. Mlle. de Ville-Handry had left her father's house, and set at defiance all the established laws of society. She was now entirely at the mercy of circumstances, and was saved or lost according to the turn events might take. But her prostration was now too great to allow her to reflect, for her feverish excitement had passed away with the danger of being intercepted, and she was reclining scarcely conscious on the cushions of the carriage, when the door opened and M. de Brévan reappeared. "Well, mademoiselle," cried he, in a strangely embarrassed voice, "we have won the day. I have just presented my respects to the Countess Sarah and her worthy companions; I have shaken hands with the Count de Ville-Handry; and no one has the shadow of a suspicion." And, as Henriette made no remark, he added,—“Now we must make haste, for it is indispensable I should show myself at the ball again as soon as possible. Your lodgings are ready for you, mademoiselle, and with your leave we will drive there at once.”

Raising herself from her recumbent position, she replied with a great effort, "Let us do so, sir!"

M. de Brévan had already jumped into the carriage, which now started off at a rapid pace; and, while they were driving along, he explained to Henriette how she would have to behave in the house where he had engaged a lodging for her. He had spoken of her, he said, as one of his relatives from the provinces, who, having suffered a reverse of fortune, had come to Paris in the hope of finding some means of earning her living. "Remember this romance, mademoiselle," said he, "and act and speak in accordance with it. Be especially careful never to mention my name or your father's. Remember that you are still under age, that you will be searched for anxiously, and that the slightest indiscretion may put your persecutors on your trail." Then, noticing the tears that were coursing down her cheeks, he sought to take her hand as if to comfort her, and in doing so, remarked the bag she had decided to bring away. "What's that?" he asked in a tone which, despite its affected gentleness, revealed considerable apprehension.

"Oh, it only contains some indispensable articles."

"Ah! then you did not take your jewels after all, mademoiselle."

"No, certainly not, sir!" answered Henriette.

M. de Brévan's persistency on this subject began to strike her as odd; and she would perhaps have expressed her surprise if the carriage had not at that moment suddenly stopped before No. 23 Rue de la Grange.

"Here we are, mademoiselle," said M. de Brévan. And, jumping out,

he gave the bell a vigorous pull, which caused the door to open immediately. The *conciierge's* room was still lighted up, and M. de Brévan walked straight towards it, opening the door with an air of authority, as if he had been the master of the house. "It is I," he said.

The door-keeper and his wife, who had been dozing over their newspapers, started up at once. "Monsieur Maxime!" they said with one voice.

"I bring you the young kinswoman I spoke to you of,—Mlle. Henriette," rejoined M. de Brévan.

If Mlle. de Ville-Handry had had the slightest knowledge of Parisian customs, she would have guessed, from the door-keeper's bows and his wife's courtesies, that they had received a handsome gratuity in advance. "The young lady's room is quite ready," said the man.

"My husband arranged everything himself," added the wife; "and I made a fine fire there as early as five o'clock, so as to take out the dampness."

"Let us go up then," said de Brévan.

As the gas on the stairs had already been put out, Mme. Chevassat lighted a candle, and, walking ahead so as to show the way, climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, where, at the corner of a dark passage, she opened a door, exclaiming, "Here we are! The young lady will see how nice it is."

It might possibly have been nice in her eyes: but Henriette, accustomed to the splendour of her father's mansion, could not repress a gesture of disgust. She would not have allowed the least of her maids to occupy such a garret at home. However, never mind. She went in bravely, placed her travelling-bag on the drawers, and took off her shawl, as if to assume possession of the apartment. However, her first impression had not escaped M. de Brévan, and, drawing her into the passage while the woman was stirring the fire, he remarked, in a low voice, "It is a terrible room; but prudence induced me to choose it."

"I like it as it is, sir."

"You will want a great many things, no doubt; but we will see to that to-morrow. To-night I must leave you: you know how important it is that I should be seen again at your father's house."

"You are quite right, sir: go, make haste!"

Still, before leaving, he once more recommended his "young kinswoman" to Mme. Chevassat, who assured him, over and over again, that she was quite willing to place herself at the young lady's disposal. The pair left the room together, and Henriette could hear them on the stairs—Maxime again repeating his recommendations, and the woman all complacency and honeyed words. Left to herself, the last vestiges of Henriette's excitement passed away, and she now felt intensely astonished at what she had dared to do. Standing by the mantelpiece, and gazing into the little looking-glass at her own pale face, she murmured, "Is that myself, my own self?" Yes, it was, indeed, herself, the opulent Count de Ville-Handry's only daughter, here, in a strange house, in a wretched garret-room, which she called her own—yesterday, surrounded by princely splendour, waited on by an army of retainers, and now in want of almost everything, and having for her only servant the old woman to whom M. de Brévan had recommended her. Was it possible? She could hardly believe it herself. Still, she by no means repented of what she had done. She could have remained no longer in her father's house, where she was exposed to the vilest insults from everyone. Wishing to occupy her mind and shake off these dismal thoughts, she rose and began to explore her new home, and to examine all it contained. It was one of those lodgings which landlords rarely trouble themselves

about, and which they never repair, being always sure of letting them just as they are. The tiled floor was going to pieces; the ceiling was cracked and blackened; the greasy, dirty, grey wall-paper was stained with the finger-marks of all the previous occupants; and the furniture was in full keeping with the rest—a walnut bedstead with faded calico curtains, a chest of drawers, a table, two chairs, and a miserable arm-chair: that was all. A short curtain hung before the window. By the side of the bed a little strip of carpet was stretched, and on the mantelpiece stood a zinc clock between two blue glass vases. Nothing else! How could M. de Brévan ever have selected such a room, such a hole? Henriette could not understand it. He had told her, and she had believed that they must use extreme caution. But would she have been any more compromised, or in greater danger of being discovered, if the walls had been papered anew, the tiled floor covered with a simple felt carpet, and the room furnished, altogether, a little more decently? Still, she did not conceive any suspicion even yet. She thought it mattered very little where and how she was lodged. She hoped it was, after all, only for a short time; and consoled herself with the thought that a convent cell would have been worse still. And anything was better than her father's house. "At least," she said, "I shall be quiet and undisturbed here."

Perhaps she was to enjoy moral quiet; but, as to any other peace, she was soon taught differently. Accustomed to the profound stillness of her father's mansion at night-time, Henriette had naturally no idea of the incessant racket that prevails on the upper floors of second and third-class Paris houses, which shelter as many inhabitants as a decent sized village, and where the tenants, merely separated from each other by thin partition-walls, live, so to say, in public. Under such circumstances, one only acquires the faculty of sleeping after long experience; and the poor girl had to undergo her apprenticeship. It was past four o'clock before she could manage to sleep; and then her slumber was so heavy, that she was not roused by the general stir throughout the house at daybreak. When she awoke, a faint sun-ray was gliding into the room through the flimsy curtain, and the hands of the zinc clock pointed to noon. She rose at once and began to dress. When she awoke the day before, she had only to ring her bell, and her maid promptly appeared, lit a fire, brought her her slippers, and helped her to don a warm, wadded dressing-gown. How different matters were to-day. The thought carried her back to her father's house. What were they doing there at this hour? Her escape was certainly known by this time. No doubt they had sent the servants out in all directions. Her father had most probably gone to obtain the assistance of the police. She felt almost happy at the idea of being so safely concealed; and, looking round her room, which appeared even more wretched in the day-time than by candle-light, she murmured:—"No, they will never think of looking for me here!"

In the meantime she had discovered a small supply of wood near the fire-place; and, as it was cold, she was about to light a fire, when someone knocked at her door. She opened it, and found Mme. Chevassat, the door-keeper's wife, waiting on the threshold. "It is I, my pretty young lady," said the old woman as she entered. "Not seeing you come down, I said to myself, 'I must go and look after her.' Now, have you slept well?"

"Very well, madame, thank you!"

"Now, that's right. And how is your appetite? For that was what I came up about. Don't you think you could eat a little something?"

"I would be obliged to you, madame," replied Henriette, "if you would bring me up some breakfast."

"If I would! As often as you desire, my pretty young lady. Just give me time to boil an egg, and grill a cutlet, and I'll be up again."

Ordinarily sour-tempered, and as bitter as wormwood, Mme. Chevassat seemed bent on displaying extraordinary amiability towards Henriette, hiding, moreover, under a veil of sympathy, the annoying eagerness of her eyes. Her hypocrisy was all wasted, however, for it was too manifest not to arouse suspicion. "I am sure," thought Henriette, "that she must be a bad woman." And she was confirmed in this idea when the door-keeper's wife returned. After setting out the breakfast on a little table before the fire, Mme. Chevassat installed herself on a chair near the door, and continued talking, without once pausing, whilst Henriette partook of her improvised meal. According to the old woman, the poor girl ought to thank her guardian angel for having brought her to this charming house, No. 23 Rue de la Grange, where there was such a *concierge* with such a wife!—he, the best of men; and she, a real treasure of kindness, gentleness, and, above all, discretion. "Quite an exceptional house, as far as the tenants are concerned," added garrulous Mme. Chevassat. "They are all people of high standing or great respectability, from the wealthy old ladies on the first floor to Papa Ravinet on the fourth landing, and without even excepting the young ladies who live in the small rooms of the back building." Then, having passed all the tenants in review, she began to sing the praises of M. de Brévan, whom she invariably called M. Maxime. She declared that he had won her heart the first time he called at the house, the day before yesterday, to engage Henriette's room. She had never seen a more perfect gentleman: so kind, polite, and liberal! With her great experience, she had at once realised that he was one of those men who inspire violent passions, and secure lasting attachments. Besides, added she, with a hideous leer, she was sure of his deep interest in her pretty tenant; and was, indeed, so well convinced of it that she would willingly devote herself to her service, even without any prospect of payment. However, this did not prevent her from informing Henriette, as soon as she had finished breakfast,—“You owe me two francs, mademoiselle; and, if you like, I can board you for five francs a-day.” Thereupon she began to explain that this would be a mere act of kindness on her part, for, considering how dear everything was, she would certainly be a loser. She was rattling on in this strain when Henriette abruptly stopped her, and, drawing a twenty-franc piece from her purse, exclaimed—“Pay yourself, madame.”

This was evidently not what the woman expected; for, drawing back with an air of offended dignity, she replied, “What do you take me to be, mam'selle? Do you think me capable of asking for payment?” And, shrugging her shoulders, she added, “Besides, don't your expenses concern M. Maxime?” Thereupon she quickly folded the napkin, took up the plates, and disappeared.

Henriette did not know what to think. No doubt this woman was pursuing some mysterious aim with all her foolish talk; but what could that aim be? This was not the only cause for anxiety. The poor girl now realised that she was altogether at M. de Brévan's mercy. The only money she possessed amounted to some two hundred francs, and she was in want of everything; she had neither another dress, nor another petticoat. Why had M. de Brévan not thought of that beforehand? Was he waiting for

her to acquaint him with her distress, and ask him for money? She could scarcely think so, and rather attributed his neglect to his excitement, fancying that he would soon call to inquire after her, and place himself at her service. But the day slowly passed, night came, and still he did not appear. What could it mean? What unforeseen event could have happened? What misfortune could have befallen him? Distracted by a thousand apprehensions, Henriette was more than once on the point of going to his house.

It was only at two o'clock on the following afternoon that M. de Brévan at last put in an appearance. He was evidently embarrassed, despite the easy air he tried to affect. He had not come the previous day, he said, as he was sure the Countess Sarah had had him watched. Mlle. de Ville-Handry's flight from her father's house was known all over Paris, and he was suspected of having aided and abetted her: at least, so some acquaintances of his had told him at his club. He added, that it would be imprudent in him to stay longer; and left without having said a word concerning future plans, and apparently without having noticed Henriette's destitution. And thus, for three days, he only called, to leave almost instantly. He always presented himself in an embarrassed manner, as if he had something very important to tell her; then suddenly his brow would darken, and he would leave without saying anything of moment. At last Henriette could endure this atrocious uncertainty no longer. She determined to provoke an explanation, when, on the fourth day, M. de Brévan made his appearance, more agitated even than usual. On entering the room he locked the door behind him, and exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, "I must speak to you, mademoiselle, yes, I must!" He was extremely pale, his lips quivered, and his eyes shone like those of a man who has sought courage in strong drink.

"I am ready to listen," nervously replied the poor girl.

He hesitated again for a moment; and then, apparently overcoming his reluctance by a great effort, he resumed, "Well, I wish to ask you if you have ever suspected what my real reasons were for assisting you to escape?"

"Why, I think you acted out of pity for me, and out of friendship for M. Daniel Champecy."

"No! You are entirely mistaken."

On hearing these words Henriette instinctively drew back. "Ah!" she muttered.

Pale a moment before, M. de Brévan had now flushed crimson: "Have you really noticed nothing else," he asked. "Are you really not aware that I love you?"

Could this infamy be true? Surely M. de Brévan was either drunk or mad. "Leave me, sir," exclaimed Henriette peremptorily.

But, far from turning to leave the room, he advanced towards her with open arms, and continued, "Yes, I love you madly, and have done so ever since I saw you for the first time."

Henriette had in the meanwhile swiftly retreated, and opened the window. "If you advance another step, I shall cry for help," she said.

He paused, and, changing his tone, exclaimed, "Ah! You refuse? Well, what are you hoping for? For Daniel's return? Don't you know that he loves Sarah?"

"Ah! You abuse my forlorn condition infamously!" retorted the poor girl. And, as he still insisted, she added, "Why don't you go, coward? Why don't you go? Must I call?"

- Frightened by the idea of her screaming for help, the scoundrel backed to the door, unlocked it, set it ajar, and as he left exclaimed, "You refuse to listen to me to-day; but, before the month is over, you will beg me to come to your assistance. You are ruined; and I alone can rescue you."

XVIII.

At last, then, Henriette knew the truth. Overcome with horror, quivering with nervous spasms, she tried to realise the depth of the abyss into which she had thrown herself: with childlike simplicity she had voluntarily walked into the pit that had been dug for her. Who, however, would have thought of mistrusting Daniel's friend, especially after Daniel's own advice? Who could have suspected such monstrous rascality? Ah! Now she understood all that hitherto seemed mysterious in M. de Brévan's conduct. She understood why he had so urgently recommended her not to take her jewels, nor, indeed, any object of value with her, when escaping from her father's house; for, if she had had her jewellery, she would have been in possession of a small fortune: she would have been independent, and above want for at least a couple of years. But M. de Brévan wished her to find herself destitute. He knew, the scoundrel! with what crushing contempt she would reject his first proposals; but he flattered himself with the hope that isolation, fear, and want, would at last reduce her to submission. And this man had been Daniel's friend! And it was he to whose care Daniel had entrusted her on leaving France! What atrocious deception! Sir Thomas Elgin was, no doubt, an unscrupulous villain; but he was known as such: he was known to be capable of anything, and thus people were on their guard. But this man—was he not a thousand times meaner and viler?—had waited with a smiling face during a whole year for the hour of treachery: he had prepared a hideous crime under the veil of the noblest friendship! Henriette thought she could divine the traitor's final aim. By forcing her to marry him, he no doubt thought he would secure a large portion of the Count de Ville-Handry's immense fortune. Hence the rivalry between Sir Tom and M. de Brévan. They both coveted the same thing; and each trembled lest the other obtained the treasure he wanted to secure. The idea that Maxime was the Countess Sarah's accomplice did not enter Henriette's mind. On the contrary, she thought they were enemies, and divided by antagonistic interests. "Ah!" she murmured, "they have one feeling, at all events, in common—hatred against me."

A few months ago, so fearful and so sudden a catastrophe would have probably crushed Henriette. But she had endured so many blows during the past year, that she had strength enough to support this new misfortune. The human heart, be it remembered, learns how to bear grief just as the body learns to endure fatigue. Moreover, she called to her assistance the remembrance of Daniel. She had doubted him for one moment, but her faith had returned intact and perfect. Her reason told her that, if he had really loved Sarah Brandon, her enemies—Sir Thomas Elgin and M. de Brévan—would not have taken such pains to induce her to believe that such was the case. Hence, he would certainly return to her, as devoted as when he left. But, great God! how grieved and enraged he would be when he learned how wickedly and cowardly he had been betrayed by the man whom he called his friend! Still, he would know how to restore

Henriette to her proper position, and how to avenge her. "And I shall wait for him," she said, with her teeth firmly set,—"I shall wait for him!"

How? This was a question she did not ask herself; for she was yet in that first stage of enthusiasm, when, full of heroic resolutions, we fail to perceive the obstacles that have to be overcome. However, she was soon made acquainted with the first difficulties in her way, thanks to Mme. Chevassat, when the latter brought her her dinner at six o'clock, according to the agreement they had made. The old woman's face had a deeply grieved expression, and it really seemed as if there were tears in her eyes. "Well, well, my beautiful young lady," she said in her sweetest voice, "so you have quarrelled with our dear M. Maxime?"

Henriette was so convinced of the futility of an explanation, and so fearful of new dangers, that she simply replied,—“Yes, madame.”

"I was afraid of it," replied the woman, "for I just now saw him come down-stairs with a dreadfully long face. You see, he's in love with you, that kind young man; and you may believe me when I tell you so, for I know what men are." She expected an answer; for generally her eloquence was very effective with her tenants. But, as no reply came, she went on,—“However, we must hope that the trouble will soon blow over.”

"No!" exclaimed Henriette.

Mme. Chevassat seemed confounded. "How savage you are!" she resumed at last. "Well, it is your own look-out. Only, I should like to know what you mean to do?"

"About what?"

"Why, about your board."

"I shall find means, madame, you may be sure."

The old woman, however, knew from experience what that cruel word, "living," sometimes means with poor, forsaken girls, and shaking her head seriously, she said,—“So much the better; so much the better! Only I know you owe a good deal of money.”

"Owe?"

"Why, yes! The furniture here has never been paid for."

"What? The furniture—"

"Of course, M. Maxime was going to pay for it: he told me so. But if you fall out together in this way—well, you understand, don't you?"

Henriette hardly did understand such fearful infamy; still, she did not betray her indignation and surprise, but simply asked,—“What did the furniture cost? do you know?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but I should think something like five or six hundred francs, for things are so dear now-a-days!"

The whole was probably not worth more than a hundred and fifty or two hundred francs. "Very well, I'll pay," said Henriette. "The man will give me forty-eight hours' time, I presume?"

"Oh, certainly!"

As the poor girl was now quite sure that this honied-mouthed Megera was employed by M. de Brévan to watch her, she affected a perfectly calm air, and, on finishing dinner, even insisted on paying her some fifty francs, which she owed for the last few days' board and some small purchases. But, when the old woman was gone, she sank on to a chair, exclaiming, "I am lost!"

There was in fact no refuge for her: no help to be expected. Should she return to her father, and implore her stepmother's pity? Ah! death itself would be preferable to such humiliation. And besides, in flying from M. de Brévan, would she not fall into Sir Thomas Elgin's clutches? Should

she seek assistance from some of the old family friends? But which of them could she confide in? Since her mother's death, no one seemed to have remembered her, unless for the purpose of slandering her. The only ones who might have made her cause their own were the Duke and the Duchess de Champdoce, who were in Italy, as she had been assured. "I can count upon nobody but myself," she repeated,—"myself, myself!" And rousing herself at the thought, she added, "Well, let it be so, I will save myself." After all, if she could but manage to live till she came of age, or till Daniel returned, all would come right again. "Is it really so hard to live?" she asked herself. "Are there not many girls, poor people's daughters, who are as completely forsaken as I am, and yet manage to subsist. Why should not I succeed as well as them?" Why? Because poor people's children serve, so to say, from the cradle, an apprenticeship of poverty,—because they are neither afraid of a day without work, nor of a day without bread,—because cruel experience arms them for the struggle,—because they know life, and know Paris,—because their industry is commensurate with their wants,—and because they have an innate capacity to turn well-nigh everything to some advantage, thanks to their smartness, enterprise, and energy. But the Count de Ville-Handry's only daughter—the heiress of many millions, reared, so to say, in a hot-house—according to the foolish custom of modern society—knew nothing at all of life, of its bitter realities, struggles, and sufferings. The only thing in her favour was her courage. "That is enough," she said to herself. "What we will do, we can do."

So, determined to ask no one for assistance, she set to work examining her resources. The only objects of any value she owned were the cashmere which she had wrapped round her when she fled, the dressing-case in her mother's travelling-bag, a brooch, a watch, a pair of pretty earrings, and, lastly, two rings, which by some lucky accident she had forgotten to take off, and one of which was somewhat valuable. All these things she thought must have cost, at least, eight or nine thousand francs; but how much would they sell for? On this question her whole future depended. Moreover, how could she dispose of them? She wished to settle the matter at once, and rid herself of this terrible uncertainty. She especially wished to pay for the furniture in her room. Whom could she ask to help her? Not for the world would she have confided in Mme. Chevassat; for she instinctively realised that, if she once acquainted that terrible woman with her destitution, she would be bound hand and foot to her. While she was thus meditating, she thought of the Mont de Piété.* She had heard its offices spoken of, but only knew that poor people could obtain money there by depositing a pledge. "That's where I must go," she said to herself. But how was she to find an office? She scarcely knew; and yet she at once went down-stairs and left the house, without even answering astonished Mme. Chevassat's inquisitive question as to where she was going in such a hurry. Turning at the first corner, she went on at haphazard, paying no attention to the passers-by, but exclusively occupied in looking at the houses and the inscriptions over the shops. However, for more than an hour she wandered on without finding what she wanted; and to make matters worse, dusk was already setting in. "Still, I won't go home till I have found an office," she said to herself, wrathfully. And mustering up all her courage, she approached a

* This is the public pawnbroking establishment of Paris, with branch offices scattered through the city.—*Trans.*

sergent-de-ville, and, flushing crimson, asked him, "Will you be kind enough, sir, to direct me to one of the Mont de Piété offices?"

The man looked at her with compassionate inquisitiveness, as if wondering what misfortune had befallen so distinguished a looking young woman, and then answered with a sigh, "You will find one, madame, at the corner of the first street on the right."

Hastily thanking him, Henriette hurried in the direction he named, entered the house he mentioned, went up-stairs to the first floor, opened a door, and found herself in a large room, where some twenty people were standing about, waiting. On the right hand three or four clerks, shut off from the public by a railing breast-high, were writing down depositors' names, and counting out money. From time to time another clerk appeared at a kind of inner window, and carried the articles offered as pledges into an adjoining room to undergo valuation. After waiting some five minutes or so, and watching the proceedings, Henriette was able to realise the main features of the system, and thought it unnecessary to question any of the bystanders. Trembling, as if she had committed a crime, she approached the window, and laid on the ledge the most valuable of her two rings. Then she waited, without daring to look up; for it seemed to her as if all the bystanders' eyes were fixed upon her.

"A diamond ring!" cried the clerk. "Nine hundred francs. Whose is it?"

The large amount caused everyone to turn round; and a tall, impudent looking, over-dressed female remarked, "Oh, oh! The damsel doesn't stint herself!"

Crimson with shame, Henriette stepped towards the clerk and whispered, "It is my ring, sir."

The clerk looked at her, and then softly asked, "You have your papers?"

"Papers? What for?"

"The papers that establish your identity. A passport, a receipt for rent, or anything."

The bystanders laughed at the ignorance this girl displayed. "I have no such papers, sir," she stammered.

"Then we can make no advance."

So thus her last hope vanished. Holding out her hand, she said, "Please give me back my ring."

"No, no, my dear!" replied the clerk with a laugh, "that can't be done. You shall have it back when you bring me your papers, or when you come accompanied by two tradespeople who are known to us."

"But, sir,—"

"That's the rule. And, considering that he had lost time enough, he resumed:—"One velvet cloak! Thirty francs. Whose is it?"

Henriette hastened out of the room and down the stairs, pursued, it seemed to her, by the cries of the crowd. How that clerk had looked at her! Did he think she had stolen the ring? And what would become of it? The police would no doubt make enquiries, she would be tracked and discovered, carried back to her father's house, and given up to Sir Tom. She had hardly sufficient strength to return to the Rue de la Grange, and there fatigue, fright, and excitement made her forget her earlier resolutions. She confessed her discomfiture to Mme. Chevassat.

That estimable female tried to look as grave as an attorney consulted on a very delicate subject; but when Henriette had finished her story, she seemingly melted and exclaimed—"Poor little kitten, poor little innocent

kitten !” But, if she succeeded in assuming a tone of sincere sympathy, the greedy look in her eyes clearly betrayed her satisfaction at seeing Henriette at last at her feet. “After all,” she said, “you are prodigiously lucky in your misfortunes, for really you are altogether too imprudent.” And as the poor girl looked up in astonishment, not understanding Mme. Chevassat’s meaning, the latter resumed—“Yes, you ran a great risk ; and I can easily prove it to you. Who are you ? Well, you need not turn pale like that : I don’t ask any questions. But, after all, if you carry your jewels yourself to the pawn-shop, you, so to say, rush right into the lion’s mouth. If they had arrested you when they saw you had no papers ; if they had taken you before a magistrate—eh ? Ah ! my young lady, you would have fared pretty badly, I dare say.” And then, changing her tone, she began scolding her tenant for having concealed her troubles from her. That was very wrong ; and, besides, it hurt her feelings. Why had she given her money last night ? Did she ask for money ? Did she look like such a terrible creditor ? She knew, God be thanked ! what life was here below, and that we are bound to help one another. To be sure, there was that furniture-dealer, who must be paid ; but she would have been quite willing to make him wait ; and why shouldn’t he do so ? She had got very different people to wait ! Why, only last week she sent an upholsterer about his business, and a dressmaker as well, for bothering one of her tenants in the back building,—the very nicest, and prettiest, and best of them all. Thus she chattered on with amazing volubility, till at last, when she thought she had made a sufficiently strong impression on her “poor little pussy-cat,” she said,—“However, one can easily see, my dear, that you are a mere child. Pawn your poor little jewels ! Why, that’s absurd, for isn’t there some one at hand quite ready to do anything for you ?” At this sudden, but not altogether unexpected, attack, Henriette trembled. “For I am sure,” continued Mme. Chevassat, “that if you only chose, poor M. Maxime could give you everything he possesses.”

Henriette gave the door-keeper’s wife such a look that that usually imperturbable female seemed quite disconcerted. “I forbid you,” cried the poor girl, in a voice trembling with indignation,—“I forbid you positively ever to mention his name to me.”

The woman shrugged her shoulders. “As you like it,” she answered. And then, to change the conversation, she added, “Well, let us return to your ring. What do you propose to do ?”

“That is exactly why I came to you,” replied Henriette. “I don’t know what is to be done in such a case.”

Mme. Chevassat smiled, evidently well pleased. “And you did very well to come to us,” she said. “Chevassat will go to the office, taking the charcoal-dealer and the grocer next door with him ; and before going to bed you shall have your money, I promise you ! Chevassat understands how to make the clerks perform their duty, and no mistake.”

That evening, indeed, the excellent man really condescended to go upstairs, and hand Henriette eight hundred and ninety-five francs. He did not bring the whole nine hundred, he said ; for, having put his two neighbours to some inconvenience, he was bound, according to established usage, to invite them to take something. For himself, he had, of course, kept nothing—oh, nothing at all ! He could take his oath upon that ; for he greatly preferred to leave that little matter to the beautiful young lady’s liberality. “Here are ten francs,” curtly retorted Henriette, in order to put an end to his unpleasant chattering.

Thus, with a few gold-pieces previously remaining in her purse, the poor girl had a capital of about a thousand francs in hand. How many days, how many months, this sum would have lasted, had it not been for that unfortunate furniture-dealer. He did not fail to present himself the very next day, accompanied by Mme. Chevassat, and he boldly asked for five hundred and seventy-nine francs. Such a sum for the few second-hand pieces of furniture which garnished that wretched garret! It was a clear swindle, and such an impudent one, that Henriette felt overwhelmed. However, she paid the money. When the man had left, she sadly counted from one hand into the other the twenty-three pieces of gold remaining to her, and in the midst of her musings a thought occurred to her which might have led to salvation had she only acted on it. Why not stealthily leave the house, go to the Orleans railway station, take the first train for Anjou, and seek shelter at the home of Daniel's aunt. Alas! she contented herself with writing to her, and did not start.

XIX.

THIS inspiration was, moreover, destined to be the last favour vouchsafed by Providence—one of those opportunities which, once allowed to pass, never return. From that moment she felt the net, in which she had been ensnared, tighten day by day more closely around her. She had vowed to economize her little hoard as if it had been the blood of life itself. But how could she economize? Was it not necessary that she should buy many indispensable things? When M. de Brévan had engaged this garret-room, he had thought of nothing, or rather he had taken every possible measure to ensure his victim being speedily reduced to utter destitution. Henriette's only clothes were those on her back; she had not even a change of linen, a second pair of shoes, or a towel to wipe her hands—excepting one which the woman down-stairs had lent her. A girl accustomed to all the refinements of cleanliness could not possibly endure such privations; and thus she spent in a variety of small purchases more than a hundred and fifty francs. The sum was enormous for one in her position, and yet she merely bought such things as she considered absolutely indispensable. The worst, however, was, that she had to pay Mme. Chevassat five francs a-day for her board. These five francs troubled her grievously, for she would have been quite willing to live on bread and water. But in that direction she thought it impossible to economize; for one evening, when she hinted at the necessity of retrenching, Mme. Chevassat gave her a venomous, significant glance, which revealed the possibility of another danger. Might not that woman denounce her? These five francs thus became a kind of daily ransom which she paid to secure Mme. Chevassat's forbearance and good-will. It is true that, for this consideration, the woman was all attention towards her "poor little pussy-cat," as she had definitively dubbed Henriette, becoming daily more familiar, and adding this odious and irritating presumption to all the poor girl's other tortures. Many a time Henriette had been made so indignant that she had thought of rebelling; but she had never dared to do so. She indeed submitted to this familiarity for the same reason as she paid her five francs a-day. Taking her silence for consent, the obnoxious old female now cast aside all restraint, and declared she could not understand how her "little pussy-cat," young and pretty

as she was, could consent to live as she did. Was that a life? And thereupon she reverted to M. Maxime, who continued to call regularly twice a-day—the poor young man!—to enquire after Henriette. “More than that, my little pussy,” added Mme. Chevassat, “you will see that one of these days he will summon up courage enough to come and offer you an apology.”

That, however, was too much for Henriette to believe. “He will never have such consummate impudence,” she thought. But once again she was mistaken; for one morning, just as she had finished tidying her room, she heard a discreet knock outside. Thinking it was Mme. Chevassat with her breakfast, she opened the door without asking who was there, and started back with amazement and terror on recognizing M. de Brévan. He was extremely pale; his lips trembled; and his eyes were dim. He seemed, moreover, to have great difficulty in speaking. “I have come, mademoiselle,” he said at last, “to ask if you have reconsidered.” She made no reply, but gave him a look of supreme contempt, for which he was apparently prepared. “I know,” he continued, “that my conduct must appear abominable in your eyes. I have led you into this snare, and I have meanly betrayed a friend’s confidence; but I have an excuse. My passion is stronger either than my will or reason.”

“A vile passion for money!”

“You may think so, mademoiselle, if you choose. I shall not even attempt to clear myself. That is not what I came for. I came solely for the purpose of enlightening you in regard to your own position, which you do not seem to realize.”

If she had followed her first impulse, Henriette would have ordered him away. But she thought she ought to know his intentions and plans; so, overcoming her disgust, she remained silent, as if waiting for him to continue. “In the first place,” said M. de Brévan, apparently trying to collect his thoughts, “bear this in mind, mademoiselle. Your reputation is lost, and lost through me. All Paris is by this time convinced that I have run away with you, and that I keep you concealed in some charming retreat, where we enjoy our mutual love; in fact, that you are my mistress.” He seemed to expect an explosion of wrath. By no means! Henriette remained quite motionless. “What would you have?” he resumed sarcastically. “My coachman has been gossiping; and two friends of mine, who reached your father’s house on foot just when I drove up, saw you jump into my brougham; and, as if that were not enough, that absurd fellow Sir Tom must needs call me out. We have had a duel, and I have wounded him.”

The manner in which Henriette shrugged her shoulders clearly showed that she did not believe M. de Brévan’s statements. “If you doubt it, mademoiselle,” said he, “pray, read this paragraph, at the top of the second column.” And with these words he handed her a newspaper.

“In the Bois de Vincennes yesterday,” read Henriette, “a duel with swords was fought between M. M. de B— and one of the most distinguished members of our Anglo-American colony. After five minutes’ close combat, Sir T. E— was wounded in the arm. It is rumoured that this duel was connected with the recent surprising disappearance of one of the greatest heiresses of the Faubourg Saint Germain. Lucky M. de B— is reported to know too much of the beautiful young lady’s present home for the peace of the family. However, it would be indiscreet to say more at present on the subject of an adventure which will ere long, no doubt, end in a happy and brilliant marriage.”

"You see, mademoiselle," said M. de Brévan, when he thought Henriette had had time enough to read the paragraph, "you see it is not I who advise marriage. If you will become my wife, your honour is safe."

"Ah, sir!"

That simple exclamation was uttered in so contemptuous a tone, that M. de Brévan seemed to turn, if possible, whiter than before. "Ah! I see you prefer marrying Sir Thomas Elgin," he said; and, as she shrugged her shoulders by way of reply, he resumed, "Oh, I am not joking! He or I; you have no other alternative. Sooner or later you will have to choose."

"I shall not choose, sir."

"Oh, just wait till poverty comes. You think, perhaps, you will only need to implore your father to come to your assistance. Don't flatter yourself with that idea. Your father has no other will than the countess Sarah's, and she is determined to make you marry Sir Tom."

"I shall not appeal to my father, sir."

"Then you probably count upon Daniel's return? Ah, believe me! do not indulge in such dreams. I have already told you that Daniel loves the Countess Sarah; and, even if he did not love her, you have been too publicly disgraced for him ever to give you his name. But that is nothing yet. Go to the Ministry of Marine and enquire. The officials will tell you that 'The Conquest' is out on a cruise of two years more. By the time Daniel returns, if indeed he returns at all (which is far from certain), you will long since have become Lady Elgin or Mme. de Brévan, unless—"

Henriette looked at him so fixedly that he could not sustain her glance, but lowered his eyes. "Unless I die!" said she impressively. "Did you not mean that? Be it so." M. de Brévan bowed, as if such indeed were his meaning. Then, opening the door, he exclaimed—"Let me hope, mademoiselle, that this is not your last word. I shall, however, have the honour of calling every week to receive your orders." And, with another bow, he left the room.

"What brought him here, the wretch! What does he want of me?" asked Henriette of herself as soon as she was alone. She did not believe a word of the pretexts M. de Brévan had assigned for his visit. She could not admit that he had really come to see if she had reflected, nor that he really cherished the abominable hope that misery, hunger, and fear would drive her into his arms. "He ought to know me well enough," she thought, "to be sure that I would prefer death a thousand times." It seemed to her that some all-powerful consideration must have absolutely compelled M. de Brévan to visit her,—for his manner had sufficiently shewn that the visit was scarcely to his liking. But then, what could that consideration be? His words, which she easily recalled, threw no light on the matter at all. She herself had already realised what he had told her concerning the consequences of her flight. The only new information he had imparted concerned his duel with Sir Tom; and, on consideration, this occurrence seemed to her natural enough. For did they not both covet with equal eagerness the fortune she would inherit from her mother as soon as she came of age? To her mind, their antagonistic interests explained their mutual hatred; for she was convinced that they hated one another mortally. The idea that Sir Tom and M. de Brévan understood each other, and pursued a common purpose, never entered her mind; and, indeed, if it had suggested itself, she would have rejected it as absurd. Must she, then, come to the conclusion that the only purpose of M. de

Brévan's visit was to drive her to despair? But why should he do so? what advantage would he reap from that? A lover does not seek to terrify and disgust the girl whose hand he seeks to win;—and yet this is how M. de Brévan had acted, so that he must have some very different aim to matrimony. What could it be? Surely he was not acting in this abominable manner for the mere pleasure of doing so. It was certain that when Daniel returned, whether he still loved Henriette or not, M. de Brévan would at all events have a terrible account to settle with him. Did M. de Brévan ever think of Daniel's return? No doubt he did; and with secret terror too. There was proof of that in one phrase that had escaped him. After saying, "When Daniel returns," he had added, "if, indeed, he ever does so, which is by no means sure." Why this proviso? Had he any reason to think that Daniel might perish in this dangerous campaign? Now she remembered—yes, she remembered distinctly—that M. de Brévan had smiled in a very peculiar way while uttering these words. At this recollection her heart sank within her, and she felt as if she were about to faint. Was he not capable of anything, the villain,—capable even of arming an assassin? "Oh, I must warn Daniel!" she exclaimed, "I must warn him, and at once." Accordingly, although she had written him a long letter only the day before, she sat down and wrote again, begging him to be watchful, to mistrust everybody, for his life was certainly threatened. Prudently enough she posted this letter herself, feeling convinced that if she confided it to Mme. Chevassat, the latter would hand it to M. de Brévan.

It was astonishing, however, how the door-keeper's wife seemed to become every day more attached to Henriette, and how expansive and demonstrative her affection grew. At all hours of the day, and on the most trivial pretexts, she would come up, sit down, and chatter away at a surprising rate. She no longer restrained herself in the least, but talked "from the bottom of her heart" with her "dear little pussy-cat," as if Henriette had been her own daughter. Moreover, she now cynically developed certain strange doctrines which she had formerly only hinted at; and it seemed as if she had been purposely deputed by Henriette's enemies for the special purpose of demoralizing and depraving her, and driving her, if possible, into that brilliant easy life of sin which is the ruin of so many unhappy women. Fortunately, in this case, the messenger was ill-chosen. Mme. Chevassat's eloquence might have inflamed the imagination of some low-born, ambitious girl, but it only disgusted Henriette. She had got into the habit of thinking of other things while the old woman was holding forth; and her mind fled to regions Mme. Chevassat had never heard of. Still, her life was a very sad one. She never went out; but spent her time at home, reading, or working at some embroidery—a masterpiece of patience and taste—which she had undertaken in the faint hope that it might prove useful in a moment of distress. However, a new source of trouble soon roused her from this monotonous existence. Her money rapidly diminished, and at last one day she had to change her last piece of gold. It was necessary to resort to the Monte de Piété again, for the month of April had just come round, and Mme. Chevassat had given her to understand—in honied words it is true—that she had better get ready to pay her quarter's rent, amounting to a hundred francs. She therefore entrusted the door-keeper with her other ring, and calculating by what had been lent her on the first one, she hoped on this occasion to obtain some five or six hundred francs. To her surprise, however, the man only brought her one hundred and ninety

francs. At first she believed he had robbed her; and she gave him to understand that she thought so.

Flying into a rage, he threw the pawn ticket on the table, and exclaimed, "just look at that, and remember to whom you are talking!"

Taking up the paper, she read plainly enough:—"Advanced, two hundred francs." Worthy M. Chevassat, be it noted, had charged ten francs for his time and trouble. Convinced that she had accused him unjustly, Henriette now hastened to apologise; but it was only by means of a second ten-franc piece that she at last succeeded in soothing his wounded feelings. She was quite ignorant of the fact that a person is always at liberty to pawn an object for only a portion of its estimated value, and never thought of studying the printed memoranda on the paper. Grievously disappointed at not having obtained what she hoped for, Henriette reflected how she might obtain other resources; for, after paying her rent, only enough money for a fortnight's subsistence would remain to her. This time she thought she would try and sell—not pawn—her dressing-case with the gold fittings, and she requested obliging Mme. Chevassat to find her a purchaser.

At first the old woman raised a host of objections. "It's folly to sell such a pretty toy!" she said. Just think, you'll never see it again. If, on the other hand, you pawn it, you can take it out again as soon as you have a little money." But she lost her pains, and at last consented to fetch a dealer in toilet-articles—whom she declared to be an excellent, worthy man, in whose honesty one might have all confidence. And he really showed himself worthy of her recommendation; for he instantly offered five hundred francs for the dressing-case, which was not worth much more than three times that amount. Nor was this his last bid. After an hour's irritating discussion, and after pretending, at least, a dozen times to leave the room, he at last sorrowfully produced his purse, and counted on the table the seven hundred francs in gold upon which Henriette had stoutly insisted. That was enough to pay Mme. Chevassat for four months' board. But then, what should she do afterwards? She must make this money last as long as possible; and accordingly, that very evening, she summoned all her courage and firmly told the old woman that in future she wished her to prepare her only one meal a-day—that is, her dinner. She chose this half-measure so as to avoid a regular falling out, which she feared might lead to fatal results. Contrary to her expectations, the door-keeper's wife appeared neither surprised nor angry. She only shrugged her shoulders, and replied: "As you like, my little pussy-cat. Only believe me, it is no use economising in one's eating."

From the day of this *coup d'état*, Henriette went down every morning herself to buy a penny roll and the little supply of milk which constituted her breakfast. For the rest of the day she did not leave her room, but busied herself with her embroidery; and the distressing monotony of her life was only interrupted by M. de Brévan's periodical visits. For he did not forget his threat; and Henriette was sure to see him regularly every week. He invariably presented himself with a solemn air, and coldly asked if she had reflected since he had last had the honour of presenting his respects to her. As a rule, she only answered him by a look of contempt; but he did not seem in the least disconcerted. He bowed respectfully, and invariably said before leaving the room, "Next time, then: I can wait. Oh! I have time: I can wait."

If he hoped by this means to conquer Henriette more promptly, he was

entirely mistaken. His periodical insults only revived her wrath and increased her energy. Her pride rose at the thought of this incessant struggle ; and she vowed that she would be victorious. It was this sentiment which inspired her with a thought, which, in its results, was destined to have a decisive influence on her future. It was now the end of June, and she noticed with alarm that her little treasure was growing smaller and smaller. One day, when Mme. Chevassat seemed to be unusually good humoured, she ventured to ask her if she could not procure her some work, saying, that she was considered quite skilful in all kinds of needlework.

"What nonsense," replied the woman with a loud laugh. "Are hands like yours made to work?" And when Henriette insisted, and showed her, as a specimen of what she could do, the embroidery she was engaged on, Mme. Chevassat retorted : "It is very pretty, no doubt, but embroidering from morning till night would not enable a fairy to keep a canary-bird."

There was probably some truth in what she said, exaggerated as it sounded ; and the poor girl hastened to add that she understood other kinds of work also. She was a first-class musician, for instance, and fully able to give music-lessons, or teach singing, if she could only obtain pupils. At these words a gleam of diabolical satisfaction lighted up the old woman's eyes, and she exclaimed, "Why, my 'pussy-cat,' could you play dance-music, like those artistes who go to fashionable people's entertainments."

"Certainly, I could."

"Well, that's a talent worth something ! Why did you not tell me before ? I will think of it, and you shall see."

On the next Saturday, early in the morning, she came to Henriette's room with the bright face of a bearer of good news. "I have thought of you," she said as she entered. "We have a tenant in the house who is going to give a large party to-night. I have mentioned you to her ; and she says she will give you thirty francs if you will make her guests dance. Thirty francs ! That's a big sum ; and besides, if the people are pleased, you will get more customers."

"In what part of the house does this lady live ?"

"On the second floor of the back building, looking on to the yard. Her name's Madame Hilaire ; she's a very nice person indeed, and so kind, there's no one like her. You would have to be there at nine o'clock precisely."

"Very well, I'll go." Elated with hope, Henriette spent a part of the afternoon in mending her only dress, a black silk, unfortunately much worn, and already often repaired. Still, by dint of skill and patience, she had managed to look quite respectable when she rang at Mme. Hilaire's door. She was shown into a room rather oddly furnished, but brilliantly lighted up, where seven or eight ladies in flaming costumes, and as many fashionably dressed gentlemen, were smoking and taking coffee.

They had evidently just dined ; and judging from their eyes and voices, the wine had circulated pretty freely at the repast.

"Ah ! here's our musician," exclaimed a tall, dark-haired woman, with a pretty face but vulgar air, who proved to be Mme. Hilaire. "Will you take a drop of something, my dear ?" she asked, turning to Henriette.

The poor girl blushed crimson, and seemed painfully embarrassed. While she was apologising for declining, Mme. Hilaire roughly interrupted her and exclaimed, "Not thirsty, eh ? all right. Well, you can take something by-and-bye. In the meantime will you play us a quadrille ? and mark the time, please." Then imitating with distressing accuracy the

barking voice habitually assumed by masters of ceremonies at public balls, she called out,—“Take your positions, take your positions : a quadrille !”

Seated at the piano, Henriette turned her back to the dancers ; but in a mirror placed above the instrument she could perceive every movement made by Mme. Hilaire and her guests. By this means she was speedily confirmed in what she had suspected from the beginning. She understood into what company Mother Chevassat had thrown her. However, she had sufficient self-control to finish the quadrille. But when the last figure had been danced she rose, and, approaching Mme. Hilaire, stammered in the most embarrassed manner,—“Please excuse me, madame, but I cannot stay. I feel very unwell. I could not play any more.”

“How funny !” cried one of the gentlemen. “Why, here’s our ball at an end !”

“Hush, Julius !” exclaimed Mme. Hilaire. “Don’t you see how pale she is,—as pale as death, poor child ! What is the matter with you, my dear ! Is it the heat that makes you feel badly ? It is stifling hot here.” And, as Henriette walked towards the door, she added,—“Oh, wait ! I don’t trouble people for nothing. Come, Julius, turn your pockets inside out, and give the little one a twenty-franc piece.”

The poor girl was almost outside the room, but turning round she replied,—“Thank you, madame ; but you owe me nothing.” It was high time for her to leave. Her first surprise had been followed by mad anger, which drove the blood to her head, and drew bitter tears from her eyes. To think that Mme. Chevassat had entrapped her in that manner ! What could have been the wretched woman’s object ? Carried away by an irresistible impulse, and no longer mistress of herself, Henriette rushed down-stairs, and swept like a whirlwind into the door-keeper’s room. “How could you dare to send me to such people ? You knew all about it, you wretch !” she cried.

Master Chevassat was the first to rise. “Eh, what’s the matter ?” he asked ; “do you know whom you are talking to ?”

But his wife motioned him to be quiet, and, turning to Henriette, cynically exclaimed, “Well, what next ? Arn’t those people good enough for you ; eh ? In the first place, I am tired of your ways, my ‘pussy-cat.’ Beggars like you ought to stop at home and behave properly, instead of running away with young men, and gadding about the world with lovers.” Thereupon she took advantage of the fact that Henriette had paused on the threshold to push her brutally out of the room, and fiercely bang the door.

On reaching her own room, the poor girl began to reproach herself for her fit of passion. “Ah !” she murmured as she wept, “those who are weak and unhappy have no right to complain. Who knows what this wicked woman will now do to avenge herself ?”

She ascertained that two days afterwards. On coming down-stairs as usual, a little before seven o’clock, in order to buy her roll and milk for breakfast, she met Mme. Hilaire in the courtyard of the house. The tenant of the back building turned as red as a poppy, and rushing up to Henriette, seized her by the arm, and shook her furiously, at the same time bawling out at the top of her voice, “Ah ! so it’s you, you miserable little beggar. You’ve been slandering me, eh ? You wicked little minx. A beggar I had sent for to enable her to earn thirty francs ! And I must needs think she is ill, and pity her, and ask Julius to give her a twenty-franc piece.”

Henriette felt that she ought not to blame this woman, who, after all, had shown her nothing but kindness. But she was thoroughly frightened,

and tried to get away; whereupon the excited female clutched her still more tightly, and screamed still louder, till at last several tenants came to their windows to see what was the matter. "You'll have to pay for it," yelled Mme. Hilaire, carried away by wrath. "You'll have to clear out of the house, I can tell you!"

The threat was not an idle one, for that very afternoon the same lamentable scene was repeated; and to make matters worse, Mme. Hilaire had friends in the house, who espoused her quarrel, and fell upon Henriette whenever she appeared. They lay in wait for her by turns; and she no sooner ventured upon the staircase than shouts were raised against her: so that the unfortunate girl no longer dared leave her room. Early in the morning, as soon as the front door was opened, she ran out to buy her daily provisions; and then, swiftly returning, barricaded herself in her chamber, not to stir out of it again during the day. She certainly did wish she were able to leave the house; but where could she go to? The Unknown frightened her, moreover; for might it not have still greater terrors in reserve? At last she was quite without money again. In July her rent had cost her a hundred francs, and she had been compelled to buy a simple alpaca dress, in place of her old black silk one, which was literally falling to pieces. At the beginning of August she reached the end of her resources. Nor would she even have been able to eke them so long if, ever since that evening at Mme. Hilaire's, she had not entirely dispensed with Mme. Chevassat's expensive board. She had at first rejoiced over this rupture, which freed her from the importunities of the door-keeper's wife, and enabled her to curtail her daily expenditure, but now she was placed in an awkward predicament. She had still a few things that she might sell—her cashmere, her watch, her earrings, and brooch; but without the Chevassats' assistance she didn't know how to dispose of them. All that the woman had said to frighten her from going to the pawnshop herself returned to mind; and she pictured herself arrested, questioned, conveyed to her father's house, and handed over to Sarah and Sir Tom. However, her need daily became more pressing; and at last one evening, after long hesitation, she slipped out of the house to try and find a purchaser for her brooch and earrings. She sought for one of those dark little shops she had read of in books, which the police always suspect and watch, and where most traffic is done in stolen goods. At last she found such a one as she desired, and a withered, bespectacled old crone, who plainly took her to be a thief, and did not even ask her her name, gave her a hundred and forty francs for her jewels.

Henriette realised well enough that this paltry sum meant merely a brief respite; and hence, overcoming all her reserve and reluctance, she vowed she would make every effort in her power to obtain work. She kept her word, and went from shop to shop, from door to door, so to say, soliciting employment, much as one might have asked for alms, promising to discharge any duty in return merely for her board and lodging. But it was written that everything should turn against her. Her beauty, her distinguished air, all the more conspicuous owing to her modest attire, and her very manner of speaking, were so many obstacles in her way. Who could think of engaging as a servant a girl who looked like a duchess? Thus on all sides she encountered cold faces and ironical smiles. She was refused everywhere, though now and then some portly libertine answered her application by an impudent declaration of love. Whilst out of doors, she attentively scrutinized all the little bills and notices setting

forth that workwomen were "wanted" at such and such addresses, and she perseveringly trudged from one place to the other. But, here again she met with insurmountable difficulties. There was no end of questions. "Who are you? Where have you been? By whom have you been employed?" and finally, always the same distressing answer,—“We cannot employ persons like you.” At last she went to an employment agency. She had noticed one, on the door of which figured a huge placard offering "situations" worth from 35 to 1000 francs a-month. On going up-stairs, a loquacious individual began by making her deposit a fee of 10 francs, and then told her that he had exactly what she wanted, only it was necessary she should call again the next day. She returned ten times in succession, and always with the same result, but, on the eleventh occasion, the man gave her the address of two shops, in one of which he assured her she would certainly find employment. However, they both proved to be low, boozing dens, where young women of prepossessing appearance were wanted to serve absinthe, and generally amuse the customers. This was Henriette's last effort. She was literally worn out with ineffectual struggling, and virtually gave up the fight. Another eighteen months must elapse before she came of age. Since leaving her father's house, she had not received a line from Daniel, although she had constantly written to him, and she had no means of ascertaining the date of his return. On one occasion, following M. de Brévan's advice, she had summoned courage enough to go to the Ministry of Marine, and inquire if they had any news about "The Conquest;" whereupon a clerk jocularly replied, that the vessel might be aloft "another year or two." How could she hope to wait so long? Why maintain the useless struggle? She felt an acute pain in her chest, she had a distressing cough, and after walking a few yards, her legs habitually tottered, and she was seized with a cold perspiration. She now spent most of her time in bed—shivering with a nervous chill, or else lost, as it were, in a kind of stupor. She realized that she was daily becoming weaker, and often murmured, "Ah, if I could only die!" This was the last favour she asked of God. Henceforth, a miracle alone could save her; and she hardly wished to be saved. She became quite indifferent to everything: fancying that she had exhausted all human suffering, and that there was nothing left for her to fear. The last misfortune which now befell her did not even draw from her a sigh. One afternoon, while out of doors, she had left her window open, and a sudden breeze, slamming the blinds, caused a chair, on which she had hung her cashmere shawl, to overturn. The shawl fell into the fire-place among the dying embers, and when Henriette returned she found it half-burnt. It was her only remaining article of value, and she might at any time have sold it for several hundred francs. However, on realising this last calamity, she simply said to herself, "After all, what does it matter? I shall be spared some three months' suffering, that's all." And, with these words, she dismissed the matter from her mind.

She, moreover, in nowise troubled herself about her rent when it became due in October. "I shan't be able to pay it," she thought. "Mme. Chevassat will give me notice, and then it will all be over." To her great surprise, however, the female down-stairs did not at all scold her for not having the money ready. On the contrary, she volunteered to ask the landlord to give her time, and this inexplicable forbearance gave Henriette a week's respite. At last, however, she woke up one morning feeling half-famished, but without a halfpenny in her possession, and, indeed, without

anything for which she thought it possible to obtain money. So this, then, was the end; a little courage, and she would die of cold and starvation. But, willing as she had hitherto been to die, now, at this last hour, she shrunk from the prospect with affright. She knew that life meant either M. de Brévan or Sir Tom, and yet she was afraid of death. After all, she was but twenty years of age. Never had she felt such a longing to live—to live merely a month, a week, a day longer! If only her shawl had not been burnt! What could she do? Glancing round her room she espied the embroidery on which she had worked so long. This work was, in point of fact, a dress of simple material enriched with an exquisite design of marvellous workmanship in coloured silk. Unfortunately, the embroidery was only half-finished. "Never mind," thought Henriette, "perhaps I may be able to obtain something for it." And hastily wrapping it up, she carried it to the old crone who had already purchased her earrings, and subsequently her watch.

The old woman stared in amazement on beholding this marvellous sample of skill and patience. "It's really magnificent," she said, "and, if it were finished, it would be worth a mint of money; but as it is, no one could turn it to account." However, after some little hesitation, she consented to give twenty francs for it, solely from love of art, she said; for it was money thrown away.

These twenty francs were, for Henriette, an unexpected release. "They will last me a month," she thought, resolving to live on dry bread alone; "and who can tell what a month may bring forth?" And this unfortunate girl's mother had left her two-and-a-half million francs. Ah! if she had but had a single friend to advise her in her inexperience! But she had been faithful to her vow never to divulge her secret; and the most terrible anguish had never torn from her a single complaint.

M. de Brévan knew this full well; for he still called regularly once a week. His perseverance, which had at first inflamed Henriette's courage, now tortured her most cruelly. "Ah, I shall be avenged!" she said to him one day. "Daniel will come back."

But, shrugging his shoulders, he answered,—“If you count upon that alone, you may as well surrender, and become my wife at once.”

She turned her head from him with an expression of ineffable disgust. Rather the icy arms of Death! It seemed, indeed, as if the long sleep would be her only refuge from suffering. By the end of November her twenty francs were exhausted; and to prolong her existence she had to resort to the last desperate expedients of extreme destitution. She sold, in turn, everything that she could carry out of the house without being stopped by the door-keeper's wife. First, she sacrificed her linen, then her coverlet and curtains. She even removed the wool from her mattress, and disposed of it in small parcels. Thus, at times she obtained a franc, at others half-a-franc, and at others again a penny to buy a roll.

Christmas-day came, and she found herself hungry and shivering in her denuded room. She wore but a single petticoat under her thin alpaca dress; she had nothing to cover herself with during the night. Two evenings before, in a moment of utter misery, she had written her father a long letter. He had never answered it. She had written again the night before, and still there was no reply. "I am hungry," she had said, "and have no bread. If by noon to-morrow you have not come to my assistance, an hour later I shall be dead." Noon had come and gone—not a line, not a single word of message had she received. It was all over.

Still frantically clinging to a last hope, she allowed herself till four o'clock. She made all her preparations; she told Mme. Chevassat that she would be out during the evening, and after some difficulty procured on credit a small stock of charcoal. Then she wrote two letters,—a last one to her father, and the other to M. de Brévan.

Having carefully closed her door, she next kindled two small fires, and, after commending her soul to God, lay down on her bed. It was then five o'clock. The fumes of the charcoal spread slowly through the room, bedimming the light of the flaring candle. It seemed as if some heavy weight were pressing on her temples, and by degrees she began to suffocate. Suddenly she felt a painful sensation in the chest; then a kind of delirium set in. She had a strange ringing in her ears; her pulse beat with extraordinary vehemence; nausea nearly convulsed her; and from time to time she felt as if her head were bursting. At last the candle went out. Mad-dened by the sensation of imminent death, she tried to rise, but could not. She attempted to cry out, but her voice merely rattled in her throat. Then her ideas became utterly confused. Breathing seemed suddenly to cease, and she suffered no longer.

XX.

A FEW minutes longer, and all would have been really over. The Count de Ville-Handry's daughter was dying! In a moment she would be dead. But at that precise instant Papa Ravinet, the dealer in second-hand merchandise, living on the fourth floor, chanced to come out of his rooms. If he had left as usual by the front staircase he would have heard nothing; but providentially he turned to go down the back-stairs, and at that moment heard the poor girl's death-rattle. In our egotistical times many a man would not have troubled himself with the matter; but Papa Ravinet at once hurried down to inform the door-keeper. Many a man again would have been quieted by the composure the Chevassats displayed, and satisfied with their assurance that Henriette was not at home. The old dealer, however, insisted on investigating the matter, and, in spite of the door-keepers' evident reluctance, he compelled them to go up-stairs: and, indeed, by his language and example, induced nearly all the tenants to interest themselves in the case. Again, it was Papa Ravinet who provided everything that was required when the poor girl was found stretched half-dead on her miserable bed.

On recovering consciousness, Henriette's first sensation was a very strange one. In the first place, she was utterly amazed at finding herself in a warm bed,—she who, for so many days, had endured all the tortures of bitter cold. Then, looking round, she was dazzled by the light of the lamp standing on the chest of drawers, and the beautiful, bright fire burning in the fire-place. Next, she beheld with stupefaction all the unknown women who were leaning over her attentively watching her movements. Had her father at last come to her assistance? No, that could not be, for he would have been there; and she looked for him in vain among all these strange people. Then understanding, from a remark made by one of the bystanders, that she had been rescued from death by chance alone, she was seized with a feeling of bitter grief. "To have suffered all that a dying person can suffer," she thought, "and then not to die after all!" At this idea she almost hated these people who were busying themselves around her. No

doubt they had brought her back to life, but would they enable her to subsist ?

She now clearly distinguished what was going on in her room, and recognized the ladies from the first floor, to whom mendacious Mother Chevassat was explaining that "her poor little pussy-cat" had sadly deceived her affectionate heart in order to carry out her fatal purpose. "You see, I did not dream of such a thing," protested the abominable old female in a whining tone. "A poor little pussy-cat, who was always merry, and this morning yet sang like a bird. I thought she might be a little embarrassed, but never suspected such misery. You see, ladies, she was as proud as a queen : she would rather have died than ask for assistance ; and yet she knew she had only to say a word to me. Why, in October, when I saw she would not be able to pay her rent, I readily became responsible for her ?" So saying, the infamous old hypocrite bent over the poor girl, kissed her on her forehead, and tenderly resumed,—“Didn't you love me, eh, dear little pussy-cat ; didn't you ? I know you loved poor old Mother Chevassat.”

Henriette shrank with horror and disgust from contact with the abominable old female's lying lips. However, the emotion this incident caused her did more to revive her than all the attention she received ; but naturally, it was only after the doctor, who had been sent for, came and bled her, that she recovered the free use of her faculties. Then, in a faint voice she thanked the people round her for all their kindness, assuring them that she felt much better now, and might safely be left alone. The ladies from the first floor, whom curiosity had brought up-stairs just as they were about to dine, thereupon slipped away ; but Mme. Chevassat pertinaciously remained by the bedside, as if anxious to find herself alone with her victim. Scarcely had the others left than her expression, look, and tone of voice completely changed. "Well," she commenced, "I suppose you are happy now ! You have advertised my house, and it will all be in the papers. Everybody will pity you, and think your lover a cold-blooded villain, who has let you die of starvation." The poor girl deprecated the charge with such a sweet, gentle expression of face, that a savage would have felt compassion ; but then Mother Chevassat was what is called a civilized being. "You know well enough, I should think," she resumed in a bitter tone, "that dear M. Maxime did all he could to save you. Only the day before yesterday he offered you his whole fortune—"

"Madame," stammered Henriette, "have you no mercy ?"

Mercy ?—Mme. Chevassat ! What a joke ! "You would accept nothing from M. Maxime," continued the old woman. "Just tell me why, pray ? You wanted to play the virtuous woman, eh ? Well ; if that was so, why have you accepted that ugly old miser's offer ? He'll make life hard enough to you. Ah, you have fallen into nice hands !" With a great effort, Henriette raised herself on her pillows, and asked,—“What do you mean ?”

"Oh, you know well enough ! I'm not so surprised, for he has been looking after you for a long time already."

Papa Ravinet, it should be mentioned, had discreetly withdrawn as soon as Henriette opened her eyes, so as to leave the women standing about at liberty to undress her. She had therefore not seen the man who had saved her, and did not at all understand Mme. Chevassat's allusions. "Explain yourself, madame ; explain !" she said.

"Ah, upon my word ! it's not difficult. Don't you know that the man who heard you groaning, and brought us up here, is the old dealer on the

fourth floor. Why, it's he who's presented you with all those bed things, and all that firing. And he won't stop there, I'm sure. Just have a little patience, and you will soon know well enough what I mean."

It must be borne in mind that Mother Chevassat had always pictured Papa Ravinet to Henriette as an arrant scoundrel—no doubt to prevent her from offering him anything she might have to sell. "What have I to be afraid of?" asked Henriette.

The woman hesitated for a moment, but at last replied—"If I told you why, you would simply repeat it to him as soon as he comes back."

"No, I promise you."

"Swear it, on your mother's sacred memory."

"I swear."

Apparently reassured by this solemn oath, the old woman drew closer to Henriette, and began in a low voice,—“Well, I mean this: if you accept what Papa Ravinet offers you now, in six months you will be worse than any of Mme. Hilaire's girls. The old rascal has ruined more than one who were just as good as you are. That's his business; and, upon my word! he understands it. Now, forewarned is forearmed. I am going down to prepare you some soup, and shall be back by-and-bye. And above all, you hear, not a word!”

Once more had Mother Chevassat hurled Henriette into an abyss of despair. “Great God!” said the poor girl, “can it really be that this old man's generous assistance is a new snare?” With her elbow resting on her pillow, her forehead supported by her hand, her eyes streaming with tears, she endeavoured to collect her scattered ideas, and her meditations might have lasted some time if she had not suddenly heard some one coughing at the door. She instinctively trembled, and raised her head. On the threshold of the room stood the old dealer looking at her.

After a long conversation with the door-keeper, and some words with his amiable wife, Papa Ravinet had come up-stairs to inquire after his patient. Henriette guessed who he was, rather than recognized him; for, although living in the same house, she had seldom met him before, and then only while quickly crossing the courtyard. “So this,” she thought, “is the man who wishes to ruin me,—the wretch whom I must avoid.” It is true that the dealer, with his mournful face, his thick, brush-like eyebrows, and his small yellow eyes perpetually darting suspicious glances right and left, was an enigmatical-looking personage, scarcely calculated to inspire confidence at first sight. However, despite the embarrassment Mother Chevassat's statement caused her, Henriette none the less thanked him very heartily for his help, care, and generosity in providing her with everything she wanted.

“Oh! you owe me no thanks,” he said. “I have only done my duty, and very imperfectly too.” Then somewhat grimly he began to tell her that what he had done was nothing in comparison with what he meant to do.

How persuasively he talked, in hopes of winning Henriette's confidence, and how she hesitated under the influence of Mother Chevassat's last words; how at last, by returning her her letters apparently intact, he succeeded in overcoming her antipathy, and obtained from her a promise to let him help her in her trouble—all this has been related in our first chapter. When the old dealer at last retired, and Henriette was left alone, she asked herself how far she ought to confide in him at the interview fixed for the morrow. Had he not already guessed, by the direction of one of her letters, that she was the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter? And if

she was to have kept anything from him, was it not precisely that very fact? Hence, she had best tell him everything. The more the poor girl thought over this strange adventure, the more she became convinced of Mother Chevassat's deception and Papa Ravinet's sincerity. He might help her, and then, perhaps, she would be able to wait for Daniel's return and her own rehabilitation. Even if the old dealer deceived her, she would be no worse off than before, no nearer death than she had been a few hours previously. So, why not make the trial—tell him the whole truth, and ask him to advise her.

This is what Henriette had made up her mind to do, when, at nine o'clock the next morning, Papa Ravinet ushered himself into her room. He was very pale, and his expression of face and tone of voice betrayed a feeling of mingled anxiety and emotion. "Well?" asked he, so absorbed in the one thought that he forgot even to inquire how the poor girl had passed the night.

"I have made up my mind, sir; sit down, please, and listen to me," replied Henriette, pointing to a chair.

On leaving her the previous night, the old dealer had felt convinced that she would ultimately confide in him, but he had scarcely expected that she would do so so soon. "At last!" he exclaimed with beaming eyes and a strange, almost unnatural, gesture of delight.

"I am quite aware," resumed Henriette in an impressive voice, "that I am about to act most rashly. It is scarcely prudent to place oneself in the power of a stranger—especially when one has been warned not to trust him."

"Oh, mademoiselle," interrupted Papa Ravinet, "believe me—"

"I think," she rejoined, speaking with even additional solemnity, "that you would be the meanest and worst of men if you deceived me. As it is, I rely upon your honour." And then, in a firm voice, she began to relate the story of her life, ever since that fatal evening when her father had acquainted her with his intention to give her a second mother.

The old dealer had sat down just in front of Henriette, and he fixed his eyes upon her as if anxious to enter into her thoughts, and anticipate her meaning. His face was all aglow with excitement, like the face of a gambler watching the little white ball of the roulette table, which is about to enrich or ruin him. At times it seemed almost as if he had foreseen Henriette's terrible story, and experienced a bitter satisfaction at finding his presentiments confirmed. Every now and then, at certain phases in the poor girl's narrative, he would interrupt her and ejaculate, "Yes, yes, of course that had to come next." And, moreover, he was apparently even better acquainted than Henriette with Sarah Brandon and her band—as if, indeed, he had lived with them on terms of intimacy; and, whenever the occasion offered, he passed judgment on their conduct with amazing alacrity and assurance. "Ah! There I recognise Sarah and Mrs Brian," he said at one moment. "Yes, Sir Tom never does otherwise," he remarked a little later on. "That's Maxime de Brévan all over," he ejaculated on a third occasion. And, as the story progressed, he burst at times into bitter laughter or threatening imprecations. "What a trick!" he exclaimed at one point. "What an infernal snare!" By-and-bye he turned deadly pale, and trembled on his chair, as if he felt ill, and were about to fall. Henriette was at that moment giving him Daniel's version, as obtained from M. de Brévan, of M. de Kergrist's death and Malgat's disappearance—describing how it was that the unfortunate cashier had left such an immense deficit behind him; how he had been condemned to penal servitude; and how a body, believed to be his, had been found in a wood near Paris. However, the old

dealer promptly regained his self-possession, and as soon as the poor girl had finished her narrative he sprang to his feet, and exclaimed in a threatening voice: "I have them now, the wretches!—this time I have them!" Then, overcome with excessive excitement, he sank on to his chair again, covering his face with his hands.

Henriette was thunderstruck, and looked aghast at the old man, in whom she now placed her hopes. On the previous night she had already had some suspicions that he was not what he seemed to be, and now she was sure he was not. But then, who could he be? How could she hope to solve such a problem. All she divined was that Sarah Brandon, Mrs Brian, and Sir Thomas Elgin, as well as M. de Brévan, had, at some time or other, come into contact with Papa Ravinet, and that he hated them mortally. That indeed seemed certain, unless, indeed, the old dealer was seeking to deceive her—for Henriette, who had not yet quite dismissed her doubts, could not prevent this afterthought from flashing through her mind. However, Papa Ravinet had in the meantime mastered his emotion. "Let no one, henceforth, deny the existence of Providence!" he exclaimed. "Fools alone can do so. M. de Brévan had every reason to think that this house would entomb his crime as safely as the grave itself, and so he brought you here. And it happens I must chance to live here as well,—I! of all men,—and he is unaware of it! By a kind of miracle we are brought together under the same roof—you, the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter and myself,—and, at the very moment when de Brévan is about to triumph, Providence brings us together, and our meeting effects his ruin!" The old dealer's voice evinced the fierce joy he felt at the thought of approaching vengeance, his sallow cheeks flushed with excitement, and his eyes shone more brilliantly than ever. "For M. de Brévan was triumphing last night," he continued. "That woman Chevassat, his confederate, had watched you, and, observing your preparations for suicide, had bidden him rejoice, for at last he was about to get rid of you."

"Is it possible?" stammered Henriette with a shudder.

Looking at her half surprised, the old man rejoined, "What! after all you have seen of M. de Brévan, didn't you ever suspect him of planning your death?"

"Why, yes! I sometimes thought so."

"You were right in doing so, mademoiselle. Ah! you don't know your enemies yet. But I know them, for I have had a chance of measuring the depth of their wickedness. And for your safety you ought to follow my advice."

"I will, sir."

Papa Ravinet was evidently a little embarrassed, but at last he said, "You see, mademoiselle, I shall have to ask you to trust me blindly."

"I will do so."

"Well, it is of the utmost importance that you should escape beyond reach of M. de Brévan: he must lose every trace of you, and, consequently, you must leave this house."

"I will leave it."

"And in the way I say?"

"I will obey you in every point."

The last shadow of anxiety, hitherto overclouding the old dealer's brow, vanished as if by magic. "Then all will go well," he said, rubbing his hands; "I guarantee the rest. Let us make our arrangements at once. I have been here a long time, and that woman Chevassat must be dying

of curiosity. However, we must not let her suspect that we are acting in concert." As if afraid that some inquisitive person might be listening outside, Papa Ravinet thereupon drew his chair close to Henriette's bed, and whispered, "As soon as I have turned my back, that woman will come up, burning with curiosity to know what has transpired between us. You must pretend to be disgusted with me. Let her understand that you think me a wicked old man, who wants you to pay the price of infamy for his services."

Henriette flushed crimson. "But, monsieur,—” stammered she.

"Perhaps you dislike telling a falsehood?"

"You see—I can't, I fear. It wouldn't be easy to lie well enough to deceive Mme. Chevassat."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you must do so! it can't be helped. By remembering the necessity, you may succeed in misleading her. Remember that we must fight the enemy with her own weapons."

"Well, I will try, sir."

"So be it. The rest is a small matter. At nightfall you must dress yourself, and watch for the moment when the door-keeper sets about lighting the gas. As soon as you see him on the front staircase, make haste and run down by the back-stairs. I will take measures to have the woman Chevassat either engaged or out of the house: and so you will find it easy enough to slip out without being perceived. Directly you are in the street, turn to the right. At the first corner, in front of the great Auction-Mart, you will see a cab, with a coloured handkerchief like this protruding out of the window. Jump into it at once. I shall be inside. There, that is all you have to do. Have I made it all clear to you?"

"Oh, perfectly, sir!"

"Then we understand each other. Do you feel strong enough?"

"Yes, sir. You may rely on me."

Everything passed off just as the old dealer had planned; and Henriette played her part so well, that at night, when her disappearance was discovered, Mother Chevassat was neither surprised nor disturbed. "She was tired of life, the girl!" she said to her husband. "I saw it by her manner when I was up-stairs. We'll no doubt see her again at the Morgue. As the charcoal failed to do the work, she has tried water instead."

XXI.

DEAR woman! She would not have gone to bed so quietly, nor have fallen asleep so comfortably, if she had suspected the truth. She owed most of her peace of mind to the certainty that Henriette had left the house bareheaded, with wretched, worn-out shoes on her feet, and nothing but one petticoat and a thin alpaca dress on her body. Now she was quite sure that, as the poor girl was in such a state of destitution, she would soon weary of wandering through the streets of Paris on this cold December night, and would be irresistibly drawn towards the Seine. Unfortunately for the estimable female's calculations, something very different happened. On being left alone in her room, after Papa Ravinet's departure, Henriette felt strengthened in her determination to trust the old dealer blindly: besides, she had, so to say, no other choice on earth. Accordingly, after receiving Mother Chevassat's visit, and playing the

part indicated by the dealer, she rose from her bed, and although still very faint, installed herself by the window watching for the time to act. At last the first shades of night fell over the great city, and the public clocks could be heard striking four o'clock. With a lamp in his hand, the door-keeper left his room and ascended the staircase to light the gas on the various landings. "Now's the time," murmured Henriette; and casting a last look at the wretched room where she had suffered and wept so much, and where, indeed, she had expected to die, she slipped out into the passage. The back-stairs were quite dark, so that she was not recognized by two persons she met as she went down. The courtyard, moreover, was deserted, and the door-keeper's room unoccupied; so she crossed the hall, and with one bound reached the street. Thirty or forty yards on the left-hand she espied the cab in which Papa Ravinet was waiting for her, and running towards it, she at once sprang in; and the driver, who had previously received his instructions, whipping up his horse as soon as he heard the door slam. "And now, sir," began Henriette, at once turning to the old dealer, "where are you taking me?"

The gas in the shops from time to time lighted up the interior of the vehicle, and enabled her to see her companion's features. He was looking at her with manifest satisfaction; and a smile of friendly malice played upon his lips. "Ah!" he replied, "that is a great secret. But you will know soon, for the man drives well."

The poor horse went, indeed, as fast as if the five-franc piece which the driver had received had infused the noble blood of the swiftest racer into its veins. They drove down the street at a furious rate, turned at first to the right, and subsequently in several directions, and at last pulled up before a house of modest appearance. Papa Ravinet promptly jumped out, and, having assisted Henriette in alighting, drew her into the house, with the words:—"You will see what a surprise I have in store for you." On reaching the landing of the third floor the old man paused, took a key out of his pocket, and opened the door facing the staircase. Then, before she had time to consider, Henriette found herself gently pushed into a small sitting-room, where an elderly lady was embroidering at a frame by the light of a large copper lamp. "Dear sister," said Papa Ravinet, still pausing on the threshold, "here is the young lady I spoke to you about, and who does us the honour to accept our hospitality."

The elderly lady slowly pricked her needle into the canvas, pushed back the frame, and rose. She seemed some fifty years of age, and must originally have been beautiful. But age and sorrow had whitened her hair and furrowed her face, and habits of silence and meditation had given her lips a peculiar curve. She was dressed in black, and in a provincial style: "You are welcome, mademoiselle," she said in a grave voice. "You will find in our modest home the peace and sympathy you need."

In the meantime Papa Ravinet had come forward; bowing to Henriette, he said,— "I beg to present to you Mme. Bertolle, or rather, my dear sister Marie, a widow, and a saint, who has devoted herself to her brother, and has sacrificed everything to him,—her fortune, her peace, and very life."

Ah! there was no mistaking the look which the old man gave his sister; he plainly worshipped her. But, as if embarrassed by his praise, she interrupted him saying, "You told me so late, Antoine, that I have not been able to attend to all your orders. However, the young lady's room is ready, and if you like—"

"Yes, we must show her the way."

Taking up the lamp, the old lady opened a door leading from the parlour into a small, comfortably furnished room, where everything was exquisitely tidy, and which exhaled that fresh odour of lavender so dear to all house-keepers from the country. The bright fire on the hearth cast lustre on the polished furniture, and the curtains were as white as snow. At one glance the old dealer had taken in everything; and, after a smile of gratitude addressed to his sister, he said to Henriette,—“This is your room, mademoiselle.”

The poor girl was so touched that she sought in vain for words to express her gratitude. However, Mme. Bertolle did not give her time to speak, but showed her, spread out on the bed, various articles in white linen, a couple of petticoats, several pairs of stockings, and a warm grey flannel dressing-wrapper, while at the foot were a pair of slippers. “This will answer for a change to-night, mademoiselle,” she said; “I have provided what was most pressing: to-morrow we will see about the rest.”

Big tears—tears of happiness and gratitude—now rolled down Henriette’s pale cheeks. Yes, indeed! this was a surprise, and a delicious one, which her new protector with his ingenious foresight had prepared for her. “Ah, you are so kind!” she said, giving her hands to brother and sister,—“you are so kind! How can I ever repay what you are doing for me?” Then overcoming her emotion, and turning to Papa Ravinet, she added, “But pray, who are you, sir,—you who succour a poor girl who is an utter stranger to you, increasing the value of your assistance by your great delicacy?”

It was Mme. Bertolle who replied. “My brother, mademoiselle,” said she, “is an unfortunate man, who has paid for a moment’s forgetfulness of duty with his happiness, prospects, and very life. Do not question him. Let him be for you what he is for all of us,—Antoine Ravinet, dealer in curiosities.”

Mme. Bertolle’s voice betrayed such great sorrow, silently endured, that Henriette felt ashamed, regretting her indiscretion. But the old man intervened:—“What I may say to you, mademoiselle,” he exclaimed, “is, that you owe me no gratitude,—no, none whatever. I am doing what my own interest commands me to do; and I deserve no credit for it. Why do you speak of gratitude? It is I who shall forever be under obligations to you for the immense service you render me.”

He seemed to be inspired by his own words; his figure straightened, his eyes flashed fire, and he was on the point of letting, perhaps, some secret escape him, when his sister intervened, saying reproachfully,—“Antoine! Antoine!”

“You are right; you are right! my dear,” he replied,—“I am forgetting myself here; and I ought already to be back in the Rue de la Grange. It is of the utmost importance that that woman Chevassat should not miss me a moment to-night.”

He was already turning to leave them, when the old lady caught him by the arm, and said, “You ought to go back, I know; only be careful! It is a miracle that M. de Brévan has never met and recognized you during the year he has been coming to the house you live in. If such a misfortune should happen now, our enemies might once more escape us. After the young lady’s desperate act, he would not fail to recognize the man who saved her. What can you do to avoid meeting him?”

“I have thought of that danger,” replied Papa Ravinet. “And when I get back, I shall tell the two Chevassats a little story to frighten them, so that they will advise de Brévan never to appear there, except at

night-time, as he formerly did." Thereupon he bowed to Henriette, and left with these words,—“To-morrow we will consult together.” A ship-wrecked mariner, saved from death at the last moment, could not experience a sense of greater happiness than Henriette did when retiring to rest that night. Her spirits had been additionally revived by the evening spent in company with Papa Ravinet's sister. The widow, free alike from embarrassment and affectation, possessed a kind of quiet dignity which showed itself in certain words and ways, which Henriette duly noted. Ruined all of a sudden, she did not say how—some months after her husband's death—she had seen herself reduced from almost opulence to poverty, and all its privations. This had happened some five years previously; since then she had practised the strictest economy, though never neglecting her appearance. She had but one servant: a woman who came for a couple of hours every morning to clean and tidy the rooms. She herself did all the other work, washing and ironing her own linen, cooking only twice a-week, and eating cold meat on the other days, as much to save money as to save time: for her time had its value. She embroidered for a fashionable shop, which paid her very good prices; and in the summer there were days when she earned nearly five francs. Ruin had been a severe blow to her: she did not conceal it. But gradually she had become reconciled to her reduced position, and had practised economy with unflinching severity, and in the smallest details of every-day life. At present, the very privations she imposed upon herself gave her, as it were, a kind of secret satisfaction, such as results from the consciousness of having accomplished a duty—a satisfaction all the greater as the duty is harder to perform; though what duty her's had been she did not say. “Mme. Bertolle is a noble woman,” thought Henriette when she retired that night, after a modest repast. But while rendering due homage to the character of her protector's sister, she could not fathom the mystery which enveloped the lives of this worthy couple, which relenting fate had at last placed in her way. What was the mystery? For there was one; and, far from trying to conceal it, they had begged Henriette not to inquire into it. To make matters stranger, it seemed as if their past had been in some way connected with her own. How could that be, and how could their future depend in any way on her's? But fatigue soon put an end to her meditations, and confused her ideas; and, for the first time in two years, she fell asleep with a sense of perfect security; she slept peacefully, without starting at the slightest noise, without wondering whether her enemies were watching her, without suspecting the very walls of her room.

When she awoke the next morning, calm and refreshed, it was broad daylight, nearly ten o'clock; and a pale sun-ray was darting over the polished furniture. As she opened her eyes, she espied the dealer's sister standing at the foot of her bed, like a good genius who had been watching over her slumbers. “Oh, how lazy I am!” she exclaimed, with a child's hearty laugh, for she felt quite at home in this little bedroom, where she had only spent a night: indeed, she felt as much at home here as she had been in her father's mansion, when her mother was still alive; and it seemed to her as if she had lived here many a year. “My brother called about half-an-hour ago,” said Madame Bertolle, “and wished to talk with you, but we did not like to wake you. You needed repose so much! He will be back in the evening, and dine with us.”

The bright smile which had lighted up Henriette's face faded away at once. Absorbed in the happiness of the moment, she had forgotten all her troubles; and these few words recalled her to the reality of her position,

to the sufferings of the past and the uncertainty of the future. The good widow assisted her in rising; and they spent the day together in the little parlour, cutting out and making-up a black silk dress for which Papa Ravinet had brought the material in the morning, and which was to take the place of Henriette's miserable, worn-out alpaca. When she first saw the silk, she remembered all the kind widow had told her of their excessive economy, and only succeeded with difficulty in checking her tears. "Why should you go to such an expense?" she sadly said. "Would not a woollen dress have done quite as well? The hospitality which you offer me must in itself be a heavy charge. I should never forgive myself for becoming a source of still greater privations to such kind friends."

But Mme. Bertolle shook her head and replied, "Don't be afraid, child. We have money enough."

They had just lighted the lamp at dusk, when they heard a key in the outer door of the apartment; and a moment later Papa Ravinet made his appearance. He was very red; and, although it was freezing out of doors, he was streaming with perspiration. "I am exhausted," said he, sinking into an arm-chair, and wiping his forehead with his coloured check handkerchief. "You can imagine how I have been running about to-day! I wanted to take an omnibus to come home; but they were all full."

Henriette sprang to her feet, and exclaimed,—“You have been to see my father?”

“No, mademoiselle. The Count de Ville Handry left his mansion a week ago.”

A mad thought—the hope that her father might have separated from his wife—crossed Henriette's mind. “And the countess,” she asked,—“the Countess Sarah?”

“She has gone with her husband. They are living in the Rue Lepelletier, in a modest apartment over the office of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company. Sir Tom and Mrs Brian are there as well. They have kept only two servants,—Ernest, the count's valet, and a woman called Clarisse.”

Henriette failed to notice the name of the creature whose treachery had been one of the principal causes of her misfortunes. “How could my father have ever been induced to leave his house?” she asked.

“He sold it, mademoiselle, ten days ago.”

“Great God! My father must be ruined!”

The old man bowed his head. “Yes!” said he.

So thus the sad presentiments Henriette had felt when first she heard of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company were realised. But never, never! would she have imagined so speedy a downfall. “My father ruined!” she repeated, as if she were unable to realize the news. “And only a year ago he had an income of nearly four hundred thousand francs. Nine million francs swallowed up in twelve months! nine millions!” And as the enormity of the amount seemed out of all proportion with the shortness of the time, she turned at last to the old dealer and said, “It cannot be. You must be mistaken, sir: some one has misled you.”

Papa Ravinet smiled with bitter irony, and replied, as if much puzzled by Henriette's doubts. “What, mademoiselle, can't you understand it yet? Unfortunately, what I tell you is only too true; and, if you want proofs—” So saying, he drew a newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Henriette, pointing out an article marked with a red pencil on the first page.

The paper was one of those ephemeral financial sheets which are started in Paris from time to time, and profess to teach people how to become rich

in a very short time without running the least risk. This particular print, which had been originated only a few months previously, was captivatingly entitled "*La Prudence.*" Henriette turned to the article M. Ravinet had marked, and read aloud as follows:—"We shall never tire of repeating to our subscribers the maxim, in one word, which forms the title of this journal,—'Prudence, prudence!' Let our readers beware of trusting new enterprises. Out of a hundred affairs launched at the Bourse, fully sixty are simply down-right swindles, projected for the purpose of speedily easing fool-hardy speculators of their cash. Of the remaining forty, five-and-twenty savour far too much of gambling, and must be regarded with suspicion; and even among the last fifteen a careful selection must be made before we are able to name the few that offer safe guarantees."

Henriette paused, unable to understand the meaning of all this trash; but Papa Ravinet remarked, "That's only the honey of the preface, the sirup intended to conceal the bitterness of the medicine. Go on, and you will understand." Accordingly, she continued to read,—"A recent event, we ought to say a recent disaster, has just confirmed the soundness of our doctrines, and justifies but too clearly our admonition to be careful. A company, which started into existence last year with amazing suddenness, which filled all the papers with its flaming advertisements, and decorated every blank wall with its gigantic posters—a company which, according to its own 'puffs,' was certain to enrich its shareholders, is already unable to pay the least dividend or its paid-up capital. As for the capital itself—but we will not anticipate events. All our readers will have understood that we refer to the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company, which, during the last week, has been the subject of such excited comment. Its shares, nominally worth 500 frs. apiece, and issued at a large premium, are now being quoted on the Bourse at from 90 to a 100 francs each." For a moment Henriette's grief prevented her from continuing. "O God!" she murmured, weeping bitterly, "O God!" But at last, mastering her weakness, she resumed her perusal. "And yet, if ever any company seemed to offer every desirable material and moral guarantee it was certainly this one. As its promoter and director figured a man who, in his day, was looked up to as a statesman endowed with rare administrative talents, and whose reputation for sterling integrity seemed to be above all suspicion. Need we say that this was the much vaunted Count de Ville-Handry? When the company burst into being, this high-sounding name was shouted from the housetops. It was the Count de Ville-Handry here, and the Count de Ville-Handry there. He was to enrich the country with a new branch of industry, and to change vile petroleum into precious gold. It was especially brought into notice that the noble count's personal fortune almost equalled the whole of the new company's capital—that is, 10 million francs. Hence he was described as risking his own money rather than other people's. It is now a year since all these dazzling promises were made. What remains of them? A certain number of shares worth but a fifth part of their nominal value yesterday, and worth, perhaps, nothing at all to-morrow, and, in addition, a more than doubtful capital. Who could have expected in our days to see Law's Mississippi Scheme revived?"

The paper fell from the poor girl's hands. She had turned as pale as death, and Mme. Bertolle noticing how she staggered, took her in her arms to support her. "How horrible," murmured Henriette: "How horrible."

Still, she had not yet read everything, and Papa Ravinet therefore picked up the paper, and read the following paragraph aloud:—"Two delegates

of the shareholders of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company are to sail this morning from Le Havre for New York. These gentlemen have been sent out by their fellow-sufferers to examine the land on which the oil-wells, which constitute the only security, are situated. Some people have gone so far as to doubt even the very existence of such oil-wells." Again, on another page, under the heading of "Miscellanea," there appeared the following lines: "The Count de Ville-Handry's mansion was sold last week. This magnificent building, with the princely grounds attached to it, was knocked down to the highest bidder for the sum of 875,000 francs. The misfortune is, that house and grounds are burdened with mortgages, amounting altogether to nearly 500,000 francs."

"All this is simply infamous," stammered Henriette in an almost inaudible tone. "Nobody will believe such atrocious libels."

Papa Ravinet and his sister exchanged looks of distress. The poor girl evidently did not realise how her father had been duped; and yet, seeing her so crushed, they scarcely dared to enlighten her. At last, however, the old dealer, knowing but too well that uncertainty is always more painful than truth, ventured to say, "Your father is fearfully slandered, no doubt, but I have tried to inform myself, and two facts are certain. The Count de Ville-Handry is ruined; and the shares of the company have fallen to 100 francs." Changing his voice he added, almost in a whisper, "This has happened because it is believed that the capital of the company has been appropriated to other purposes, and lost in speculations on the Bourse."

He had been right in counting upon Henriette's admirable energy of character. A glance of indignation shot from her eyes, and instantaneously dried her tears; and with surprising fierceness she exclaimed, "That's an infamous slander!" Inexperienced as she was, she nevertheless instinctively realised the terrible nature of such a charge, and perhaps, also, its natural consequences. And, greatly excited, she continued, "To accuse my father of such an abuse of confidence,—of embezzlement! Why should he have risked other people's money on the Bourse? To procure more money for himself? An adventurer, having nothing to lose,—a man eager to become wealthy, and ready to risk everything in the attempt, might do that, but surely you wouldn't expect such conduct from the Count de Ville-Handry,—a man whom everybody knows and respects,—a great nobleman, with a fortune of many millions of his own!" As she spoke, she shrugged her shoulders, and laughed contemptuously.

"You forget, mademoiselle," rejoined Papa Ravinet, with increased solemnity, "that your father is no longer his own master. He has no more will or strength than a child: he is completely under the control of one of those formidable creatures, who seem to possess a philter, by which they can beguile the senses and destroy reason. You forget—"

"I forget nothing, sir. My father is old; he is feeble; he is in love, and—credulous. People may have made him believe things that are not true, but no power on earth could convince him that a dishonest act is honest, and much less induce him to commit such an act."

"Ah, mademoiselle," retorted the old dealer, "I am perfectly convinced of Count de Ville-Handry's integrity, but I also know that he was utterly ignorant of business. What did he understand about these speculations he was drawn into? Nothing at all. It is a difficult and often a dangerous thing to manage a large capital. They no doubt deceived him, cheated him, misled him, and drove him at last to the verge of bankruptcy."

“Who?”

Papa Ravinet trembled on his chair, and, raising his hands to the ceiling, exclaimed,—“Who? You ask who? Why, those who had an interest in it, the wretches by whom he was surrounded,—Sarah, Sir Tom—”

“I don’t think the Countess Sarah looked with a favourable eye upon the formation of this company,” said Henriette, shaking her head; and, noticing that the dealer was about to raise an objection, she continued,—“Besides, what interest could she have in ruining my father? Evidently none. His ruin meant her own, for she was absolute mistress of his fortune, and free to dispose of it as she chose.”

Proud of the accuracy of her judgment, Henriette glanced triumphantly at Papa Ravinet, who now realised that he must strike a decisive blow. Encouraged by a gesture from his sister, he began: “Pray, listen to me, mademoiselle. So far I have only repeated to you what is being said at the Bourse. As I told you, people say that the capital of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company has been swallowed up by unlucky speculations at the Bourse. But I don’t believe these reports. On the contrary, I am quite sure that these millions were not lost at the Bourse, as they were never used for the purpose of speculating.”

“Still—”

“Still they have none the less disappeared, and your father is probably the last man in the world to tell us how and where they have disappeared. But I know it; and, when it becomes a question of recovering these enormous sums, I shall cry out, ‘Search Sarah Brandon, Countess de Ville-Handry; search Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian; search Maxime de Brévan, their wretched tool!’”

Now at last a terrible light broke upon Henriette’s mind. “Then,” stammered she, “these infamous slanders have only been concocted to conceal an impudent robbery.”

“Quite so.”

The young girl seemed to be making a great effort to comprehend; at last she said, “And in that case, the articles in the papers—”

“Were written by the wretches who have robbed your father. Yes, mademoiselle, that’s the truth!” And, shaking his fist with a threatening air, Papa Ravinet added,—“Oh! there is no doubt of it. How long has this paper existed? Barely six months. It was established, you may be sure, with the sole object of utilising it one day for publishing the articles you have just read.”

Although Henriette could not well understand by what ingenious combinations such enormous sums could be abstracted, her doubts were conquered by Papa Ravinet’s air of earnest conviction. “Then,” said she, “the wretches now mean to ruin my father entirely!”

“They must do so for their own safety. The money has been stolen, you see: so there must be a thief. For the world and the law courts, the criminal will be your father.”

“For the law courts?”

“Yes, unfortunately!”

The poor girl’s eyes wandered from the brother to the sister with a terrible expression of bewilderment. At last she asked,—“And do you believe Sarah will allow my father’s name to be dishonoured in that fashion—the name she bears, and was so proud of?”

“She will, perhaps, even insist upon it.”

“Good heavens! What do you mean? Why should she?”

Noticing her brother's hesitation, the old lady took it upon herself to answer. Touching Henriette's arm, she said in a subdued voice, "Because, you see, my poor child, now that Sarah has obtained possession of the fortune she wanted, your father is in her way; because, you see, she wants to be free—do you understand?—free!"

Henriette uttered a cry of such horror that both the brother and the sister at once realised that she had not misunderstood the horrible meaning of that word "free."

But, since the blow had fallen, the old dealer did not think the rest need be concealed from Henriette. Rising to his feet, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, he addressed the terrified girl in these words, "You must at last learn to know the execrable woman who has sworn to ruin you. I know, by my own experience, what crimes she is capable of; and I see clear in the dark night of her infernal intrigues. I know that this woman with the chaste brow, open smile, and soft eyes, has the genius and instincts of a murderess, and has never counted upon anything else but murder for the gratification of her lusts." The old man's attitude and gestures alike revealed an eager, intense thirst for vengeance. He no longer measured his words carefully; but they overflowed from his lips as they came to his tongue boiling under the pressure of his rage.

"Antoine!" said the old lady more than once,— "Antoine, brother! I beseech you!"

But he did not even seem to hear this friendly voice, ordinarily all-powerful. "And now, mademoiselle," he continued, "must I still explain to you the simple and yet formidable plan by which Sarah Brandon has succeeded in obtaining by one effort the immense fortune of the Ville-Handry family? From the first day, she realised that you were standing between her and those millions: and so she attacked you first of all. A brave and honest man, M. Daniel Champcey, loved you; he would have protected you: therefore she got him out of the way. Society might have interested itself in you, and have taken your side; so she beguiled your father to slander you, ruin your reputation, and expose you to the contempt of the world. As you might, perhaps, have tried to find a protector, and have secured one, she placed by your side her wretched tool and spy, a forger, a criminal whom she knew capable of what even an accomplished galley-slave would have shrunk from with disgust and horror: I mean Maxime de Brévan."

The very excess of Henriette's emotion had partially restored her energy, and she exclaimed: "But haven't I told you, sir, that Daniel himself confided me to M. de Brévan's care? Haven't I told you—"

The old dealer smiled almost contemptuously, and continued,— "What does that prove? Nothing but M. de Brévan's skill in carrying out Sarah Brandon's orders. In order to obtain more complete mastery over you, he began by obtaining mastery over M. Champcey. How he succeeded in doing so, I don't know. But we shall know it when we want to know it; for we are going to find out everything. To resume, however. Through M. de Brévan Sarah was kept informed of all your thoughts and hopes, of every word you wrote to M. Champcey, and of all he said in reply; for no doubt he did answer, and they suppressed his letters, just as they, very probably, intercepted all of yours which you did not post yourself. However, as long as you remained under your father's roof, Sarah could attempt nothing against your life, and so she determined to make you fly from home, and Sir Tom's mean

persecutions served their purpose. You thought, and perhaps still think, that the scoundrel really wanted your hand. Undeceive yourself. Your enemies knew your character too well to hope that you would ever break your word, and become faithless to M. Champcey. But they were bent upon handing you over to M. de Brévan. And so, poor child! you were handed over to him. Maxime had no more idea of marrying you than Sir Tom had; and when he dared to approach you with open arms, he was quite prepared to be rejected with disgust. But he had received orders to add the horror of his persecutions to the horror of your isolation and destitution. For he was quite sure, the scoundrel! that the secret of your sufferings would be well kept. He had carefully chosen the house in which you were to die of hunger and misery. The two Chevassats were bound to be his devoted accomplices, even unto death, and thus he had the amazing boldness, and inconceivable brutality, to watch your slow agony. No doubt he became quite impatient at your delaying suicide so long. Finally, you were driven to it; and your death would have realised their atrocious hopes, if Providence had not miraculously stepped in,—that Providence which always, sooner or later, takes its revenge, whatever the wicked may say to the contrary. Yes, these wretches thought they had now surely got rid of you, when I appeared upon the scene. That very morning, the woman Chevassat had no doubt told them, 'She'll do it to-night!' And that same evening, Sarah, Mrs Brian, and Sir Tom no doubt hopefully asked each other, 'Is it all over?'

Poor Henriette had remained listening with pallid cheeks, parted lips, and dilated eyes. It seemed to her as if a sun-ray were suddenly illuminating the dark abyss from which she had been snatched. "Yes," she said, "yes: now I see it all." Then, as the old dealer, out of breath, and hoarse with indignation, paused for a moment, she asked,—“Still, there is one circumstance I scarcely understand: Sarah insists that she knew nothing of the forged letter by means of which Daniel was sent abroad. She told me, on the contrary, that she had wished to keep him here, because she loved him, and he loved her.”

“Ah! don't believe those lies,” interrupted Madame Bertolle.

“No, certainly not! We ought not to believe such things,” said Papa Ravinet, scratching his head. “And yet, I wonder if there is not some new trick in that. Unless, indeed— But no, that would be almost too lucky for us: Unless Sarah were really in love with M. Champcey!” And, as if he were afraid of having given rise to hopes founded upon this contingency, he immediately added—“But let us return to facts. When Sarah was sure of you, she turned her attention to your father. While they were slowly murdering you, she profited of the Count de Ville-Handry's inexperience to lead him into a path at the end of which he was bound to leave his honour behind him. Just observe that the articles you read are dated on the very day you would probably have died. That is clear moral proof of her crime. Thinking that she had got rid of you, she evidently said to herself, 'And now for the father.'”

“Good heavens!” cried Henriette. “Yes, the proofs are coming out; the crime will be disclosed. I have no doubt the murderers told each other that the Count de Ville-Handry would never survive such a foul stain on his honour. And so they dared everything, feeling sure that he would carry the secret of their wickedness with him to the grave.”

Papa Ravinet leisurely wiped the perspiration from his brow. “Yes,”

said he in a hoarse voice, "that was probably, indeed certainly, how Sarah Brandon reasoned in her own mind."

"What! you knew all this?" rejoined Henriette, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes. "You knew that they were murdering my father, and you did not warn him? Ah, that was cruel cautiousness!" And like a young lioness she dashed towards the door.

But Mme. Bertolle intercepted her, and cried, "Henriette, my poor child! where are you going?"

"To save my father, madame. Perhaps at this very moment he is struggling in the last agonies of death, just as I struggled only two nights ago." In her excitement, she had caught hold of the door-knob, and endeavoured to move the old lady out of the way.

However, Papa Ravinet now intervened, and clasping Henriette's arm, he said to her impressively, "I swear to you, mademoiselle, by all you hold sacred, and my sister will swear to you in like manner, that your father's life is in no kind of danger." On hearing this the poor girl gave up the struggle; but her face still wore an expression of harassing anxiety. "Do you wish to prevent our triumph?" continued the old man. "Would you like to warn our enemies, put them on their guard, and deprive us of all hopes of revenge?" Henriette passed her hand across her brow, as if endeavouring to recover her peace of mind. "Remember," resumed the dealer in a persuasive voice, "remember that such imprudence would save our enemies, without saving your father. Pray consider and answer me. Do you really think that your arguments would be stronger than Sarah Brandon's? You cannot so far underrate your enemy's diabolical cunning. Why, she has no doubt taken all possible measures to keep your father's faith in her unshaken, and to let him die as he has lived, completely deceived by her, and murmuring with his last breath words of supreme love for the woman who kills him."

These arguments were so peremptory, that Henriette let go the door-knob, and slowly returned to her seat by the fire. And yet she was far from being reassured. "If I were to appeal to the police," she suddenly proposed.

"Poor child!" said Mme. Bertolle, who had sat down by her side and taken her hands in her own. "Don't you see that this creature's whole power lies in the fact that she employs means which are not within the reach of human justice. Believe me, my child, it is best for you to rely blindly on my brother."

Once more the old dealer had resumed his place by the mantelpiece. "Yes, Mlle. Henriette, rely on me," said he. "I have as much reason to curse Sarah Brandon as you have, and perhaps I hate her more. Rely on me; for my hatred has now been watching and waiting for years, ever anxious to reach her, and secure revenge. Yes, for long years I have been lying in wait, thirsting for vengeance, and pursuing her tracks with a Red Indian's unwearied perseverance. I have associated with the lowest of the low, and stirred up heaps of infamy to find out who she really is, and who her accomplices are, whence they came, and how they have met together to plot such fearful crimes,—and I have found out everything. And yet in Sarah Brandon's whole career,—albeit a career of theft and murder,—I have not so far found a single fact which might bring her within the reach of the law, so cunning is her wickedness." Then, as his face brightened with an air of triumph, he added, in a louder voice, "However, this time success seemed to her so sure and so easy, that she has neglected her usual precautions. Eager to enjoy her millions, and weary of affect-

ing love for your poor father, she has been too eager. And she is lost, if we on our side only know how to be prudent. As for your father, mademoiselle, I have my reasons for feeling safe about him. According to your mother's marriage-contract, and in consequence of a bequest of two millions and a-half left her by one of her uncles, your father's estate is your debtor to the amount of three millions; which sum is invested in mortgages on his Anjou estates. He cannot touch that money, even if he became a bankrupt. Should he die before you, that sum remains still yours; and it is only in the event of your dying the first, that it would go to him. Now Sarah is so insatiable that she has sworn she will have these three millions as well."

"Ah," exclaimed Henriette, "You are right! It is Sarah's interest that my father should live; and so he will live, as long as she does not know whether I am dead or alive—in fact, as long as she does not know what has become of me."

"And she must not know that for some time to come," chimed in the old man. "You ought to see how anxious your enemies are, since you have slipped out of their hands. Last night that woman Chevassat had come to the conclusion that you had gone out of the world altogether; but this morning matters looked very differently. Maxime de Brévan had been there, making a terrible row, and beating her (God forgive him!) because she had relaxed in her watchfulness. The rascal! He has been spending the whole day in running from the Prefecture de Police to the Morgue, and back again. Destitute as you were, and almost without clothes, they ask themselves what could have become of you? I, for my part, did not show; and the Chevassats are far from suspecting that I dabbled in the matter. Ah! It will soon be our turn; and if you will only accept my suggestions, mademoiselle, everything will one day come right again."

It was past nine o'clock when the old dealer, his sister, and Henriette sat down to their modest meal. In the interval a hopeful smile had re-appeared on Henriette's face, and she looked almost happy, when, about midnight, Papa Ravinet left them with the words,—“To-morrow evening I shall perhaps have some news. I am going to the Ministry of Marine.”

Precisely at six o'clock on the following evening he again put in an appearance, this time carrying a carpet bag, and gesticulating so strangely, that it really seemed as if he had gone mad. “I want some money!” he cried out to his sister as soon as he entered. “I am afraid I have not enough; and make haste: I have to be at the Lyons Railway Station at seven o'clock.”

“What is the matter? What are you going to do?” asked both his sister and Henriette, plainly alarmed by his strange manner.

“The matter?” he rejoined. “Why, nothing! Only Heaven itself has declared in our favour. I went to the Ministry of Marine to-day. ‘The Conquest’ will remain another year in Cochin China; but M. Champcey is coming back to Europe. He was to have taken passage on board a merchant-vessel, ‘The Saint Louis,’ which is expected at Marseilles every day, if indeed she has not already come in. And I—I am going to Marseilles, for I must see M. Champcey before anybody else can see him.” Then as soon as his sister had handed him a couple of thousand francs in bank notes, and Henriette had written a short note of introduction to Daniel, to serve in case of need, he rushed out, exclaiming,—“To-morrow I will send you a telegram!”

XXII.

IF there is a civilized profession more arduous than others it is surely the sailor's—so arduous, indeed, that one is almost disposed to ask how men can be found bold enough to embrace it, and firm enough in their resolution not to abandon it after a first trial. Not, however, on account of the peril and fatigue connected with it, but because it constitutes an existence unlike all others, in many instances quite incompatible with the exercise of free will. The sailor is usually most attached to his home. Many, one might almost say most sailors, are married; and by a kind of special grace they are apt to enjoy their short happiness on shore, as if it were destined to be eternal, and quite indifferent as to what the morrow may bring forth. But behold! one fine morning, all of a sudden, a letter comes from the Admiralty. It is an order to sail. The seaman must go, abandoning everything and everybody,—mother, family, and friends,—perhaps the wife he has married the day before, or the young mother smiling beside her first-born's cradle, or the sweetheart who was but just now looking joyfully at her bridal veil. He must start, and stifle the ominous voices rising from the depths of his heart, which ask him, "Will you ever return? and, if so, will you find them all, your dear ones? and, if you find them, will they not have changed? will they have preserved your memory as faithfully as you will have preserved their's?" In reality, it is only in comic operas that sailors are seen singing their most cheerful songs at the moment of starting on a long and perilous voyage. Their leave-takings are almost always sad and solemn. Such, indeed, was the case when "The Conquest" sailed,—with Daniel Champeey on board as second lieutenant. On reaching Rochefort at five o'clock in the morning, he at once went on board, and slept the first night in his berth. Early the next day the ship weighed anchor. Daniel probably suffered more than any other man on board, though he succeeded in affecting a certain air of indifference. The thought that he had left Henriette in the hands of adventurers, who were capable of anything, caused him constant anxiety and grief; and now, for the first time, a thousand doubts assailed him concerning Maxime de Brévan: would he not be exposed to terrible temptation on being thrown thus suddenly into the society of a great heiress? Might he not some day covet her millions, and try and profit of her peculiar situation, in order to win them for himself? Daniel believed too firmly in Henriette to apprehend that she would even listen to de Brévan. But he reasoned, very justly, that she would find herself in a desperate condition indeed, if M. de Brévan turned traitor and went over to the enemy—that is, the Countess Sarah. "And yet," thought Daniel, "my last directions were to urge her to trust implicitly in Maxime, and follow his advice as if it were my own!"

In the midst of this anxiety, he hardly recollected that he had also intrusted Maxime with everything he possessed. What was money to him in comparison with Henriette? His thoughts were as gloomy as ever, when a week after the sailing of "The Conquest" a violent tempest arose, endangering the vessel's safety for fully three days. As the ship tossed to and fro, and the crew battled manfully with the elements, Daniel's anxiety for Henriette was vanquished by a sense of official responsibility; and when at last the storm was conquered, he was actually able to enjoy a good night's rest, the first he had had since leaving Paris. On awaking, he

was surprised to feel comparative peace of mind. Henceforth his fate was no longer in his own hands : it had been proved, beyond doubt, that he was unable to control events ; and thus resignation crept into the place of anxiety. His only hope was that he might, perhaps, soon receive a letter from Henriette, or maybe find one waiting for him on reaching his destination. For it was quite possible that "The Conquest" might be outstripped by some speedier vessel, starting three weeks later or so from France. She was an old wooden sailing frigate, and fully justified her evil reputation as the worst sailer of the French fleet. Moreover, an alternate exchange of calms and gales kept her much longer than usual on the voyage, a most tedious and uncomfortable one. The ship was indeed so crowded with passengers, that seamen and officers had hardly half the space usually allotted to them on board. In addition to her crew, she carried half a battalion of marines, and a hundred and sixty mechanics of various kinds, whom the government was sending out for the use of the colony. Some of these artizans, who had determined to settle in Cochin China altogether, had their families with them ; others, who were younger men, were merely going out to have an opportunity of seeing foreign lands, and earn, perhaps, a little money. They were occasionally called upon to assist in handling the ship, and, on the whole, they were orderly and willing enough, with the exception of four or five, who proved so unruly, that they had to be put in irons on two or three occasions.

Time passed by, and "The Conquest" had been out three months, when one afternoon, whilst Daniel was superintending a difficult manœuvre, he was suddenly seen to stagger, raise his arms, and fell back on to the deck. Several seamen at once ran towards him and raised him up, but he gave no sign of life, and blood poured freely from his mouth and nostrils. Daniel had won the hearts of all the crew by his even temper, strict attention to duty, and kindness when disengaged towards all who came in contact with him. Hence, as soon as the accident became known, sailors and officers hurried to the spot from all parts of the vessel. What had happened? Why had he fallen? No one could tell ; for no one had seen anything. However, he must be seriously hurt if the large pool of blood staining the deck was at all acceptable as evidence. He was promptly carried to the infirmary ; and, as soon as he recovered his senses, the surgeons discovered the cause of his fall and fainting. He had a severe wound on the back of his head, a little behind the left ear,—a wound such as a heavy hammer in the hands of a powerful man might have produced. Who had dealt this terrible blow, which a miracle alone had apparently prevented from crushing the skull? No one could explain it—neither the surgeons nor the officers standing round the wounded man's couch ; and when at last Daniel himself could be questioned, he knew no more about it than the others. There had been no one standing near him ; nor had he seen anybody approach him at the time of the accident : the blow, moreover, had been so violent, that he had at once fallen down unconscious. These particulars were soon reported among the sailors and passengers on deck, and were at first received with incredulous smiles, and, when they could not longer be doubted, with bursts of indignation. What! Lieut. Champcey had been struck on deck, in broad daylight! How? By whom? The whole affair was so mysterious that the captain at once ordered a searching enquiry. At length some hairs and a clot of blood were noticed on a heavy pulley among the rigging, and seemed to furnish some kind of explanation. It was surmised that the rope to which this pulley was

fastened had slipped through the hands of one of the sailors engaged in the rigging, during the manœuvre superintended by Daniel, and that the man, frightened by the consequences of his awkwardness, but, nevertheless, preserving his presence of mind, had drawn it up again so promptly that he had not been noticed. Could it be hoped that he would accuse himself? Evidently not. Besides, what would be the use of it? The wounded man himself was the first to request that the inquiry might be stopped. So at the end of a fortnight, when Champcey returned to duty, his shipmates ceased talking of the accident. Such things frequently happen on board ship, and besides, the idea that "The Conquest" was approaching her destination now filled every mind, and furnished the exclusive topic of conversation. And really, one fine evening, just as the sun was setting, they came in sight of land, and the next morning, at daybreak, the frigate sailed into the Dong-Nai, the king of Cochin Chinese rivers, which is so wide and deep, that vessels of the largest tonnage can ascend it without difficulty as far as Saigon. Standing on deck, Daniel watched the scenery of the river banks—strange in aspect, and exhaling pestilential fivers from their black yielding slime. Mangoes and mangroves, with supple, snake-like roots extending deep under the water, cast a refreshing shadow on either side, and in their rear, every shade of green was in turn presented to the eye, from the bluish, sickly hue of the idrys to the dark, metallic tinge of the stenia. Farther inland, wild vines and lianes, aloes, and cacti formed impenetrable thickets, from which, like fluted columns, sprang gigantic cocoa and graceful areca-palms. Here and there, through occasional clearings, one could perceive, stretching as far as the horizon, a vast expanse of fever-breeding marsh-land—an immense slough covered with undulating vegetation, which opened and closed again under the breeze, like the sea itself. "Ah! that's Saigon, is it?" exclaimed a merry voice at Daniel's side. He turned and espied his best friend on board, the first lieutenant, who, offering him a telescope, added with an air of satisfaction,—“Look! there, do you see? At last we've reached our destination. In two hours, Champcey, we shall be riding at anchor.”

In the distance one could, indeed, detect against the deep blue sky the outlines of the curved roofs of the Saigon pagodas; but another long hour was to elapse before, at a turn in the river, the town itself appeared to view—scarcely as handsome and as inviting as French geographers would have us to believe. Saigon in those days mainly consisted of one wide street running parallel with the right bank of the Dong-Nai—a primitive, unpaved street cut up into ruts, interrupted every now and then by large open spaces, and having on either side a succession of monotonous timber houses roofed with rice-straw or palm-leaves. Thousands of boats were moored along the river-bank, forming, as it were, a kind of floating suburb, tenanted by a strange medley of Annamites, Hindoos, and Chinamen. At a short distance from the river rose a few massive buildings roofed with red tiles, and here and there on the outskirts appeared some Annamite farm nestling among copses of areca-palms. Finally, on an eminence, Daniel beheld the citadel, serving both as an arsenal and as the residence of the French commander, just as in former times it had sheltered the Spanish colonel. Any town where we may happen to land after a protracted voyage has always certain attractions, so that all the officers of the "Conquest," excepting the few on duty, went ashore as soon as the ship cast anchor. Most of them at once repaired to the government house to inquire whether any letters from France had arrived before them. It,

indeed, so happened that a couple of swifter sailers—a French vessel and an English clipper, which had started nearly a month after the “Conquest”—had already reached Saigon a week or so in advance of the dilatory old frigate, and among the letters they carried there proved to be two for Daniel. He received them with feverish hands and beating heart. But on glancing at the addresses he at once turned pale—for on neither of them did he recognise Henriette’s handwriting. However, he tore open the envelopes, and glanced at the signatures. The first letter was signed, “Maxime de Brévan;” and the other, “Countess de Ville-Handry,” *née* Sarah Brandon. Daniel commenced with the latter, in which, after informing him of her marriage, Sarah described at great length Henriette’s conduct on the wedding-day. “Any other person but myself,” she said, “would have been incensed at this atrocious insult, and would have profited of her position to revenge herself. But I, although not usually of a forgiving mind, will forgive her, Daniel, for your sake, and because I cannot see any one suffer who has loved you.” Finally, Sarah’s letter ended with the following postscript: “Ah! why did you not prevent my marriage, when you might have done so by a word? They think I have reached the height of my wishes, and yet in truth I have never been more wretched.”

This letter fairly enraged Daniel, who thought he could detect a strain of covert irony in every line. “This miserable woman laughs at me,” he mused; “and when she pretends she will forgive Henriette, she really means that she hates her, and is determined to persecute her.” However, he was fortunately somewhat reassured by Maxime’s note. M. de Brévan confirmed Sarah’s account of the wedding fracas, adding, moreover, that Mlle. Henriette was very sad, but resigned; and that her step-mother treated her with the greatest kindness. Curiously enough, he did not say a word of the large amounts intrusted to his care, nor mention the sale of Daniel’s landed property, nor the price he had obtained for it. However, Daniel did not notice this: all his thoughts were for Henriette. “Why has she not written,” he asked himself, “when both the others found means to write?”

Overwhelmed with disappointment, he sat down on a wooden bench near one of the windows of the office where the letters were distributed, and travelling back in thought to France, he fancied himself once more under the trees in the count’s garden. There, in the pale moonlight, he thought he could again discern the form of his beloved as she stole towards him between the ancient elms. But a friendly touch on the shoulder suddenly recalled him to reality. Four or five brother officers were standing around him, gay, and smiling: “Well, Champcey,” they asked, “are you coming?”

“Where?”

“Why, to dinner!” And as he looked at them with the air of a man who has just woken up and not yet had time to collect his thoughts, they continued, “Yes, to dinner. It appears Saigon possesses an admirable French restaurant, the cook of which is not merely a Parisian, but a great culinary artist as well. Come, get up, and let us go.”

In Daniel’s frame of mind, however, solitude had irresistible attractions, and he trembled at the idea of having to tear himself away from his gloomy reverie, and take part in some careless conversation. “I can’t dine with you to-day, my friends,” he said to his comrades.

“You are joking.”

“No, I’m not. I must return on board.”

Then only were the others struck by his sad expression; and, changing

their tone, they asked him with evident concern, "What is the matter, Champcey? Have you heard of any misfortune, any death?"

"No."

"You have had letters from France, I see."

"They bring me nothing sad; but I was expecting news, which hasn't come; that's all."

"Oh? then you must come with us."

"Don't force me, pray: I should prove a sorry companion."

Despite all their efforts they failed to induce Daniel to change his mind, and at the door of the government house they went their way, whilst he sadly retraced his steps towards the harbour. He speedily reached the banks of the Dong-Nai; but here he encountered difficulties which he had not previously thought of. The night was so dark, that he could hardly pick his way along an uncompleted wharf, strewn with enormous stones and piles of timber. Not a light in all the native huts around; and despite all his efforts he could but barely discern the dark outlines of the vessels lying at anchor in the river, and the lighthouse reflector obscured by the fog. He called in vain. No voice replied. The surrounding silence was broken only by the low wash of the river as it flowed along. "How on earth," thought Daniel, "shall I find our boat?" Still, after a long and patient search, he did succeed in finding it moored and half lost amidst a crowd of native craft. However, the boat seemed to be empty, and it was only on going aboard that he discovered a boy fast asleep in the bottom, wrapped up in a strip of carpet used to cover the officers' seats. Daniel shook him testily, and the youngster slowly rose, grumbling evidently with annoyance at having his sleep disturbed. "Well, what's the matter?" he growled.

"Where are the men?" asked Daniel.

Quite awake now, the lad, who had good eyes, managed to discern Champcey's gold epaulets, and immediately becoming most respectful, replied, "Lieutenant, all the men are in town."

"How so? All of them?"

"Why, yes, lieutenant! When you came ashore the first lieutenant told the boatswain, that as he and the other officers would not return on board till late, the men might go and eat a mouthful, and drink a glass, provided none of them got drunk."

Daniel now remembered this circumstance, which he had momentarily forgotten. "And where did the men go?" he asked.

"I don't know, lieutenant."

Daniel looked at the large, heavy boat, as if asking himself whether he could row it back to "The Conquest" with the mere assistance of this lad. No, on reflection, that was impracticable. "Well, go to sleep again," he said to the boy. And jumping on shore again, without uttering a word of disappointment, he turned to go in search of his comrades, when he suddenly perceived a man whose features it was impossible to distinguish in the darkness, spring as it were out of the fog. "Who are you?" asked Daniel.

"Mr Officer," answered the man in an almost unintelligible jargon, a horrible medley of English, French, and Spanish, "I heard you tell the youngster in the boat there—"

"Well?"

"I thought you wanted to get back on board your ship?"

"Why, yes, I do."

"Well, then, if you like, I am a boatman and I can take you over."

There was no reason why Daniel should mistrust the man. In all parts of the world, and at any hour of the day or night, men are to be found waiting on the wharves for belated sailors, whom they usually charge a heavy price for their services. "Ah! you are a boatman, eh?" said Daniel, quite pleased at the encounter. "Well, where is your boat?"

"There, Mr Officer, a little way down; just follow me. But what ship do you want to go to?"

"That ship there." And Daniel pointed out the lights of "The Conquest," lying some six hundred yards off in the river.

"That's rather far," grumbled the man: "for the current's very strong."

"I'll give you a couple of francs for your trouble."

"Ah! if that's it, all right," exclaimed the man, clapping his hands with apparent delight. "Come along, Mr Officer, a little farther down. There, that's my boat. Get in, now steady!"

Daniel followed his directions; but he was so struck by the man's awkwardness in getting the boat off, that he could not help saying to him—"Ah, my boy, you are not a boatman, after all!"

"I beg your pardon, sir: I used to be one before I came to this country."

"Where do you come from, then?"

"From Shanghai."

"Well, at all events you have a good deal to learn to make a proper sailor."

Noticing that the boat was very small, a mere nutshell in fact, Daniel thought he could, if needs be, take the oars and pull himself and the man. However, sitting down, and stretching out his legs, he resumed for the time being his gloomy meditation, from which he was abruptly roused by a most unexpected occurrence. Owing to a wrong movement of the boatman, or some other cause, the little craft suddenly upset, and Daniel was thrown into the river. To make matters worse, one of his feet was so closely jammed in between two planks, that at first he could not extricate himself, but *volens volens* had to go under water. The thought that he was lost flashed through his mind; but, desperate as his position was, he was not the man to give up life without a struggle, and in a supreme effort, gathering up all his strength and energy, he caught hold of the boat, that had turned over just above him, and pushed it so forcibly, that he loosened his foot, and at the same moment reached the surface. It was high time; for he had imbibed no little water. "Now, he thought, "I have a chance of saving myself!" A very faint chance, alas!—so faint, in fact, that it required all Daniel's strong will and invincible courage to give it any effect. A furious current carried him down like a straw; the little boat, which might have furnished some support, had disappeared; and he knew nothing about this formidable Dong-Nai, except that it went on widening to its mouth. There was nothing to guide him; for the night was so dark, that land and water, the river and its banks, were all blended in the same well-nigh impenetrable obscurity. What had become of the boatman, however? "Ahoy, my man!" called Daniel at hap-hazard. But no answer came. Had the unfortunate fellow been swept off as well? Had he got back into the boat again? Perhaps he was drowned already. All of a sudden Daniel's heart trembled with joy and hope. A few hundred yards ahead he perceived a red light, indicating a vessel at anchor, and at once he directed all his efforts towards that point. He was carried thither with almost bewildering rapidity. With incredible presence of mind, and great precision, he succeeded in clutching hold of the anchor-chain, at the

very moment when the current drove him to it. With the desperate strength that such terrible peril imparts, he held on, and recovering his breath, shrieked, with all the strength of his lungs, "Help, help, help!"

From the ship there at once came a call, "Hold on!" proving that his appeal had been heard, and that help was at hand; but, alas! at the same moment, an eddy in the terrible current tore the chain, slippery with mud, out of his stiffened hands with irresistible violence. Rolled over by the water, he was rudely thrown against the side of the vessel, went under, and was carried off. When he rose to the surface again, the red light was far behind him, and below no other light could be seen. No human help was henceforth within reach. Daniel could now count only upon himself in trying to make one of the banks. Although he could not measure the distance, which seemed very great, he fancied the task would not be beyond his strength, if he were only naked. But his clothes encumbered him terribly; and the water they imbibed made them, of course, more weighty and oppressive every minute. "I shall certainly be drowned," he thought, "if I cannot get rid of my clothes." Excellent swimmer as he was, the task was no easy one. Still he accomplished it. After prodigious efforts of strength and skill, he finally got rid of his shoes; and then, as if in defiance of the element against which he was struggling, he cried:—"I shall pull through! I shall see Henriette again!"

But it had cost him an enormous amount of time to undress; and how could he calculate the distance which this current—one of the swiftest in the world—had carried him? As he tried to recall all he knew about the river, he remembered having noticed that, a mile or so below Saigon, it was as wide as a branch of the sea. According to his calculation, he must now be near that spot. "Never mind," he said to himself, "I mean to get out of this." And not knowing which bank he was nearest to, he resolved to swim towards the right one, on which Saigon stands.

He had been swimming for half-an-hour or so, and already began to feel his muscles stiffen, and his joints lose their elasticity, while his hands and feet grew cold, and his breathing became shorter, when he noticed from the wash of the water that he was near the shore. Soon he felt the ground under his feet; but, the moment he touched it, he sank up to his waist in the glue-like slime, which makes the banks of all the Cochin China rivers so peculiarly dangerous. There was the land, no doubt, and only the darkness prevented him from seeing it; and yet his situation was more desperate than ever. His legs were caught as in a vice; the muddy water boiled up almost to his lips; and, at every effort to extricate himself, he sank deeper, a little at a time, but always a little more. His presence of mind, as well as his strength, now began to leave him, and his thoughts were growing more and more confused, when, while instinctively feeling for a hold, he happily touched a mangrove root. That root might save his life. First he tried its strength, and then, finding it sufficiently solid, he grasped it firmly, and gently hoisted himself up. Next, creeping cautiously over the treacherous mud, he finally succeeded in reaching firm ground, and fell down exhausted. He was saved from drowning, no doubt; but what was to become of him—naked, exhausted, chilled as he was, and lost at dead of night in a strange, deserted country? However, after a moment's repose he rose to his feet, and tried to walk on. But on all sides an entanglement of creeping lianes and cactus-thorns barred his way. "Well," he said at last, "I must stay here till day-break."

He spent the rest of the night walking up and down, and beating his chest, in order to lessen the terrible chills which penetrated to the very marrow of his bones. At dawn he perceived that he was, so to say, imprisoned in the midst of an almost impenetrable thicket, from which he only extricated himself after prodigies of ingenuity and courage. At last, after a walk of four hours, he reached the outskirts of Saigon. Some sailors of a merchant-ship, whom he met on the way, lent him a few clothes, and carried him on board "The Conquest," which he reached more dead than alive.

"Where do you come from, great God! in such a state?" exclaimed his comrades when they saw him. "What has happened to you?" And, when he told them all that had happened since they parted, they rejoined, "Well, Champcey, you are certainly a lucky fellow. This is the second accident from which you escape almost miraculously. But mind the third!"

"Mind the third!" that was exactly what Daniel thought. For, in the midst of all his frightful sufferings the night before, he had indulged in many gloomy reflections. That mysterious blow which had stunned him on board ship; this boat sinking suddenly, without any apparent cause—were these merely chance occurrences? He had been struck with the awkwardness of the boatman who had so unexpectedly turned up to offer him his services. This man, although a wretched sailor, might, however, be a first-class swimmer; and, having taken all his measures before upsetting the boat, might easily have reached land after the accident. "That fellow," mused Daniel, "plainly wished me to drown. But why? Evidently not for his own sake. Who is it, then, that wants to put me out of the way? Sarah Brandon? No, that can't be!" It was, indeed, improbable to imagine that a wretch in her pay should have found his way on board "The Conquest," and have been precisely at the right moment on the wharf, the first time Daniel went on shore. And yet his suspicions troubled him to such a degree, that he determined to make every effort to solve the mystery. To begin, he asked for a list of all the men who had been allowed to go on shore the night before; and in reply he learned that out of the ship's crew only the seamen manning the different boats had been in Saigon, but that, as permission had been given to all the emigrants to land, several of them had also gone on shore. Despite his great weakness, Daniel then went to the chief police official, and asked him for an inspector, with whom he proceeded to the wharf, to the spot where the ship's boat had been moored the night before. He asked the police agent to inquire round about whether any boatman had disappeared since the previous day. On all sides came a negative answer; but at last Daniel was shewn an unfortunate Annamite who had been wandering up and down the river bank since early morning, tearing his hair, and crying that he had been robbed—for some one had stolen his boat. On the previous night Daniel had been unable to distinguish either the features or the dress of the man whose services he had accepted; but he had heard his voice, and remembered its peculiar intonation so perfectly, that he would have recognised it among thousands. Besides, this Annamite did not know a word of French, as a dozen persons testified; and born and bred on the river, he was quite an expert boatman—not at all the clumsy fellow by whom Daniel had been accosted. Finally, it was clear enough that if the Annamite had been the guilty party, he would not have made so much noise over the loss of his boat. After this enquiry, Daniel's conclusion was summed up in these words, "There can be no doubt about it. That mysterious boatman was paid to drown me."

XXIII.

No man, however brave he may think himself, can refrain from trembling at the idea that he has just miraculously escaped assassination. The strongest hearted must feel their blood chill at the thought that the would-be murderer will no doubt speedily renew his attempt, and that the next time no miracle may intervene to prevent his purpose. This was Daniel's position. He instinctively realised that war had been declared against him,—a savage, pitiless warfare, replete with treachery and cunning snare and ambush. It seemed that he had beside him, dogging him like his very shadow, a terrible, determined foe, who, stimulated by the thirst of gain, was ever on the watch, waiting for an opportunity to murder him with impunity. The infernal cunning displayed in the two first attempts on Daniel's life enabled him to estimate at its true value the murderous skill of the man, who, as he thought, had been hired by Sarah Brandon for the purpose of "suppressing him." However, he did not say a word to his comrades of the danger to which he was exposed, and indeed, as soon as he had recovered from the first shock, he assumed an air of cheerfulness which he had not shown during the whole voyage, and under which he successfully concealed his apprehensions. "It would never do," he said to himself, "to let my enemy know that I am on the watch."

However, from that moment his suspicions never fell asleep; and even in his slightest acts he observed the greatest circumspection. He never put one foot before the other, so to say, without first having examined the ground; he never trusted himself to a rope without having first tried its solidity, and he made it a law to eat and drink nothing, not even a crust and a glass of water, but what came from the officers' table. These perpetual precautions and incessant apprehensions proved exceedingly repugnant to him; but he felt that, under such circumstances, carelessness would be no longer courage, but simply folly. His enemies had engaged him in a duel in which he wished to be victorious: so he must at least defend himself properly. He felt, moreover, that he was Henriette's only possible future protector; and that, if he died, she would certainly be lost. And he also thought not merely of defending himself, but of unmasking the murderer, and the infamous woman by whom he was employed. Thus he quietly but tenaciously continued his investigations. In reference to the seamen manning the ship's boats, he learned that, while they were on shore, none of them had been ten minutes out of his companions' sight, so that the pretended boatman evidently did not belong to "The Conquest's" crew. Nor could he have belonged to the detachment of marine infantry, for not a single soldier had been allowed to leave the vessel. However, there remained the emigrants, fifty or sixty of whom had spent the night in Saigon. Could Daniel's would-be murderer be one of them? Would that supposition tally with the circumstances of the first attempt on his life? Perhaps so, for several of the younger emigrants, wishing to relieve the tedium of their voyage, had often lent a hand in working the ship. Moreover, after careful enquiry, Daniel ascertained that four of these fellows had been with the sailors on the yards when he received that mysterious blow from above, which stunned and nearly killed him. Unfortunately, however, he was unable to discover exactly who these four fellows were. Still the result of his investigation sufficed to make life on

board far more endurable. He could perform his duties in perfect safety, since he was now sure that the guilty man was not one of the crew. He even felt great relief at the thought that his would-be murderer need not be sought for among those frank, brave tars. At least, none of them had been bribed with gold to kill him. So far as the emigrants were concerned, they had, unfortunately for his further investigations, been already scattered among the different establishments of the colony, according to its requirements: so, at least for the present, he had to abandon a plan he had formed of talking with every one of them until he recognized the spurious boatman's voice.

Besides, he himself was not to remain at Saigon. After a first expedition, which kept him away for two months, he obtained command of a steam-sloop, detached to explore and take the bearings of the River Kamboja, from the sea to Mitho, the second city of Cochin China. This was no easy task; for the Kamboja had already defeated the efforts of several hydrographic engineers by its capricious and constant changes—nearly every pass and every turn varying with the monsoons, both in direction and depth. In addition, the mission had its own difficulties and dangers. The Kamboja itself is not only obstructed by foul swamps, but it flows between vast, marshy plains, which, in the rainy season, are covered with water; while in the dry weather, under the burning sun, they exhale that fatal malaria which has already cost thousands of lives. In less than a week after Daniel set out, three of the men under his orders died before his eyes, after a few hours' illness, and amid atrocious convulsions. A form of cholera had carried them off. During the following four months, moreover, seven others succumbed to fever, contracted in these pestilential swamps. And towards the end of the expedition, when the work was nearly finished, the survivors were so weakened, that they had hardly strength enough to hold themselves up. Daniel alone had not yet suffered from these terrible scourges. And yet he had never spared himself, nor hesitated in doing his duty. To sustain and electrify these men,—exhausted by sickness, and irritated at wasting their lives upon work that had no reward—a leader of uncommon intrepidity was needed, and such a leader they found in Daniel.

He had told Sarah Brandon on the eve of his departure,—“With a love like mine, with a hatred like mine in his heart, a man can defy everything. The murderous climate will not harm me; and, if I had six bullets in my body, I should still find strength enough to return and call you to account for your conduct towards Henriette.” He certainly had need of all the dauntless energy which passion inspires to sustain him in his trials. But to him physical suffering was nothing in comparison with mental anxiety. At night, while his men slept, his tortured mind kept him awake pondering over his sufferings, and wondering what was happening to Henriette. For although a year had now elapsed since he left Paris to sail on board “The Conquest,” he had not received a single letter from her—not one. Each time a vessel arrived from France with despatches, his hopes revived; and each time they were disappointed. “Well,” he would remark, “I can wait for the next.” And then he began counting the days; and when some long-expected ship arrived at last, there never, never once came a letter from Henriette. How could this silence be explained? What strange events could have happened? What must he think, hope, or fear? This uncertainty was terrible. Daniel would have been less tortured if some one had suddenly come and told him, “Mlle. de Ville-Handry is dead.” Yes, less tortured, for true love in its savage selfishness suffers

less from death than from treason. If Henriette had died, Daniel would have been crushed; and maybe despair would have driven him to extreme measures; but he would have been relieved of that horrible doubt within him, that doubt as to her promises, and those suspicions which would return despite all he did to conquer them. However, he knew that she was alive; for hardly a vessel arrived from France or England without bringing him a letter from Maxime, or from the Countess Sarah.

For Sarah insisted upon writing to him, as if there existed a mysterious bond between them, which she defied him to break. "I obey," she said, "an impulse more powerful than reason and will alike. It is stronger than I am myself, stronger than all things else: I must write to you, I cannot help it." At another time she said,—“Do you remember that evening, O Daniel! when, pressing Sarah Brandon to your heart, you swore to be her's forever? The Countess de Ville-Handry can never forget it.” Under the most indifferent words, a passion seemed to palpitate and struggle, but partially restrained. Her letters read like the conversations of timid lovers, who talk about the rain and the weather in voices trembling with desire, and with looks burning with passion. “Could she really be in love with me?” thought Daniel, “and could that be her punishment?” Then, again, swearing like the roughest of his men, he added,—“Am I to be a fool forever? Isn't it quite clear that this wicked woman only tries to lull my suspicions? She is evidently preparing her defence, in case the rascal who tried to murder me should be caught, and compromise her by his confession.” Every letter from the Countess Sarah, moreover, brought some news about her “step-daughter.” But she always spoke of Henriette with extreme reserve, and in ambiguous terms, as if counting upon Daniel's sagacity to guess what she could not or would not write. According to her account, Henriette had become reconciled to her father's marriage. The poor child's melancholy had entirely disappeared. She was very friendly with Sir Tom. Indeed, her coquettish ways became quite alarming; and her indiscretion provoked the gossip of visitors. Daniel might as well accustom himself to the idea, that, on his return, he would find Henriette a married woman. “She lies, the wretch!” said Daniel: “yes, she lies!” But he tried in vain to resist: every letter from Sarah brought him the germ of some new suspicion, which fermented in his mind like the miasma in the veins of his men.

The information furnished by Maxime de Brévan was different, and often contradictory even, but by no means more reassuring. His letters betrayed the perplexity and hesitation of a man who is all anxiety to soften hard truths. According to him, the Countess Sarah and Mlle. de Ville-Handry did not get on well together; but he was compelled to say, that the wrong was all on the young lady's side, for she seemed to make it the study of her life to mortify her step-mother, while the latter bore the most irritating provocations with unchanging sweetness. He alluded to the calumnies which endangered Henriette's reputation, and even admitted that she had given some ground for them by her thoughtless acts. He finally added that he foresaw the moment when she would leave her father's house, in spite of all his advice to the contrary.

“And not one line from her,” exclaimed Daniel,—“not one line!” And yet he wrote her letter after letter, beseeching her to answer him, whatever might be the matter; imploring her to hide nothing, however terrible; for the certainty even of a misfortune would be a blessing in comparison with this torturing uncertainty. He wrote without once imagining that she suffered the same torments as himself, that their

letters were intercepted, and that she had no more news of him than he had of her.

Time passed, however, and Daniel returned to Saigon, bringing back with him one of the finest hydrographic works that exist on Cochin China. It was well known that this work had cost an immense amount of labour, privation, and life : hence he was rewarded as if he had won a battle,—and he was rewarded instantly, thanks to special powers conferred upon his chief, subject only to confirmation in France, which in such cases was never refused. All the survivors of the expedition were mentioned in the official report ; two were decorated ; and Daniel was promoted to be an officer of the Legion of Honour. Under other circumstances, this distinction, doubly valuable to so young a man, would have made him supremely happy : but now it left him indifferent. The fact was, that these long trials had worn out the elasticity of his heart ; and the sources of joy, as well as those of sorrow, had dried up. He no longer struggled against despair, but came to believe that Henriette had forgotten him, and would never be his wife. He knew well enough that he himself could never love another woman, and life without Henriette seemed such a dreary prospect, that at times he really asked himself whether it were worth living. There were moments when he looked lovingly at his pistols, and asked, “Why should I not spare Sarah Brandon the trouble?” It was a feeling of hatred that restrained his hand. He must, he thought, at least resign himself to life until he had taken his revenge. Harassed by these anxieties, he withdrew more and more from society, and gave up going on shore ; and his brother officers felt anxious for him as they watched him walking restlessly up and down the quarter-deck, with a pale face and glowing eyes : for Daniel was a great favourite with his comrades. His superiority was so evident, that none disputed it : the others might envy him, but they could never be jealous of him. Some of them thought he had brought back from the Kamboja the germ of one of those implacable diseases which demoralize the strongest, and, breaking out with sudden swiftness, carry a man off in a few hours. “You ought not to become a misanthrope, Champcey,” they were in the habit of saying. “Come, for Heaven’s sake, shake off that sadness.” And they added in a jesting tone, “Decidedly, you regret the Kamboja !”

Intended for a joke, these words, after all, only expressed the truth. Daniel did regret his mission, its hardships and perils. While it lasted, responsibility, fatigue, hard work, and danger had at least procured him some hours of forgetfulness ; whereas comparative idleness now left him face to face with his distressing thoughts. It was the desire, the necessity almost, of escaping in some manner from himself, which induced him one day to join several of his comrades in a great hunting-party. On the eve of the expedition, he had a curious presentiment. “A fine opportunity,” he thought, “for the assassin hired by Sarah Brandon !” And then shrugging his shoulders, he added with a bitter laugh, “What ! am I hesitating ? As if a life like mine were worth protecting against danger !”

On the following day, when the party reached the hunting-ground, Daniel received his instructions, and, like his comrades, had a post assigned him by the leader. He found himself placed between two brother officers, with a thicket behind him, and a narrow ravine—through which all the game must necessarily pass as it was driven down by a crowd of Annamites—in front. The sport had been going on for an hour or so, when those nearest Daniel suddenly saw him drop his rifle, turn over, and fall to the ground, exclaiming : “This time they haven’t missed me.”