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PAPA, MAMMA AND BABY.

By GUSTAVE DROZ.

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 130TH FRENCH EDITION.



Illustrated

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M. ÉMILE ZOLA ON "PAPA, MAMMA AND BABY."

"Monsieur Gustave Droz is the painter of a slightly factitious state of society which toys with pleasant vices like the eighteenth century played at pastorals. One must read his masterpiece—"Monsieur, Madame et Bébé"—to understand all the painted grace of that circle. No doubt the tone is a trifle exaggerated, but the artist's great merit lies in his having depicted characters which will certainly live as excellent studies of the society of the period. He has been reproached with having dipped his pen in pearl powder. This is true, and it will be his claim to renown, for he alone has painted the picture of a French fashionable home of the epoch."





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TO MY FAIR READER.

Dear Madam,

If by chance on opening this volume you come across some frolic jest, do not, I beg of you, be in too great a hurry to cry "Wolf."

In the opening pages of my book it is a bachelor who speaks, and I seek pardon and indulgence for him. Do not judge him too quickly ; you would regret it ; for towards the hundredth page this bachelor marries, and, upon my honour, makes an excellent husband.

Need I say that he soon becomes a father and then deserves all your sympathies.

My embarrassment is not slight, I can assure you. I would advise you to begin at the end ; but then to love the father it is necessary to know the man, and all these little sketches are linked together by a thread which I cannot break.

Therefore, dear madam, be bold. If at times the story becomes slightly animated, close one eye ; it is an excellent method of only reading half and not quarrelling with anyone.

Your obedient servant,

GUSTAVE Z.





PAPA, MAMMA AND BABY.

MY FIRST SUPPER PARTY.



EUCE take me if I can recollect her name, and yet I dearly loved her, the charming girl that she was.

Strange how wealthy we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers, how many forgotten kisses, how many pretty little trinkets, broken, old-fashioned, and dusty, we come across. But no matter. I was eighteen, and, upon my honour, very unsophisticated. It was in the arms of my dear—I have her name at the tip of my tongue, it ended in “ine”—it was in her arms that I murmured my first words of love, on her rounded shoulder, close to a pretty little black mole, that I printed my first kiss. I adored her, and she reciprocated the sentiment. I used to dress her myself, I laced her stays, and used to feel boundless emotion as I marked her waist contract, and her figure shape itself under my hands.

She would smile at me in the glass, smile with her spark-

ling black eyes, all the while that she was saying, "Not so tightly, dear, you will suffocate me."

I really think that I should have married her, and gaily too, I can assure you, if during certain moments of moral weakness her past had not inspired me with doubts, and her present with uneasiness. Man is not perfect, and I was a trifle jealous.

Well, one evening—it was Christmas eve—I called to take her on to supper with a friend of mine whom I was very fond of then, and who afterwards died an examining magistrate I do not know where.

I went upstairs to her room and was quite surprised to find her ready to start. She had on, I remember, a bodice cut square and somewhat low to my idea, but it suited her so well that when she kissed me I felt tempted to say, "I say, pet, suppose we stop here;" but she took my arm, humming a favourite tune of hers, and we found ourselves in the street.

You have known, have you not, the joy of the lad who feels himself a man when he has his mistress on his arm? He shudders at his prank, and is haunted by a notion of a paternal rebuke on the morrow, but all these fears fade into nothingness before the ineffable joy of the moment. He is free, he is a man, he loves, he is loved, he feels that he is taking a step in the pathway of life. He would like all Paris to see him, and he is afraid of being recognised; he would give his little finger to have three hairs on his upper lip, and a wrinkle across his forehead, to be able to smoke a cigar without feeling sick, and to take off a glass of punch without coughing.

When we reached my friend's, a numerous company had already assembled; from the ante-room we could hear animated voices and noisy laughter, with an accompaniment in a lower key of plate and crockery being spread upon the

table. I was a little uneasy ; I knew that I was the youngest of the party, and I was afraid of appearing awkward amidst this scene of revelry. I said to myself, "My boy, you must go it, play the rake and take your liquor without flinching, your mistress is here and her eyes are on you." The notion that I might be very ill next morning rather troubled me ; I saw my poor mother bringing me a cup of tea, and weeping over my excesses, but I banished all such thoughts and really everything went off very well up till supper-time. My mistress had been pulled about a bit, one or two men had even kissed her before my very eyes, but I had at once set down these details to the profit and loss account, and in all sincerity felt very proud and happy.

"My young friends," suddenly exclaimed our host, "feeding time has come. Let us adjourn to the dining-room."

Joyful shouts greeted these words, and amidst some confusion the guests flocked round the table, at each end of which I noticed two plates filled with those big cigars I could not smoke half way through without breaking into a cold sweat.

"Those cigars will bring about a catastrophe, if I don't dissemble," I thought to myself.

I do not know how it was that my mistress found herself seated on the left of the host. I did not like it, but what could I say. Besides, the said host with his twenty-five summers, his moustaches curled up at the ends, and his cool cheek, seemed to me the most ideally astounding customer, and I felt something like respect for him.

"Well," he said, with a captivating fluency, "you are all right and comfortable, eh ? You know the gentlemen who feel ill at ease in their coats may take them off . . . and the ladies too. Hah ! hah ! hah ! that's the sort of thing ; isn't it, my little dears ?"

And as he laughed, with the speed of lightning he printed a kiss right and left on the necks of his two neighbours, one of whom, as I have had the honour to say, was my beloved.

Confound it, I felt my hair stand on end. Every one burst out laughing, and from that moment the supper went on with a charming briskness.

"My young friends," was the remark of that infernal examining magistrate, "let us go for the cold meat, the sausages, the turkey, the salad; let us go for the cakes, the cheese, the oysters, and the grapes; let us go for the whole boiling. Draw the corks and we will eat everything at once, eh, my cherubs? No order, no false symmetry, it is adorably Oriental. In the heart of Africa no other system is followed. We must poetise our pleasures, so give me some cheese with my turkey. Hah! hah! hah! I am wild, I am mad; am I not, pets?"

And he planted two more kisses, but a little lower down this time. If I had not been drunk already, upon my honour, I should have kicked up a row.

I was dazed. Around me they were laughing, shouting, singing and rattling their plates. A sound of popping corks and breaking glasses rang in my ears, but it seemed to me that a mist had risen between me and the outer world; a veil separated me from the remaining guests, and despite the evidence of reality, I thought I was dreaming. I could distinguish, however, though somewhat confusedly, the animated glances and heightened colour of the guests, and, above all, a disorder in the toilette of the ladies. My mistress herself appeared to me changed. Suddenly—it was a flash of lightning—my beloved, my angel, my ideal, she whom that very morning I would have almost married, leant towards the examining magistrate and—I still shudder at

the recollection—devoured three truffles that were on his plate.

I experienced real anguish ; it seemed to me that my heart was breaking, then

Here my recollections fail me. What next took place I do not know. I remember, however, that some one saw me home in a cab. I kept asking, "Where is she, but where is she?"

I was told that she had left two hours before.

The next morning I experienced a sense of utter desolation as the truffles of the examining magistrate recurred to my mind. I had for a moment a vague idea of taking holy orders, but time—you know what it is—soothed my trouble. What the deuce was her name though? It ended in "ine." No, by the way, I think after all it ended in "a."





A PERTURBED SPIRIT.

TO MONSIEUR CLAUDE DE L——

Seminary of P——-sur.
(Haute-Saône)



It affords my soul peculiar enjoyment to address you, dear Claude. Need I tell you that I cannot think without pious emotion of the life which only the other day we were leading together at the Jesuits' College. I think of our long talks under the trees, the pious pilgrimages we daily made to the Father Superior's Calvary, our beloved books, the outpourings of our two souls towards the eternal source of all greatness and all goodness. I still can see the little chapel that you fitted up one day in your desk, the little wax tapers we made for it, and lit up one day during the cosmography class. Sweet recollections how dear to me you are, charming details of a calm and holy life with what happiness I recall you! Time in separating you from me seems to have only rendered you more present to my recollection. I have seen life, alas, during these six long months, but in acquiring worldly science, I have learned to love still more the holy ignorance of my past existence. Wiser than myself, you have remained in the path of the Lord; you have comprehended the divine mission reserved for you; you have been unwilling to cross the profane

threshold and enter the world, the den, I ought to say, in which I am now tormented, tossed about like a frail bark in the tempest. And, moreover, the wrath of the waves of the sea is mere child's play compared to that of the passions! Happy friend, yet ignorant of what I already know. Happy friend whose eyes have not yet measured the abyss in which mine are already plunged.

But what could I do? Was I not obliged, in spite of my inward vocation, and of the tender friendship that bound me to your side, to yield to the duties imposed by the name I bear, and also to the will of a father who intended me for a military career in defence of the noble cause which you too will defend? In short, I obeyed and left the college of the Reverend Fathers to return to it no more.

I went into the world with my heart filled with the salutary fears which our pious education had implanted within it. I advanced in alarm, but in the space of a moment I had drawn back in horror. I am eighteen, still young I know, but I have already reflected a great deal, and the experience of my pious pastors has imparted to my soul a precocious maturity which enables me to take stock of a great many things; besides, my faith is so unshakeable, and so firmly rooted in my being, that I can look about me without danger. I do not fear for my own salvation, but I am heart-broken when I think of the future of our modern society, and I pray the Lord with all the fervour of a heart preserved from evil not to turn away His eyes in wrath from our unhappy country. Even here, at the seat of my cousin, the Marchioness K—— de C——, where I am now staying, I find nothing but frivolity amongst the men, and dangerous coquetry amongst the women. The pernicious atmosphere of the times seems to penetrate even into these aristocratic regions. Sometimes discussions occur concerning matters

of science and morality, which deal a kind of indirect attack upon religion itself, and upon which our Holy Father the Pope should alone be called on to decide. Thus it is God's will at this moment that certain petty *savans*, scientific pretenders you understand, should seek to explain the origin of mankind after a new fashion, and, despite the excommunication which will certainly overtake them, hurl a wild and impious challenge at the most venerable traditions.

I have not myself sought enlightenment in such vileness, but I have heard with real grief men of weighty minds and illustrious names attach some importance to it.

As to manners and customs, without being immoral, which would be out of the question in our society, they are yet marked by a frivolity, a freedom, terribly shocking. I will only give you a single example, the one indeed that has struck me most forcibly.

Ten minutes' walk from the house there is a charming little stream, overshadowed by spreading willows, the current is slight, the water clear as crystal, and the bottom covered with sand so fine that one sinks into it like a carpet. Would you believe it, dear friend, that in this hot weather all those staying at the house go at the same time, together and without distinction of sex, and bathe in it? A simple garment of thin material, and very scanty, somewhat imperfectly screens the strangely daring modesty of the ladies. Forgive me, my pious friend, for entering into these details, and for troubling your tranquillity of spirit by this picture of worldly life, but I promised to confide to you my most intimate thoughts and impressions. It is a sacred undertaking I am fulfilling.

I will therefore acknowledge that this bathing business revolted me to the highest degree the first time I heard it spoken of. I felt a species of disgust easy to understand,

and I positively refused to take part in it. I was certainly chaffed a little, but these worldly railleries could not touch me and did not in any way alter my determination.

However, yesterday, towards five in the afternoon, the marchioness sent for me, and managed so adroitly that it was impossible for me to refuse to act as her escort.

We started. The maid carried the bathing costumes, that of the marchioness and that of my sister who was to join us.

"I know," said my cousin, leaning on my arm rather more heavily than was becoming, "that you swim very well, the report of your talents has reached us here from your college. You are going to teach me to float, eh, Robert?"

"I do not set much value on such physical acquirements, cousin," I replied; "I swim fairly, that is all."

And I turned my head to avoid an extremely penetrating scent with which her hair was impregnated. You know that I am subject to nervous attacks.

"But, my dear child, physical advantages are not to be despised."

This "my dear child," displeased me very much. My cousin is twenty-six, it is true, but I am no longer, properly speaking, a "dear child," and besides, it betokened a familiarity which I did not desire. It was on her part one of the consequences of that frivolity of mind, that carelessness in speech which I have noted and nothing more, but I was shocked at it. She went on:

"Exaggerated modesty is not good form in society," and turning towards me with a smile. "You have the making of a very handsome fellow, Robert, and what is lacking is very easily acquired. For instance, have your hair dressed by the marquis's valet. He will do it admirably, you will be charmed."

You will surely understand, my dear Claude, that I replied to these advances with a coolness which left no doubt as to my intentions.

"I repeat, cousin," I said, "that I attach very little importance to all that," and I emphasized my words by a firm, an icy glance. Then only, for I had not looked at her before, did I notice the ungodly elegance of her toilette, an elegance for which, unfortunately, the perishable beauty of her person serves as a pretext and an encouragement.

Her arms were bare, and her wrists laden with bracelets, the upper part of her bosom was inadequately veiled by the too slight tissue of a transparent gauze; in short, the wish to please was betrayed in her by all the details of her attire. I was moved at the sight of so much frivolity, and I felt myself blush with pity, almost with shame.

At length we reached the edge of the stream. She loosed my arm and sank down, I cannot say seated herself, upon the grass, throwing back the long curls that hung from her chignon. The word chignon, in the jargon of society, denotes that prominence to be seen at the back of ladies' heads. It is formed of coils or plaits of their long hair. I fancy that I gather from certain allusions that some of these chignons are not natural. There are women, worthy daughters of Eve, who purchase for gold, hair yielded to them, *horresco referens*, by poverty or death. It sickens one.

"It is extremely hot, cousin," said she, fanning herself. "I tremble every moment in such weather lest Monsieur de Beurenard's nose should catch fire or explode. Ha, ha, ha, I do upon my word of honour."

She laughed heartily at this joke, an unbecoming one, and without much point. Monsieur de Beurenard is a friend of the marquis, and happens to have a high colour.

I forced, out of politeness, a smile, which she, doubtless,

took for one of approbation, for she plunged into conversation or rather into an indescribable flow of chatter, blending the most worldly sentiments with the strangest religious ideas, the quiet of the country with the whirl of society, and all this with a freedom of gesture, a charm of expression, a subtlety of glance, and a species of earthly poesy, by which any other soul than mine would have been seduced.

"A charming spot, this little nook, is it not?"

"Certainly, cousin."

"And those old willows with their boughs hanging over the stream, see how the wild-flowers cluster about their battered trunks. How odd, too, all that young silvery foliage, those slender supple branches. So much grace, freshness and youth springing from that old stock that looks accursed."

"God would not curse a vegetable production, cousin."

"Perhaps so, but I cannot help seeing in willows something that smacks of humanity. Perpetual old age resembles a punishment. He is expiating and suffering that old reprobate of the bank there, that old Quasimodo of the fields. I cannot help it, cousin, that is the impression it gives me. What is there to tell me that the willow is not the final incarnation of an impenitent angler?"

And she burst out laughing.

"Those are heathenish notions, and so opposed to the dogmas of faith that I am obliged, in order to explain their coming from your mouth, to suppose that you are making game of me."

"But I am not making the least game in the world of you, Robert. You are not a baby, you know! Come, go and get ready for a bathe, I will go into the dressing tent and do the same."

She waved her hand to me, as she lifted up one of the

sides of the tent, with visible coquetry. What a strange mystery is the heart of woman !

I sought out a bushy spot, thinking over these things, and in a minute or so had got into my bathing costume. I thought of you, my dear and pious friend, as I buttoned up the neck and wrists. How many times have you not helped me in this little task over which I was so awkward. I entered the water and was about to strike out when the sound of the marchioness's voice reached me. She was talking with her maid inside the tent. I stopped and listened ; not from guilty curiosity, but from a sincere wish to become better acquainted with the workings of a spirit, good certainly, but misled.

"No, no, Julie," the marchioness was saying, "I won't hear any more about that hideous waterproof cap. The water gets inside and does not come out. Twist up my hair in a net, that is all that is needed."

"Your ladyship's hair will get wet."

"You can powder it afterwards. Nothing is better for drying than powder. I shall wear my light blue dress this evening, and blonde powder will go with it exactly. . . . But you must be going mad. I told you to shorten my bathing costume, by taking it up at the knees. Just look at it. What does it look like?"

"I was afraid your ladyship would find it tight for swimming."

"Tight ! Then why have you taken it in three inches just here ? See how it rucks up ; it is ridiculous, don't you see ?"

The sides of the tent were shaken, and I understood that my cousin was somewhat impatiently assuming the costume in question, the better to point out its defects.

"I don't want to look as if I were wrapped up in a sheet,

but on the other hand, I want to be able to move. You won't understand, Julie, that this material will not stretch. You see now that if I stoop—Ah! you do see it, that's as well."

Weak minds—is it not so, my pious friend, those which can be absorbed by such preoccupations? I hold these preoccupations so frivolous that I suffered at being even the involuntary recipient of them, and so splashed the water noisily to announce my presence and put a stop to a conversation which shocked me.

"I will be with you in a moment, Robert, go on into the water; has not your sister come yet?" said my cousin, raising her voice, then in lower tones, and addressing her maid she added, "Yes, certainly, lace tightly. I need support."

The tent opened, and my relative appeared.

I do not know why I shuddered, as if at the approach of some danger. She made two or three steps forward on the sand, drawing from her fingers as she did so, the rings she was accustomed to wear, then she stopped, handed these trinkets to Julie, and, with a movement which I can still see, but which it would be impossible for me to describe to you, kicked off the slippers with red bows which protected her feet.

She had only taken three paces, but this was sufficient for me to notice the singularity of her bearing. She walked with short timid steps, her bare arms close to her sides, and the more prominent portions of her figure abandoned to the scanty shelter of her immodest costume, quivering as with shame at the least movement.

I turned away my eyes; it was too much. I felt myself blushing to the tips of my ears at the thought that a Marchioness K—— de C——, one of my own cousins, could

so far forget the laws of modesty, as to show herself in broad daylight, in such a state. She had no longer anything womanly about her, save the tresses of her hair twisted up in a net. As far as all the rest was concerned, she was a singular-looking young man, at once slender and afflicted by a precocious plumpness, one of those beings who appear to us in dreams, and in wakefulness of fever, one of those beings towards whom an unknown power attracts us, and who resemble angels too closely, not to be demons.

"Well, Robert, what are you thinking of? Give me your hand to help me into the water."

She dipped the toes of her arched foot into the transparent stream.

"It always gives one a little shock, but the water must be delightful to-day," said she. "But what is the matter with you, your hand shakes? You are a chilly mortal, cousin."

The fact is, that I was not trembling with either fear or cold, but on approaching the marchioness, the penetrating perfume emanating from her hair flew to my head, and with my susceptible nerves you will readily understand that I was ready to faint. I mastered this sensation. She took my hand, frankly, firmly, as one would clasp the knob of a cane or the rail of staircase, and we ascended the stream together. Beneath the pressure of the water, I saw the material of her garments yield, and outline brutally and unscrupulously realities of which the very suspicion would alone have excited my imagination. I was bewildered by the part I was playing. Ah! my dear Claude, with what sorrow and alarm your noble soul would have been assailed could you have seen me in the state in which I was. However strong I may be, thanks to the firm basis of my education, I was afraid least these repeated contacts of the

flesh should give rise in me to that sensual desire which we have been so wisely reared to dread, and from the bottom of my still pure heart I prayed God to preserve me from evil and not to suffer the fiend to arouse himself, as the Father Superior says. But allow me to finish this narrative, however repulsive the details may appear to you.

As we advanced, the stream became deeper. The marchioness, as the water rose higher and invaded the upper part of her body, uttered low cries of fear like the hiss of a serpent, then gave vent to ringing outbursts of laughter, and drew closer and closer to me. At last she stopped, and turning towards me fixed her eyes on mine. I felt that the moment was a solemn one. I divined a hidden precipice at my feet, my heart throbbed to bursting, and my head seemed on fire.

"Come, teach me to float, Robert. Legs quite straight out, and arms close to the body, that's it, is it not?"

"Yes, cousin, and move the hands gently."

"Very good; here goes then. One, two, three, and off! Oh, what a silly I am, I'm afraid! Oh, do keep me up; support me, just a little bit."

That was the moment when I ought to have said to her: "No, madame, I am not one to support coquettes, and I will not;" but I did not dare to, my tongue remained silent, and I passed my arm round the marchioness's waist to keep her up more easily.

Alas! I was guilty of an error perhaps irreparable.

When I felt this form full of earthly charms yielding to my touch, when I saw before my eyes, only a couple of feet from my face, this woman stretched upon the water, when I noted her head thrown back, bringing into relief the luxuriant outlines of an adorable bosom—pardon me this expression, my pious friend, but at that supreme moment it is

only too true that I adored those seductive charms. But I will abridge. When I saw all this it seemed to me that all the blood in my body flowed back to my heart, a deadly thrill ran through every limb, from shame and indignation, no doubt; my eyes grew dim; it seemed to me that my soul was parting from me, and I fell upon her, fainting, dragging her down to the bottom in a mortal clutch.

I heard a loud cry. I felt her arms clasp me round the neck, her clenched fingers bury themselves in my flesh, and then no more. I had lost consciousness.

I came to myself stretched on the grass. Julie was chafing my hands, and the marchioness, in her bathing-dress streaming with water, was holding a smelling-bottle to my nose. She looked at me with severity, although in her glance there was a shade of satisfaction, the import of which escaped me.

“Baby,” she said, “you great baby.”

You are now acquainted with the facts of the case, my pious friend. Bestow the charity of your advice upon me, and thank heaven that you live remote from these shocks.

With heart and soul,

Your sincere friend,

ROBERT DE K—— DE C——.





ALL THE REST OF MADAME DE K.



PERHAPS you know Madame de K., if so, I congratulate you, for she is a very noteworthy person. Her face is pretty, but folks do not say, "What a pretty woman." Oh! no, they say, "Madame de K. Ah! what a fine woman!"

Do you perceive the difference? it is easy to do so. That which charms in her is less what is seen than what is guessed at. Ah! what a fine woman. That is what is said after dinner when we have dined at her house, and her husband, who unfortunately has bad health and does not smoke, has gone to fetch some cigars from his cabinet. It is said in a low tone, as though in confidence, but from the very discretion that is affected, it is easy to read profound conviction on the part of each of the guests. The ladies in the drawing-room really do not sufficiently realize the charming freedom which characterises the gossip of the gentlemen when they go into the smoking-room to enjoy their cigars over a cup of coffee.

"Yes, yes, she is a very fine woman."

"Ah, yes, opulent beauty, opulent."

"But poor De K. makes me feel uneasy, he does not get any better. Does it not alarm you, doctor?"

Everyone smiles imperceptibly at the idea that poor De

K., who has gone for cigars, is fading away visibly, whilst his wife has such good health.

"He is most irrational, he works too hard as I have told him. His post at the ministry—Thanks, I never take sugar."

"It is serious, for he is not strong," says a guest, gravely, biting his lips to keep from laughing.

"I think that even within the last year the beauty has grown more perfect," says a little gentleman, stirring his coffee.

"De K.'s beauty? I never could see it."

"I don't say that."

"Excuse me, but you did; is it not so, doctor?"

"By Jove!" "What!" "Let us establish the distinction." "Ha, ha, ha!" and there is an outbreak of that hearty laughter which men love as a help to digestion. The ice is broken, they draw near to one another and continue in low tones:

"Her neck is remarkable. When she turned just now it was sculptural."

"Her neck, her neck, but how about her hands, her arms and her shoulders. Did you see her at Leon's ball a fortnight ago? A queen, my dear fellow, a Roman empress. Neck, shoulders, arms—"

"And all the rest," hazards someone, looking down into his coffee cup. All laugh heartily, and that worthy fellow, De K., comes in with a box of cigars of exceptional symmetry.

"There," he says, coughing slightly, "I beg of you to smoke carefully."

There is a fresh outbreak of laughter due to that "all the rest," which has remained present in everyone's mind.

I have often dined at my friend De K.'s, and I have always,

or almost always, heard a conversation akin to the foregoing after dinner.

But I must acknowledge that the evening on which I heard the impertinent remark of that gentleman quoted above I was particularly shocked, firstly, because De K. is my friend, and secondly, because I cannot bear people who speak of what they do not know anything about. I make bold to say that I am the only one in Paris who understands the matter to the bottom. Yes, I alone. Paul and his brother are in England, Ernest is a consul in America, as to Leon, he is at Hyères in his little sub-prefecture ; you see, therefore, that I am really the only one in Paris who can—

“But Monsieur Z., you must be joking. Explain what you mean. Do you mean to say that Madame de K— But that is shocking !”

Nothing, nothing. I know I am ridiculous. Let us suppose that I have not said anything, ladies, we will speak of something else. How could I have had the idea of saying anything about “all the rest?” Let us talk of something else.

It was a fine spring morning, the rain was falling in torrents and the north wind was blowing furiously, when the damsel, more dead than alive—

But I feel I cannot get out of it. It will be better to make a clean breast of it. Only swear to me to be discreet. On your word of honour? Well, then, this is all about it.

I am, I repeat, the only man in Paris who can speak of all the rest of Madame de K. from actual knowledge.

Some years back, let us deal with the matter seriatim, I had an intimate friend at whose rooms we used to meet of an evening. In summer the windows were left open, and we used to sit in armchairs and chat by the light of our cigars. Well, one evening when we were talking of fishing—all these details are still fresh in my memory—we heard the sound of

a powerful harpsichord, and soon the notes of a voice more strong than harmonious, I must admit.

"Hallo, she has altered her hours," said Paul, glancing towards one of the windows of the house opposite.

"Who has changed her hours, my dear fellow?"

"My neighbour. A strong voice, don't you think so? She usually sings in the morning, and I like that better because it is just the time I go out for a walk."

Instinctively I glanced towards the lit-up window and through the drawn curtains could clearly see a woman, clothed in white and with her hair loose, seated before her instrument like one knowing herself to be alone and yielding to her inspirations.

"My Fernand, go, seek glo-o-o-ry," she was singing with all the strength of her lungs. The singing appeared to me mediocre, but the songstress in her nocturnal undress greatly interested me.

"Gentlemen," said I, "there seems to me to be a very handsome creature behind that frail tissue," I alluded to the curtain. "Put out your cigars, their light might betray our presence and disturb the singer."

At once the cigars were abandoned, the window was even almost completely closed for greater security, and we began to watch. It was not, I know, altogether discreet, but we were young bachelors all five of us, and then, after all, dear reader, would not you have done the same?

When the song was concluded, the singer rose. It was very hot and her garment must have been very thin, for the rays of the light which was at the further end of the room, shone through the stuff. It was one of those long garments which fall to the feet and which custom reserves for night wear. The upper part is often trimmed with lace, the sleeves are loose, the folds are long and flowing and often

exhale a perfume of ambergris or violet. But perhaps you know this garment as well as I do. The beauty drew near the looking-glass, and it seemed to us that she was contemplating her face, then she raised her hands, and as she gracefully did so the sleeve which was unbuttoned and very loose slipped from her beautifully rounded arm, the outline of which we could distinctly make out.

"The deuce," said Paul, in a stifled voice, but he could not say any more.

The songstress then gathered up her hair, which hung very low down, in her two hands and twisted it in the air like a washerwoman. Her head, which we saw in profile, was bent a little forward, and her shoulders, which the movement of her arms threw back, rendered more prominent and more clear the outline of a full, firm bosom.

"Marble, Parian marble," muttered Paul. "Oh, Cytherea!"

"Be quiet, you idiot."

It really seemed as though the flame of the candle understood the pleasure we felt and sought to point out things precisely for our admiration. Placed behind the fair songstress, it lit up things so well that the garment with the long folds resembled those faint vapours which veil without hiding the horizon, and that the most inquisitive imagination disarmed by so much courtesy would have fain exclaimed: "That will do."

Soon the beauty advanced towards her bed, sat down in a low arm-chair in which she stretched herself at her ease, and remained for some moments with her arms joined over her head and her legs extended. Then midnight struck and we saw her take her right leg and cross it over her left and perceived that she had not yet removed her shoes and stockings.

But what need of asking any more about it? These

PAPA, MAMMA AND BABY.

recollections trouble me, and although they have remained present to my mind, very present indeed, I may say, I feel a modest embarrassment at relating all to you at length. Besides, at the moment when turning down the clothes, she was preparing no doubt to get into bed, the light went out.

The next night, about ten o'clock, we all five found ourselves at 11 o'clock, four of us with opera-glasses in our pockets. As on the evening before, the fair songstress sat down at her piano and then slowly proceeded to make her toilette for the night. The same grace, the same charm, but when we came to the fatal moment at which on the preceding night the candle had gone out, a thrill ran through us all. To tell the truth, for my part I was trembling. Happily heaven was on our side, the candle remained alight. The young woman then with a charming hand, the plump details of which we could easily distinguish, smoothed the pillow, patted it, arranged it with a thousand caressing precautions in which was to be read the thought, "With what happiness shall I bury my head in it."

Then she smoothed down the little wrinkles in the bed, the contact with which might have troubled her, and raising herself on her right arm like a horseman about to get into the saddle, we saw her left knee, smooth and shining as marble, slowly bury itself. We seemed to hear a kind of creaking, but this creaking seemed joyful. The vision was brief, too brief, alas! and it was in a species of delightful confusion that we perceived a well-rounded leg, dazzlingly white, struggling in the silk of the quilt. The night garment, forgetting itself, fluttered a moment and then stretched itself over the powerful protuberance of an inflexible model, as at the breath of the breeze the mainsail, which at first was hanging idle, fills, swells, resists, and resembles an enormous sphere ready to split. At length everything grew

quiet again, and it was as much as we could do to make out a smooth-skinned, rose-tinted little foot which, not being sleepy, still lingered outside and fidgetted with the silken covering.

Delightful souvenir of my lively youth. My pen splutters, my paper seems to blush to the colour of that used by the orange-sellers. I think I have said too much.

I learned shortly afterwards that my friend De K. was about to marry, and singularly enough was going to wed the beautiful creature whom I knew so well.

"A charming woman!" I exclaimed one day.

"You know her, then?" said someone.

"I? no, not at all."

"But?"

"Ah! yes, I have seen her, once, at mass."

"She is not very pretty."

"No, not as far as her face is concerned," I replied, and added to myself, "but all the rest!"

It is none the less true that this secret has been oppressing me for some time past, and if I have made up my mind now to reveal it to you, it is because it seems to me that to do so will quiet my conscience.

But for heaven's sake do not noise it abroad.





LENTEN RECOLLECTIONS.

I. THE SERMON.



HE faithful are flocking up the steps of the temple, toilettes, already according to spring fashions, glitter in the sun, trains sweep the dust with their long flowing folds, feather and ribbons flutter, the bell chimes piously, and carriages keep rattling up at a trot, deposit upon the pavement all that is most pious and most noble in the Faubourg, and then draw up their escutcheon-adorned panels in line, at the further end of the square.

Be quick, push through the crowd if you wish for a good place, for the Abbé Gélon preaches to-day on abstinence, and when the Abbé Gélon preaches it is as if Patti were singing.

Enter, madame, push the triple door which closes heavily behind you, brush with rapid fingers the holy water sprinkler which that pious old man holds out to you, and carefully make a graceful little sign of the cross so as not to spot your ribbons.

Do you hear these discreet and aristocratic whisperings ?

“Good morning, my dear.”

“Good morning, dear. It is on abstinence he is going to preach, is it not ? Have you a seat ?”

"Yes, come with me. Is that the bonnet you were speaking about?"

"Yes, how do you like it? A little bright coloured, is it not? What a number of people! Where is your husband?"

"Bright coloured! oh no, it is charming. My husband is in the churchwarden's pew, he left home before me. He is getting quite a fanatic, and speaks of lunching on radishes and lentils."

"That must be a sweet consolation to you."

"Don't mention it. Come with me. Ah! there are Ernestine and Louise. Poor Louise's nose, always the same, who would believe that she only drinks water?"

These ladies make their way onward amongst the chairs, which they upset in their progress with a certain nobility.

Once in their places they sink down on their knees, cast a look of adoration, moist-eyed and full of feeling, towards the high altar, and then hide their faces with their little gloved hands.

For two minutes they gracefully lose themselves in the Lord, then sit down, coquettishly arrange the immense bow of their bonnet strings, scan the assembly with a twinkling glance through a gold eye-glass which they hold with their little finger turned up, and, whilst smoothing down the satin folds of a dress hard to keep within bounds, scatter, right and left, charming nods and delightful smiles.

"Are you comfortable, dear?"

"Quite, thanks. Do you see Louise and Madame de C—, there, between the two tapers? Is it right for any one to come to church got up like that?"

"Oh! I have never had much confidence in the piety of Madame de C—. You know the story about her, the story of the screen? I will tell it you later on. Ah! there is the verger."

The verger indeed shows his shining head in the pulpit of truth. He prepares the seat, arranges the kneeling stool, and then withdraws and gives passage to the Abbé Gélon, somewhat paler than usual from Lenten fasts, but admirable as ever in dignity, elegance and unction. A momentary stir flutters through the congregation, and then they settle down comfortably. The noise dies away, and all eyes are turned with pious avidity towards the face of the preacher. The latter, his eyes raised to heaven, stands upright and motionless ; a light from above may be divined in his inspired look ; his beautiful white hands, encircled at the wrists by fine lace, are carelessly placed on the red velvet cushion of the pulpit. He waits yet a few moments more, then he coughs twice, unfolds his handkerchief, places his shovel hat in a corner, and bending forward lets fall from his lips in those sweet, slow, persuasive, charming tones you wot of, the first word of his sermon, "Ladies."

He has only said that much, and he has already won all hearts. Slowly he casts over his congregation a velvety glance that at the same time penetrates and attracts, then, after a few Latin words which he has the tact to translate quickly into French, he continues :

"What is it to abstain, why should we abstain, how should we abstain? Those are the three points, ladies, I shall proceed to enlarge upon."

He coughs and wipes his mouth, a holy thrill stirs every heart, magnificent subject, how will he treat it, let us listen.

Is it not true, madame, that your soul is piously stirred, and that at this moment you feel a veritable thirst for abstinence and mortification?

The sacred edifice is bathed in a soft obscurity, very much akin to that of your boudoir and inviting reverie.

Something ineffable and vaguely intoxicating penetrates

your being. The voice of this handsome and venerated old man has something deliciously heavenly about it amidst the deep silence. Mysterious echoes repeat in the depths of the temple each of his words, and in the shade of the sanctuary the golden candlesticks glitter like precious stones. The old stained-glass windows with their symbolical figures are suddenly lit up, a flood of light and sunshine darts through the church like a tongue of fire. Are the heavens opening, is the Spirit from above descending amongst us?

Lost in a pious reverie, which soothes and charms you, you gaze with ecstasy at the capricious details of the sculptures losing themselves in the groined roof above, and at the quaint pipes of the hundred-toned organ. The beliefs of childhood wisely cultivated in your heart suddenly re-awaken, a vague perfume of incense again floats in the air. The stone pillars shoot up to infinite heights, and from these celestial arches depends the golden lamp which softly sways and sheds its eternal light. God is great.

By degrees the softness of the preacher's tones enrapture you still more, the sense of his words fades away, and lulled by the divine murmur of that saintly voice, like a child falling asleep in the bosom of the Creator, your eyes close.

You do not go to sleep, but your head bends forward, blue heaven surrounds you, and your soul, amorous of the uncertain, plunges into celestial space, and loses itself in infinity.

Sweet and holily intoxicating sensation, delightful ecstasy. And yet some smile at this religious staging, these pomps and splendours, this celestial music which soothes the nerves and thrills the brain. Pity these scoffers who do not understand the ineffable rapture of being able to open the gates of Paradise to themselves at will, and to become one with the angels at odd moments.

But what is the use of talking of the faithless and their

impotent smiles? As the Abbé Gélon has so admirably observed, "Our heart is a fortress, incessantly assailed by the spirit of darkness."

The notion of a constant struggle against this powerful personage has something about it that decuples one's strength and rather flatters one's vanity. What, alone in your fortress, madame; alone against the enemy!

But hush! the Abbé Gélon is finishing in a thrilling and faltering voice. His right hand traces in the air the sign of peace. Then he wipes his forehead bathed in perspiration, his eyes sparkle with divine light, he descends the narrow stairs, and we hear the regular taps on the pavement of the rod of the verger, who is reconducting him to the vestry.

"Was he not splendid, dear?"

"Adorable! when he said, 'May my eyes close for ever, if . . .' you remember?"

"Superb! and further on, 'Yes, ladies, you are coquettish.' He told us some hard truths; he speaks admirably."

"Admirably! He is heavenly!"

II.—THE PENITENTS.



It is four o'clock, the church is plunged in silence and shadow. The rumble of the vehicles without scarcely penetrates this abode of prayer, and the creak of one's boot, echoing from time to time in the distance, is the only noise of human origin which disturbs the deep calm.

However, as one advances, one perceives in the chapels groups of the faithful, kneeling, motionless, and silent. At the sight of the despair which their attitude seems to express, one is overwhelmed with sadness and uneasiness. Is it a gathering of the damned?

One of these chapels presents a special aspect. A hundred or a hundred and fifty ladies, smothered in silk and velvet, are packed devoutly about the confessional. A sweet scent of violets and vervain perfumes the vicinity, and one halts, despite oneself, in presence of this mass of elegance.

From each of the two cells adjoining the confessional, the folds of a rebellious skirt issue, for the penitent, stuck fast at the waist, has only been able to get half of her form into the narrow space. However, one can distinguish her head moving in the shadow, and can guess from the contrite movements of her white feather that her forehead is bowed down beneath remonstrance and repentance.

Scarcely has she concluded her little narration than ten of her neighbours rush forward to replace her. This eagerness is to be understood, for this chapel is that in which the Abbé Gélon hears confessions, and you know that when the Abbe Gélon confesses, it is exactly as if he were preaching; there is a crowd.

He confesses all these ladies, the good Abbé, and with angelic devotion, remains shut up for hours in this dark, narrow, airless box, through the grating of which two eternal penitents constantly whisper their sins.

The dear Abbé, the most adorable thing about him is that he is not long over it. He knows how to escape useless details, he perceives the condition of a soul with a subtle tact, and a sureness of vision that spares you a thousand embarrassments, so that being into the bargain a man of intelligence and of the world, he renders the recital of those little weaknesses, of which he has hinted one half to you, almost agreeable.

One comes to him somewhat embarrassed by one's little parcel, and whilst one is hesitating about telling him all, he unfastens it with a discreet and skilful hand, rapidly

examines the contents, smiles or consoles one, and the confession is made without one having said a word ; so that one exclaims, prostrating oneself before God, "But, Lord, I was pure, pure as the lily, and to think that I felt uneasy !"

Even when in sacerdotal vestments he ceases to be a man, and speaks in the name of God, the tone of his voice, the refinement of his look, reveal native distinction and that fine courtesy which does no harm in a minister of God, and which one cannot do without on this side of the Rue du Bac.

If God wills that there should be a Faubourg Saint Germain in the world—and it cannot be denied that He does not—is it not right that He should give us a minister speaking our language, and understanding our delicacy ? That is obvious, and really I do not understand some of these ladies who talk to me about the Abbé Brice. Not that I wish to speak ill of the good Abbé, for this is neither the time nor the place for it. He is a godly man, but his godliness is of rather a common order, and needs a touch of the brush.

One has to dot one's i's with him ; he understands badly, or does not understand at all.

Acknowledge a peccadillo and he frowns, he must know the hour, the moment, the circumstances, the antecedents ; he examines, he probes, he weighs, and ends these thousand questions of his by being indiscreet and verging on indecency. Is there not, even when the holy mission of the priest is in question, a way of being politely severe, and of acting as a gentleman towards well-bred people ?

The Abbé Brice—why should I not say so?—smacks of the plough-tail, and that must be prejudicial to him. He is slightly Republican, too, wears clumsy boots, has awful nails,

and when he has new gloves, twice a year, his fingers stand out stiffly apart.

I do not, mark me, deny his admirable virtues ; but you may say what you like, you will never get a woman of fashion to address a farmer's son as "Father," and tell him her little private affairs.

Matters must not be carried to absurdity ; and then, too, this excellent Abbé smells detestably of snuff.

Then he confesses all sorts of people, and you must acknowledge that it is disagreeable to have one's maid or one's cook for one's neighbour at the confessional.

There is not a woman with a better comprehension of Christian humility than yourself, dear madame ; but all the same you are not accustomed to travel in an omnibus, and you do not want to. .

You may be told that in Heaven you will be only too happy to call your coachman "Brother," and your maid Rosalie "Sister," but these worthy folk will have passed through Purgatory beforehand, and fire purifies everything. Besides, what is there to assure us that Rosalie will go to Heaven, since you yourself, dear madame, are not sure of getting in ?

It is, therefore, perfectly understood why the Abbé Gélon's chapel is crowded. If a little whispering goes on, it is because they have been waiting three long hours, and everybody knows everyone else.

All the ladies we know are there.

"Make a little place for me, dear," whispers a new comer, edging her way amongst trains, kneeling-stools, and chairs.

"Ah ! is that you, dear, come here. Clementine and Madame de B. are there in the corner at the breach. You have two hours to wait yet."

"If Madame de B. is there, I am not surprised. She is

an inexhaustible stream, and there is not a woman who tells things more slowly. Have not all these people had their turn yet? Ah! there is Ernestine." She waves her hand to her discreetly. "That child is an angel. She acknowledged to me the other day that her conscience was greatly troubled, because, on the reading of the 'Passion,' she could not make up her mind to kiss the mat."

"Charming; but tell me now, do you kiss it yourself?"

"I! never, it is so dirty, dear."

"You confess the omission, at any rate?"

"Oh! I confess all those little trifles in a lump. I say: 'Father, I have sinned from human self-respect.' I give the total at once."

"That is just like me, and that dear Abbé Gélon wipes it out."

"Seriously, he would have no time to do otherwise. But it seems to me that we are chattering a little too much, dear; let me think over my sins."

Madame leans upon her praying-stool. Gracefully, and without taking her eyes off the altar, she removes the glove from her right hand, and with her thumb turns the ring of Saint Geneviève that serves her as a rosary, moving her lips the while. Then, with downcast eyes and set lips, she loosens the fleur-de-lys-engraved clasp of her book of hours, and seeks out the prayers suitable to her situation.

(*Reading fervently.*)—"My God, it is crushed beneath the burden of my sins that I cast myself at your feet"—How annoying that it should be so cold to the feet. I am sure to have influenza—"That I cast myself at your feet"—Tell me, dear, do you know if the chapel-keeper has a foot-warmer? Nothing is worse than cold feet, and that Madame de P. sticks there for hours. I am sure she confesses her friends' sins at the same time as her own. It is ridiculous; I no

longer have any feeling in my right foot ; I would pay her for her foot-warmer—‘ I bow my head in the dust under the weight of repentance, and of—’ ”

“ Ah ! Madame de P. has finished ; she is as red as a turkey cock.”

Four ladies rush forward with pious zeal to take her place.

“ Ah ! madame, do not push so, I beg of you.”

“ But I was here before you, madame.”

“ I beg your pardon, madame.”

“ You have a very strange idea of the respect due to this hallowed spot.”

“ Hush, hush. Profit by the opportunity, madame, slip through, and take the vacant place. (*Whispering.*) Do not forget the big one last night, and the two little ones of this morning.”

III.—MADAME AND HER FRIEND CHAT BY THE FIRESIDE.



ADAME (*waving her slender fingers*)—It is ruched, ruched, ruched, loves of ruches, edged all round with blonde.

HER FRIEND—That is good style, dear.

MADAME—Yes, I think it will be stylish, and over this snow-like foam fall the skirts of blue silk like the body ; but a sweet blue, something like—a little less crude than sky blue, you know, like— My husband calls it a quiet blue.

HER FRIEND—Capital. He has some very telling expressions.

MADAME—Has he not ? You understand at once—a quiet blue. It is quite plain.

HER FRIEND—Touching his expressions, though, you know that Ernestine has not forgiven him his joke of the other evening.

MADAME—Not forgiven my husband? What joke? The other evening when the Abbé Gélon and the Abbé Brice were there?

HER FRIEND—And their son.

MADAME—What! the Abbé's son? (*They both break into laughter.*)

HER FRIEND—But—ha, ha, ha—what are you saying—ha, ha—you madcap?

MADAME—I said the Abbé Gélon and the Abbé Brice, and you add, 'And their son.' It is your fault, dear. He must be a choir-boy, that cherub. (*Renewal of laughter.*)

HER FRIEND (*placing her hand over her mouth*)—Be quiet, be quiet, it is very wrong. In Lent, too.

MADAME—Well, but whose son are you talking of?

HER FRIEND—Why, of Ernestine's son, Albert, a gem of innocence. He heard your husband's joke, and his mother was annoyed.

MADAME—I really don't know what you refer to, dear. Please tell me all about it.

HER FRIEND—Why, on entering the drawing-room, and seeing the candelabra lit up, and the two Abbés standing in the middle of the room, your husband pretended to be looking for something, and when Ernestine asked him what it was, he said, 'I am looking for the holy water font; please excuse me for coming in in the middle of service.'

MADAME—Was it so, really? (*Laughing.*) The fact is, that he cannot get out of it; he has met the two Abbés twice running at Ernestine's. Her drawing-room is a perfect vestry.

HER FRIEND (*drily*)—A perfect vestry. How free you are getting in your ideas since your marriage.

MADAME—I did not need to free myself. I never cared to meet priests anywhere else than at church.

HER FRIEND—Come, you are a child, and if I did not know you to be sound at heart. . . . Do not you like to meet the Abbé Gélon ?

MADAME—Ah ! the Abbé Gélon, that is another thing. He is so delightful.

HER FRIEND (*briskly*)—Is he not well-bred ?

MADAME—And venerable ? His white hair is such a splendid frame for his pale face, so full of unction.

HER FRIEND—Oh ! yes, he is full of unction, and then his look, that sweetly softened look. The other day, when he was speaking on the mediation of Christ, he was heavenly. Once he wiped away a tear, he could not restrain his own emotion ; he grew calm, however, almost immediately, he has marvellous self-command, and went on quietly, but the emotion had gained us in turn. It was electrifying. The Countess de S., who was close to me, was weeping like a fountain in her yellow bonnet.

MADAME—Ah ! yes, I know that yellow bonnet. What a bundle that Madame de S. is.

HER FRIEND—The fact is, she is always dressed like a fright. A bishopric has been offered, I know on good authority ; my husband had it from . . .

MADAME (*interrupting her*)—A bishopric offered to Madame de S. It was wrong to do so.

HER FRIEND—You jest at everything, my dear ; these are, however, subjects which should be respected. I tell you that the mitre and the pastoral ring have been offered to the Abbé Gélon. Well, he refused them. God knows, however, that the ring would become his hand.

MADAME—Oh ! as to that he has a charming hand.

HER FRIEND—White, slender, aristocratic. We are perhaps wrong to linger over these worldly details, but really his hand is beautiful. Do you know (*enthusiastically*) I find

that the Abbé Gélon makes one love religion. Do you attend his lectures?

MADAME—I was at the first of them. I wanted to go again on Thursday, but Madame Savain came to try on my body and I had to argue to all eternity about the slope of the skirts.

HER FRIEND—Ah! the skirts are cut on the slope.

MADAME—Yes, with a lot of little cross bars, my own idea --I have not seen it anywhere; I think it will look very well.

HER FRIEND—Madame Savain told me that you had suppressed the sleeves.

MADAME—Ah! the gossip. Yes, I will have nothing on the shoulders but a ribbon, a trifle, just enough to fasten a jewel to—I was afraid lest the bodice would look a little bare. Madame Savain had put in some ridiculous bits of insertion. I wanted to try something else, my cross-bars, on the spot, and I missed the Abbé Gélon's lecture. He was charming, it seems.

HER FRIEND—Oh! charming. He spoke against bad books; there was quite a crowd. He demolished all the horrible things of Monsieur Renan. What a monster that man is!

MADAME—You have read his book?

HER FRIEND—Heaven preserve me from it. Don't you know that it is everything that is . . . Well it must be very bad for the Abbé Gélon, in speaking of it to a gentleman, a friend of my husband, uttered the word. . .

MADAME—Well, what word?

HER FRIEND—I dare not tell you, for really, if it is true it is enough to make one shudder. He said that it was (*whispering in her ear*) the Antichrist! It is dumbfoundering, is it not? They sell his photograph; he has a satanical look. (*Looking at the clock*). Half-past two, I must be off; I

have not given any orders about dinner. These three fast days in the week are a perfect martyrdom to me. One must have some variety ; my husband is very hard to please. If we did not have water-fowl I don't know what I should do. How do you get on, dear ?

MADAME—Oh ! with me it is very simple ; so long as I do not make my husband abstain from flesh, he is satisfied with anything. You know, Augustus is not very much . . .

HER FRIEND—Not very much ! I think that he is far too little ; for after all if we do not impose some privations upon ourselves in this life— No, that would be too easy. I hope that at least you have a dispensation ?

MADAME—Oh ! yes, I am all right.

HER FRIEND—I have one of course for butter and eggs as vice-chancellor of the Association. The Abbé Gélon begged me to accept a full dispensation on account of my headaches but I refused. Oh ! I firmly refused. If one palters with one's principles— But then there are people who have no principles.

MADAME—If you mean that for my husband, you are wrong. Augustus is not a heathen, he is sound at heart.

HER FRIEND—Sound at heart ! you make my blood boil. But there I must go. Well, it is understood, I count upon you for Tuesday ; he will preach upon authority a magnificent subject, we may expect allusions. Ah ! I forgot to tell you, I am collecting and I expect a trifle from you, dear. I have an idea of collecting with my little girl on my praying stool. Madame de K. collected on Sunday at Saint Thomas's and her baby held the alms bag. The little angel had an overwhelming success.

MADAME—I will certainly go. How shall you dress ?

HER FRIEND—Oh ! quite simply and in black. At this present moment, you understand.

MADAME—Besides, black becomes you so well.

HER FRIEND—Yes, everything is for the best ; black does not suit me so badly. Tuesday, then. But I say, try to bring your husband, he is so fond of music.

MADAME—Oh ! as to that I cannot promise.

HER FRIEND—Ah ! they are all like that, the men ; they ape strong-mindedness, and when grace touches them look back at their past with horror. When my husband speaks of his youth he has tears in his eyes. It must be admitted that he has not always been as he is now ; he was very gay in his time, poor fellow. I do not object to a man knowing something of life, do you ? But I am gossiping and time is running by ; I have still to call on Madame W. I do not know whether she has found her juvenile lead.

MADAME—What for, in Heaven's name ?

HER FRIEND—For her party. There are to be private theatricals. Oh ! with a pious object, you know, during Lent ; it is so as to have a collection on behalf of the Association. I must be off. Good-bye, dear.

MADAME—Till Tuesday then, dear, in full uniform.

HER FRIEND (*smiling*)—In full uniform. Kind regards to your reprobate. I am very fond of him all the same. Good-bye.

IV. A DREAM.



RESTLESS slumbers are always due to indigestion. My friend, Dr. Jacques, is there to tell you so.

Now, that evening, it was last Friday, I had been guilty of eating brill, a fish that positively disagrees with me.

God grant that the narration of the singular dream that was the consequence may inspire you with prudent reflections.

However that may be, this is my dream in all its wildness :

I had in this dream the honour to belong, in the capacity of senior curate, to one of the best frequented parish churches in Paris. Could anything be more nonsensical ! I had besides a respectable degree of stoutness, a venerable head framed by silver locks, well-shaped hands, an aquiline nose, great unction, the friendship of the lady worshippers, and I venture to add the good opinion of the rector.

Whilst, having returned to the vestry, I was reciting the thanksgiving after service, and at the same time unfastening the cords of my alb, the rector came up to me ; I can see him now, he was blowing his nose.

"My dear friend," said he, "you hear confessions this evening, do you not ?"

"Yes, certainly. How are you this morning ? I had a good congregation at mass."

And as I said this I finished my thanksgiving, put my alb into the wardrobe, and offering a pinch to the rector, added gaily :

"This is not breaking the fast, eh ?"

"Ha, ha, no, no, no ; besides, it wants five minutes to twelve and the clock is slow."

We took a pinch together and went off arm in arm by the little side-door, chatting in friendly fashion.

Suddenly I found myself transported into my confessional. The chapel was full of ladies who all bowed at my approach. I entered the narrow tribunal of which I had the key. I arranged on the seat the air-cushion which is indispensable to me on the eve of the great church festivals when the sittings are always prolonged ; I slipped the white surplice which was hanging from a peg over my cassock, and after having meditated for a moment, opened the little shutter that puts me in communication with my penitents.

I will not attempt to describe to you one by one the different people who came and knelt before me. I will not tell, for instance, that one of them, a lady dressed all in black, with a straight nose, thin lips, and sallow complexion, after having recited her Confiteor without hesitation in Latin, touched me infinitely by the absolute confidence she displayed in me although of the opposite sex. In five minutes she found a way to speak to me of her sister-in-law, her brother, an uncle who was on the point of death and whose heiress she was, her nephews, her servants; and I could divine, despite the tender benevolence that appeared in all her words, that she was the victim of all these people. She ended by confiding to me that she had a marriageable daughter, and that the state of her stomach hindered her from fasting.

I can still see a throng of other penitents, but it would take too long to tell you about them, and we will content ourselves, if you please, with the last two, who, besides, are particularly impressed on my memory.

A well dressed little lady threw herself into the confessional; she was fresh, brisk, rosy. Despite her expression of deep reflection, she spoke very quickly in a musical voice, and rattled through her Confiteor, making a sad hash of it.

"Father," she said, "I am very uneasy."

"Speak, my child, you know that a confessor is a father."

"Well, father—but I really dare not."

There are many of these fearful little hearts that need to be encouraged. I said, "Be brave, my child, be brave."

"My husband," she murmured, confusedly, "will not abstain during Lent. Ought I to oblige him to, father?"

"Yes, oblige him to by persuasion."

"But he says that he will go and dine at the restaurant if I do not let him have any meat. Oh! I suffer muchly

from that. Am I not assuming the responsibility of all that meat, father?"

This young wife really interested me; she had in the midst of one cheek, towards the corner of the mouth, a small hollow, a kind of little dimple, charming in the profane sense of the word, and giving a special expression to her face. Her tiny white teeth glittered like pearls when she opened her mouth to relate her pious inquietudes; she shed around, besides, a perfume almost as sweet as that of our altars, although of a different kind, and I breathed this perfume with an uneasiness full of scruples, which for all that inclined me to indulgence. I was so close to her that none of the details of her face escaped me; I could distinguish almost in spite of myself, even a little quiver of her left eyebrow, tickled every now and again by a stray tress of her fair hair.

"Your situation," I said, "is a delicate one; on one hand your domestic happiness, and on the other your duty as a Christian." She gave a sigh from her very heart. "Well, my dear child, my age warrants my speaking to you like that, does it not?"

"Oh, yes, father."

"Well, my dear child"—I fancy I noticed at that moment that she had at the outer corner of her eyes a kind of dark mark something like an arrow-head—"try, my dear child, to convince your husband, who at the bottom . . ." In addition, her lashes, very long and somewhat curled, were underlined, I might almost say, by a dark streak expanding and shading off delicately towards the middle of the eye. This physical peculiarity did not seem to me natural, but an effect of premeditated coquetry.

Strange fact, the verification of such weakness in this

candid heart only increased my compassion. I continued in a gentle tone :

"Strive to bring your husband to God. Abstinence is not only a religious observance, it is also a salutary custom. *Non solum lex Dei, sed etiam.* . . Have you done everything to bring back your husband ? "

"Yes, father, everything."

"Be precise, my child, I must know all."

"Well, father, I have tried sweetness and tenderness."

I thought to myself that this husband must be a wretch.

"I have implored him for the sake of our child," continued the little angel, "not to risk his salvation and my own. Once or twice I even told him that the spinach was dressed with gravy when it was not. Was I wrong, father ? "

"There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses, for in such cases it only takes into consideration the intention and the greater glory of God. I cannot therefore say that you have done wrong. You have not, have you, been guilty towards your husband of any of those excusable acts of violence which may escape a Christian soul when it is struggling against error ? For it really is not natural that an honest man should refuse to follow the prescription of the Church. Make a few concessions at first."

"I have, father, and perhaps too many," she said, contritely.

"What do you mean ? "

"Hoping to bring him back to God, I accorded him . . . favours which I ought to have refused him. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that I ought to have refused him them."

"Do not be alarmed, my dear child, everything depends upon degrees, and it is necessary in these matters to make delicate distinctions. There exist between husband and

wife certain feelings as to which the Church shuts her eyes. She does not approve of them. How could she when they are officially foreign to her, and prove the existence of a regrettable tie between the soul and its terrestrial envelope? But, after all, the Church paternally tolerates these tender-nesses, being unwilling in her wisdom that the human race should die out as yet. But this last consideration is the only one which excuses certain concessions to our senses, to those senses which are, as you know, our most deadly enemies.

"Yes, father. Oh! I understand you, and I can assure you that my intentions have always been conformable to your advice; but his, father, my husband's, am I responsible for them? That is what disturbs and renders me uneasy."

"I understand these worthy scruples, my child, but do not be unreasonably alarmed. Does your husband explain his intentions to you?"

"No, father."

"Well then, my dear child, it is not just that you should bear the consequences of them. If you accept with resignation, and, as it were, with regret, your *rôle* of victim. . . Do you so accept it?"

"Yes," she said, lowering her eyes, "I accept it with a sweet . . . resignation . . . the greater part of the time."

"And the remainder of the time?" I said, feeling touched by so much candour.

"The rest of the time I also submit, but out of gratitude for his kindness; for my husband is very kind, father, and it is that very fact which makes me suffer so to see him straying from the right path. Sometimes I say to myself that I ought not to love him so much, for, after all, God comes before everything."

"Yes, my dear child, the Church indeed must go first."

"That is what I say to myself, father, but my husband unites with his kindness such a communicative gaiety—he has such a graceful and natural way of excusing his impiety—that I laugh in spite of myself when I ought to weep. It seems to me that a cloud comes between myself and my duties, and my scruples evaporate beneath the charm of his presence and his wit. My husband has plenty of wit," she added, with a faint smile, in which there was a tinge of pride.

"Hum! hum!" the blackness of this man's heart revolted me. "There is no seductive shape that the tempter does not assume, my child. Wit in itself is not to be condemned, although the Church shuns it as far as she is concerned, looking upon it as a worldly ornament; but it may become dangerous, it may be reckoned a veritable pest when it tends to weaken faith. Faith, which is to the soul, I need hardly tell you, what the bloom is to the peach, and . . . if I may so express myself, what the—dew is—to the flower—hum, hum! Go on, my child."

"But, father, when my husband has disturbed me for a moment, I soon repent of it. He has scarcely gone than I pray for him."

"Good, very good."

"I have sown a blessed medal up in his overcoat." This was said more boldly though still with some timidity.

"And have you noticed any result?"

"In certain things he is better, yes, father, but as regards abstinence he is still intractable," she said with embarrassment.

"Do not be discouraged. We are in the holy period of Lent, well, make use of pious subterfuges, prepare him some admissible viands, but pleasant to the taste."

"Yes, father, I have thought of that. The day before

yesterday I gave him one of those salmon pasties that resemble ham."

"Yes, yes, I know them. Well?"

"Well he eat the salmon but he had a cutlet cooked afterwards."

"Deplorable," I exclaimed almost in spite of myself, so excessive did the perversity of this man seem to me. "Patience, my child, offer up to Heaven the sufferings which your husband's impiety causes you, and remember that your efforts will be set down to you. You have nothing more to tell me?"

"No, father."

"Collect yourself then. I will give you absolution."

The dear soul sighed as she joined her two little hands.

Scarcely had my penitent risen to withdraw than I abruptly closed my little shutter and took a long pinch of snuff—snuff-takers know how much a pinch soothes the mind—then after having thanked God rapidly, I drew from the pocket of my cassock my good old watch, and found that it was earlier than I thought. The darkness of the chapel had deceived me and my stomach had shared my error. I was hungry. I banished these carnal preoccupations from my mind, and after having shaken my bands on which some grains of snuff had fallen, I slackened one of my braces that was pressing a little on one shoulder, and opened my wicket.

"Well, madame, people should be more careful," said the penitent on my left, addressing a lady of whom I could only see a bonnet ribbon; "it is inexcusable."

My penitent's voice, which was very irritated though restrained by respect for the locality, softened as though by magic at the creaking of my wicket. She knelt down, piously folded her two ungloved hands, plump, perfumed,

rosy, laden with rings . . . but let that pass. I seemed to recognise the hands of the Countess de B., a chosen soul, whom I have the honour to visit frequently, especially on Saturday when there is always a place laid for me at her table.

She raised her little lace veil and I saw that I was not mistaken. It was the countess. She smiled at me as at a person with whom she was acquainted, but with perfect propriety; she seemed to be saying, "Good-day, my dear Abbé, I do not ask how your rheumatism is, because at this moment you are invested with a sacred character, but I am interested in it all the same."

This little smile was irreproachable. I replied by a similar smile, and I murmured in a very low tone, giving her, too, to understand by the expression of my face that I was making a unique concession in her favour, "Are you quite well, dear madame?"

"Thanks, father, I am quite well." Her voice had resumed an angelic tone. "But I have just been in a passion."

"And why? Perhaps you have taken for a passion what was really only a passing moment of temper?"

It does not do to alarm penitents.

"Ah! not at all, it was really a passion, father. My dress had just been torn from top to bottom; and really it is strange that one should be exposed to such mishaps on approaching the tribunal of . . ."

"Collect yourself, my dear madame, collect yourself," and assuming a serious look I bestowed my benediction upon her.

The countess sought to collect herself, but I saw very well that her troubled spirit vainly strove to recover itself. By a singular phenomenon I could see into her brain, and

her thoughts appeared to me one after the other. She was saying to herself, "Let me collect myself, our Father give me grace to collect myself," but the more efforts she made to restrain her imagination, the more it became difficult to restrain and slipped through her fingers. "I had made a serious examination of my conscience, however," she added. "Not ten minutes ago, as I was getting out of the carriage, I counted up three sins; there was one above all I wished to speak of. How these little things escape one, I must have left them in the carriage." And she could not help smiling to herself at the idea of these three little sins lost amongst the cushions. "And the poor Abbé waiting for me in his box. How hot he must be in there, he is quite red. Good Heavens! how shall I begin, I cannot invent faults? It is that torn dress which has upset me. And there is Louise who is to meet me at five o'clock at the dressmaker's. It is impossible for me to collect myself. Oh! God, do not turn away your face from me, and you, Lord, who can read in my soul . . . Louise will wait till a quarter past five, besides the body fits, there is only the skirt to try on. And to think that I had three a minute ago."

All these different thoughts, pious and profane, were struggling together at once in the countess's brain, so that I thought the moment had come to interfere and help her a little.

"Come," I said in a paternal voice, leaning forward benevolently and twisting my snuff-box in my fingers. "Come, my dear madame, and speak fearlessly, have you nothing to reproach yourself with? Have you had no impulses of . . . worldly coquetry, no wish to dazzle at the expense of your neighbour?"

I had a vague idea that I should not be contradicted.

"Yes, father," she said, smoothing down her bonnet

strings, "sometimes ; but I have always made an effort to drive away such thoughts."

"That good intention in some degree excuses you, but reflect and see how empty are these little triumphs of vanity, how unworthy of a truly pure soul and how they draw it aside from salvation. I know that there are certain social exigencies—society. Yes, yes, but after all one can even in those pleasures which the church tolerates—I say tolerates—bring to bear that perfume of goodwill towards one's neighbour of which the Scriptures speak, and which is the apanage . . . in some degree . . . the glorious apanage. Yes, yes—go on."

"Father, I have not been able to resist certain temptations to gluttony."

"Again, again ! Commence with yourself. You are here at the tribunal of penitence, well, promise God to struggle energetically against these little carnal temptations, which are not in themselves serious sins—oh ! no, I know it—but after all these constant solicitations prove a persistent attachment, displeasing to Him, to the fugitive and deceitful delights of this world. Hum, hum, and has this gluttony shown itself by actions more blameworthy than usual, is it simply the same as last month ?"

"The same as last month, father."

"Yes, yes, pastry between meals," I sighed gravely.

"Yes, father, and almost always a glass of Capri or of Syracuse after it."

"Or of Syracuse after it. Well, let that pass, let that pass."

I fancied that the mention of this pastry and these choice wines was becoming a source of straying thoughts on my part for which I mentally asked forgiveness of the Lord.

"What else do you recall?" I asked, passing my hand over my face.

"Nothing else, father, I do not recollect anything else."

"Well, let a sincere repentance spring up in your heart for the sins you have just admitted, and for those which you may have forgotten; commune with yourself, humble yourself in presence of the great act you have just accomplished. I will give you absolution. Go in peace."

The countess rose, smiled at me with discreet courtesy, and resuming her ordinary voice said in a low tone, "Till Saturday evening then?"

I bowed as a sign of assent, but felt rather embarrassed on account of my sacred character.

I have already told you, dear reader, that in this veritably strange dream I had the gift of reading in my neighbour's minds so that I saw very well what the countess did and thought after leaving the confessional.

She went back to her praying stool and sincerely bowed down before the Lord, she addressed to Him a rapid and fervent prayer of thanksgiving. She felt herself relieved of a great weight, vivified so to say, and but for her little blue enamelled watch which told her that Louise was waiting for her at the dressmaker's about that unhappy skirt, she would have remained for a long time wrapt in contemplation of the purity of her soul, which inspired her with a just pride.

It was getting late, she slipped into her pocket sundry trifles, and especially a coquettish little volume with a gold clasp, on the back of which could be read "The Little Grove of Penitence," then putting on her glove without for all that taking her eyes of the Saviour's image, lowering her veil and settling the bow of her bonnet strings, she lifted up her soul to God, saying, "Forgive me, Lord, for going away so soon ;

oh ! I do not forsake Thee, but an urgent affair, an appointment, Thou knowest, Lord, that appointments ought not to be broken." She made a coquettish sign of the cross and fluttered off light-hearted, pure, joyful. Her pointed heels went pit-a-pat on the flagstones, and she felt a pleasure in hearing the sound of her steps repeated by the holy echoes. She said to herself :

" Hear me walk, sacred echoes of the temple, for to-day I am as pure as yourselves ; what happiness it is to feel oneself an angel, and what a little it really costs to be one ! "

At the church door her carriage was awaiting her ; at an infinitely gentle sign from her the horses advanced champing their bits, and the footman opened the door. She got in, and said in a perfectly unctuous tone to her brother in Jesus, who was waiting hat in hand.

" Where I said, Rue de la Paix."

" Shall we pull up at the pastry-cook's, madame ? " hazarded the footman.

" Hum," said she, looking at her glove. Then suddenly in a resolute tone in which there was a tinge of pride, " No, no, go straight on." And she added, placing her hand on the little book in her pocket, " Thanks, Lord ; I am an angel, I must not sully my wings."

At that moment there was a loud noise, and having opened my eyes I perceived Jean lighting my fire. For a moment I struggled between the dream and the reality, and it was not without difficulty that I completely freed myself from this strange nightmare.

" What time is it, Jean ? " I asked, stretching out my arms.

" Half-past ten, sir. What will you have for breakfast, sir ? "

" Nothing but a cup of tea."

I still felt a weight on my stomach.



AN EMBASSY BALL.

IN WHICH IT IS QUESTION NEITHER OF BALL NOR EMBASSY.

I.

“



DON'T say that it is not pretty," added my aunt, brushing the fire-dog with the tip of her tiny boot. "It lends an especial charm to the look, I must acknowledge. A cloud of powder is most becoming, a touch of rouge has a charming effect, and even that blue shadow that they spread, I don't know how under the eye. What coquettes some women are! Did you notice Anna's eyes at Madame de Sieurac's last Thursday? Is it allowable, frankly, can you understand how anyone can dare?"

"Well, aunt, I did not object to those eyes, and between ourselves they had a softness."

"I do not deny that, they had a softness."

"And at the same time such a strange brilliancy beneath that half shadow, an expression of such delicious langour."

"Yes, certainly, but after all, it is making an exhibition of oneself. But for that—It is very pretty sometimes—I have seen in the Bois charming creatures under their red, their black, and their blue, for they put on blue too, God forgive me."

"Yes, aunt, Polish blue, it is put on with a stump, it is for the veins."

With interest. "They imitate veins! It is shocking, upon my word. But you seem to know all about it?"

"Oh, I have played so often in private theatricals; I have even quite a collection of little pots of colour, hare's feet, stumps, pencils, et cetera."

"Ah! you have, you rascal. Are you going to the fancy ball at the Embassy, to-morrow?"

"Yes, aunty; and you, are you going in character?"

"One must, since everyone else will. They say the effect will be splendid." After a silence. "I shall wear powder; do you think it will suit me?"

"Better than anyone, my dear aunt; you will look adorable, I feel certain."

"We shall see, you little courtier."

She rose, gave me her hand to kiss with an air of exquisite grace, and seemed about to withdraw, then seemingly changing her mind:

"Since you are going to the Embassy to-morrow, Ernest, call for me, I will give you a seat in the carriage. You can give me your opinion on my costume and then," she broke into a laugh, and taking me by the hand, added in my ear: "Bring your little pots and come early. This is between ourselves." She put her finger to her lip as a signal for discretion. "Till to-morrow, then."

My aunt, as you can see, has not yet bid farewell to youth, and she has done wisely. She is more than five-and-twenty, if I am to believe a little sum in addition I have made on my own account; but I am so bad at figures that with all the good will in the world I would not dare tell you anything for certain about her age. And besides, what would be the good of it? Does not a murmur of admiration al-

ways greet her when she enters a ball-room with the air of a crowned Queen? Do not people in a hurry always turn round when she gives an order to the coachman through the window of her little black brougham? Has not her voice the silvery ring of youth, and her gestures the delicate grace of a woman of twenty? Is she not, this dear aunt of mine, in all the splendour of full blown beauty, triumphantly sure of itself?

II.

THE following evening my aunt's bed-room presented a spectacle of most wild disorder. From every half-opened drawer, crumpled laces, muslins, embroideries were overflowing. On the furniture, open jewel cases were mixed up with combs and hair pins. Snippets of ribbon and ends of thread, scraps of satin and bits of flowers strewed the carpet to which a thin coating of hair powder gave a white and dusty appearance. Several candles and three unshaded lamps shed a dazzling light upon this disorder in the midst of which my aunt, her hair dressed and powdered, was standing in front of her dressing-glass examining with experienced eye her splendid costume, that of a Louis Seize marquise.

Her maid and the dress-maker with haggard eyes, for they had been up all night, were both on their knees, rummaging amidst the bows of satin, and feverishly sticking in pins.

"A little more to the left that ribbon you have hold of, Marie. Madame Savain, the body is quite an inch too loose. I feel in a sack, Madame Savain."

"Perhaps your corset is a little more tightly laced than usual, madame?"

"Certainly it is tighter. Do you not know that in the reign of Louis XVI, women wore their waists very small? One must either pay proper respect to archæology or not

meddle with it at all. The front is not bad. It suits the character."

My aunt took a side view of herself in the glass.

"I was afraid lest the sloping cut which you had copied from a dress of the period, and above all the laces, arranged inside to pull back the shoulders, might make you look a little too full at the bosom, madame."

"But, Madame Savain, you ought to know that in the days of Louis XVI, women of quality wore the bosom very full. No, no, there is nothing exaggerated, one must dress in character." And brushing with the tips of her rosy and dimpled fingers the most prominent projections of a cunningly indiscreet gauze, she smiled, and added, "No, Madame Savain, nothing exaggerated. Marie, give me my box of patches."

The maid handed it to her. My aunt moistened her finger with her aristocratic saliva, plunged it carelessly into the box, then with her finger armed with a black spot poised in the air, she gave a penetrating look at the glass, and suddenly, with a resolute movement, and marvellous dexterity, dab, she had stuck the patch right in the midst of the exaggeration. "That saves it," she murmured. "That diverts attention." And she smiled, well pleased.

The fact is, that this patch, which resembled a lady-bird between two roses, was placed with the utmost tact, art, and sentiment. Neither too high nor too low, it was just in its right place, and, in the semi-obscurity of the valley, it seemed, poor little thing, to be hiding itself to avoid blushing. It was touching. The most spiteful critics would have said, like my aunt, as she gazed on her full-blown bosom, "No, certainly there is no exaggeration."

And yet there was a little at the bottom. Perhaps it was due to the fact that my aunt had reached, without it being

noticed, that adorable age at which beauty, wishing to be at its ease, expands in all the amplitude of rich maturity.

Perhaps it was also due to the fact that, under archæological influences, and in order to follow the fashion of our great grandmothers, who brought their bosoms together like two loving twins, my aunt had not remembered that a change of shape might lead to a belief in an augmentation of volume.

Perhaps, after all, the unaccustomed and excessive slimness of her waist, compressed in a white satin corset, the crackling sound of which tickled the ear at every movement she made, alone produced this charming illusion !

In any case, the patch redeemed everything.

"How late you are," she said to me. "Do you know that it is eleven o'clock ? and we have," she continued, showing her white teeth, "a great many things to do yet. The horses have been put to this last hour. I am sure they will take cold in that icy courtyard." As she spoke she stretched out her foot, shod with a red-heeled slipper, glittering with gold embroidery. Her plump foot seemed to overflow the side of the shoe a trifle, and, through the open work of her bright silk stocking, the rosy skin of her ankle showed at intervals.

"What do you think of me, Mr. Artist ?"

"But, countess, my dear aunt, I mean, I—I am dazzled by this July sun, the brightest of all the year, you know. You are adorable, adorable, . . and your hair !"

"Is it not well arranged ? Silvani did it, he has not his equal, that man. The diamonds in the hair go splendidly, and then this lofty style of head-dressing gives a majestic turn to the neck. I do not know whether you are aware that I have always been a coquette as regards my neck ; it is my only bit of vanity. Have you brought your little colour pots ?"

"Yes, aunt, I have the whole apparatus, and if you will sit down—"

"I am frightfully pale—just a little, Ernest; you know what I told you," and she turned her head, presenting her right eye to me. I can still see that eye. Only, as she leant back to be more directly under the light, and as I drew close to her face, the operation being a delicate one, I saw the light gauze open, and that accursed patch, like a distant bark upon the ocean, rise and fall with her respiration.

I do not know what strange perfume, foreign to aunts in general, rose from . . .

"You understand, my dear boy, that it is only an occasion like the present, and the necessities of a historical costume, that make me consent to paint like this."

"My dear little aunt, if you move, my hand will shake." And, indeed, in touching her long lashes, my hand trembled.

"Ah! yes, in the corner, a little . . . you are right, it gives a softness, a vagueness, a . . . It is very funny that little pot of blue. How ugly it must be. How things lead on one to another. Once one's hair is powdered, one must have a little pearl powder on one's face in order not to look as yellow as an orange; and one's cheeks once whitened, one can't—you are tickling me with your brush—one can't remain like a miller, so a touch of rouge is inevitable. And then, see how wicked it is, if after all that, one does not enlarge the eyes a bit, they look as if they had been bored with a gimlet, don't they? It is like this, that one goes on little by little, till one comes to the gallows."

My aunt began to laugh freely, the little bark vanished, as though swallowed up between two waves, and then re-appeared again.

"Ah! that is very effective what you have just done—



'My dear little Aunt, if you move, my hand will shake.'

well under the eye, that's it. What animation it gives to the look! How clever those creatures are, how well they know everything that becomes one! It is shameful, for with them it is a trick, nothing more. Oh! you may put on a little more of that blue of yours, I see what it is now. It has a very good effect. How you are arching the eyebrows. Don't you think it is a little too black? You know I should not like it to look as if . . . You are right though. Where did you learn all that? You might earn a lot of money, do you know, if you set up a practice."

"Well, aunt, are you satisfied?"

My aunt held her hand-glass at a distance, brought it near, held it away again, smiled, and leaning back in her chair said: "It must be acknowledged that it is charming, this. What do your friends call it?"

"Make-up, aunt."

"It is vexatious that it has not another name, for really I shall have recourse to it—for the evening—from time to time. It is certain that it is attractive. Haven't you a little pot for the lips?"

"Here it is."

"Ah! in a bottle, it is liquid."

"It is a kind of vinegar, as you see. Don't move, aunt. Put out your lips as if you wished to kiss me. You don't by chance want to?"

"Yes, and you deserve it. You will teach me your little accomplishments, will you not?"

"Willingly, aunt."

"Your vinegar is miraculous, what brightness it gives to the lips, and how white one's teeth look! It is true my teeth were always—"

"Another of your bits of vanity."

"It is done then. Thank you." She smiled at me mincingly, for the vinegar stung her lips a little.

With her moistened finger she took a patch which she placed with charming coquetry under her eye, and another which she placed near the corner of her mouth, and then radiant and adorable exclaimed: "Hide away your little colour pots, I hear your uncle coming for me. Clasp my bracelets for me. Midnight! oh, my poor horses!"

III.

At that moment my uncle entered in silk shorts and a domino.

"I hope I do not intrude," said he gaily on seeing me.

"What nonsense," said my aunt, turning towards him. "Ernest is going to the Embassy, like ourselves, and I have offered him a seat in the carriage."

At the aspect of my aunt, my uncle, dazzled, held out his gloved hand to her, saying: "You are enchanting this evening, my dear." Then, with a sly smile, "Your complexion has a brightness, and your eyes a brilliancy."

"Oh, it is the fire they have been making up, it is stifling here. But you, my dear, you look splendid; I have never seen your beard so black."

"It is because I am so pale—I am frozen. Jean forgot to look after my fire at all, and it went out. Are you ready?"

My aunt smiled in turn as she took up her fan.





My Aunt smiled in turn as she took up her fan.



MY AUNT AS VENUS.



SINCE the day on which I kissed Madame de B. right on the neck, when she held out her forehead to me, our relations have assumed a certain coquettish coolness, which is nevertheless rather pleasant. The question of the kiss has never been thoroughly threshed out. It took place just as I left Saint-Cyr. I was full of ardour, and the cravings of my heart sometimes blinded me. I say that they sometimes blinded me, and I am right, for really I must have been possessed to have kissed my aunt on the neck as I did that day. But let that pass.

It is not that she was not worth it, no ; my little aunty, as I used to call her then, was the prettiest woman in the world—coquettish, elegant, and with a foot ; and, above all, that delightful, little, I don't know what, which is so fashionable now, and which always makes you want to go too far.

No, when I say that I must have been possessed, it is because I think of the consequences that kiss might have led to. General de B., her husband, being my superior officer, it might have got me into a very disagreeable position, and then, after all, there is the respect due to one's family. Oh, I have never been lacking in that.

But I do not know why I am recalling all these old recollections, which have nothing to do with what I am going to relate. My intention was simply to tell you that since my return from Mexico, I go pretty often to Madame de B.'s, and perhaps you do the same, for she lives in very good style, and receives every Monday evening, when there is generally a crowd of people, since it is lively there. There is no form of amusement that she does not go in for to keep up her reputation as a woman of fashion. I must acknowledge, however, that I had never seen anything at her house to equal what I saw last Monday.

I was in the ante-room, and the footman was helping me off with my great-coat, when Jean, approaching me with a suspicion of mystery, said: "My mistress is waiting to see you at once, sir, in her bed-room. Will you follow the passage and knock at the door at the end, sir?"

It is all very well to have come back from the other side of the world—such phrases always have an effect on one. The old affair of the kiss recurred to me in spite of myself. What could my aunt want with me?

I tapped discreetly at the door, and at once heard an outburst of stifled laughter.

"Not yet—in a moment," exclaimed a laughing voice. "But I won't be seen in this state," whispered another—"Yes"—"No"—"You are absurd, my dear, since it is a question of art." "Ha, ha, ha." And they kept laughing and scuttling about on the other side of the door.

At last a voice cried: "Come in," and I turned the handle.

At the first glance I could only make out a confused chaos, impossible to describe, amidst which my aunt was bustling about clad in pink fleshings. Clad—superficially.

Happily a graceful garland of sea-weed, made of paper

protected modesty here and there. My little aunty seemed to me to have grown much plumper, but let that pass too. Her hair, in wavy curls, flowed over her shoulders, and Marie, her maid—a pearl about whom I shall also have a word or two to tell you one of these days—kneeling in front of her mistress, was lacing her boots of glittering pink satin, with very high and pointed heels.

The furniture, the carpet, the mantel-shelf, were encumbered, and, as it were, buried under an indescribable mass of things. Muslin petticoats thrown down at hap-hazard, pieces of lace, a card-board helmet, covered with gilt-paper, open jewel cases, bows of ribbon, fleshings, too tight, no doubt, and split; curling tongs, half hidden in the ashes; and on every side little pots, paint brushes, odds and ends of all kinds. Behind two screens, which ran right across the room, I could hear whisperings, and the rustling sound peculiar to women dressing themselves. In one corner Silvani—the illustrious Silvani still wearing the large white apron he dons to powder his clients—was putting by his powder puffs, and turning down his sleeves with a satisfied air. I stood petrified. What was going on at my aunt's?

She noticed my astonishment, for without turning round she said in somewhat agitated tones!

“Ah! is it you, Ernest?” Then making up her mind, no doubt, she broke into a hearty burst of laughter like all women who have good teeth, and added with a slightly conquering air: “You see, we are having private theatricals.”

As she spoke she turned towards me with her madly provoking coiffure powdered to excess with red powder, her face painted like that of a priestess of antiquity, her glance swimming with the artificial but seductive langour imparted by the Japanese pencil, her bosom smiling beneath the three sprays of herbage that shaded it with tact. Those legs,

that gauze, that atmosphere, odorous with feminine perfumes, and behind those screens . . . behind those screens.

By Jove ! I am not a child, you can understand that I must have seen a great many things in my time, being a captain of lancers and naturally pretty inquisitive. But I can tell you I was never so deeply . . . interested as on that evening. It is not, on the whole, such an everyday matter to find one face to face with one's aunt's legs.

"Women in society," I said to myself, looking a bit about me, "must be possessed to amuse themselves in this fashion." "And what piece are you going to play, aunt, in such a . . . seductive costume ?"

"Good evening, captain," cried a laughing voice from behind the screen on the right.

"We were expecting you," from behind the screen on the left.

"Good evening, ladies ; what can I do for you ?"

"It is not a piece," observed my aunt modestly, drawing together her sea-weed. "How behind the world you are, as if any one plays pieces now-a-days. It is not a piece, it is a tableau vivant, 'The Judgment of Paris.' You know 'The Judgment of Paris ?' I take the part of Venus . . . I did not want to, but they all persecuted me . . . Give me a pin . . . on the mantel-shelf . . . by the bag of bonbons . . . there to the left, next to the jewel case . . . close by the bottle of gum on my prayer-book. Can't you see ? Ah ! at last. In short they held the knife to my throat to force me to play Venus : 'What, baroness, with your shoulders and your arms and your . . . hands,' they kept saying . . . Give me another pin. These sea-weeds won't hold together."

"It is, however, indispensable that they should hold together a little, aunt."

"I see, you think me a little too *décolletée*, eh? I was certain you would think me a little too *décolletée*, I told them so; but what would you have, it is in the part; and then, after all, such things are good form now." Turning towards the screen on the right, "Pass me the red for the lips, dear, mine are too pale." To the hair-dresser who is making his way to the door, "Silvani, go to the gentlemen who are dressing in the billiard-room, and in the baron's dressing-room, they perhaps have need of you. Madame de S. and her daughters are in the boudoir you know . . . Ah! find out if Monsieur de V. has found his apple again . . . He plays Paris," added my aunt turning towards me again; "the apple must not be lost. . . Well, dear, and that red for the lips I asked you for? Pass it to the captain over the screen."

"Here it is; but be quick, captain, my cuirass cracks whenever I raise my arm."

I perceived above the screen two slender fingers, one of which, covered with glittering rings, held in the air a little pot without a cover.

"What, is your cuirass cracking, marchioness?"

"Oh! it will do, but be quick and take it, captain."

"It may seem funny to you, but I tremble like a leaf," exclaimed my aunt. "I am afraid of being ill. Do you hear the gentlemen who are dressing in there in the baron's dressing-room? What a noise! Ha, ha, ha, it is charming, a regular gang of strollers. It is intoxicating, do you know, this feverish existence, this life of the footlights. . But for the love of Heaven shut the door, Marie, there is a frightful draught blowing on my legs. . . This hourly struggle with the public, the hisses, the applause would, with my impressionable nature, drive me mad I know."

The old affair of the kiss recurred to me and I said to

myself, "Captain, you misunderstood the nature of your relative."

"But it is not a question of all that," continued my aunt, "ten o'clock is striking. Ernest, do you know how to apply liquid white? As you are rather . . a little fast. . ."

"A little, ha, ha, ha," said someone behind the screen.

"On the whole," continued the baroness, "it would be very extraordinary if, in course of your campaigns, you had never seen liquid white applied."

"Yes, aunt, I have some notions, yes, I have some notions about liquid white, and by summoning together all my recollections—"

"Is it true, captain, that it causes rheumatism?"

"No, I assure you; have a couple of logs put on the fire and give me the stuff."

So saying I turned up my sleeves and poured some of the "Milk of Beauty" into a little onyx bowl that was at hand, then I dipped a little sponge into it, and approached my Aunt Venus with a smile.

"You can assure me that it has no effect upon the skin . . no, I really dare not." As she said this she looked as prim as a vestal. "It is the first time do you know that I ever used this liquid white, ah, ah, ah! What a baby I am! I am all in a shiver."

"But, my dear, you are silly," exclaimed the lady of the screen, breaking into a laugh, "when one acts one must submit to the exigencies of the footlights."

"You hear, aunt? come, give me your arm."

She held out her full round arm, on the surface of which was spread that light and charming down, symbol of maturity. I applied the wet sponge.

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed the baroness, "but it is like



I passed my sponge over the hills and valleys with the delicacy
and care of a gourmet.

ice, you brute ; a regular shower-bath, and you want to put that all over me."

"Not everywhere, aunt."

"Your 'everywhere' sounds very impertinent. You know that one has need of you, and you abuse the opportunity. It is the right kind of white to show up in the light that you are spreading on my poor skin, you are not making a mistake ?—Oh Lord, down my back, it is horrible, oh ! confound it—men are lucky in being able to swear at their ease—Marie, make up the fire, my girl, make up the fire—and it will be the deuce of a time drying too. It is very long drying, is it not, captain ?"

"A short quarter of an hour, not more, and then we must brush it over with a very soft brush."

When one is frank, one should not be so by halves ; I will therefore confide something to you. You doubtless believe that, seeing the baroness wriggling and calling out, I hastened to spread this icy white. Well, not at all. I worked with a slowness full of cunning and dissimulation. I passed my sponge over the hills and valleys with the delicacy and care of a gourmet, and like a man with a bit of a wing of truffled pheasant in his mouth, I savoured the morsel, and said to myself, "Captain, profit by the opportunity, and once for all make acquaintance with the handsomest member of your family." At each shudder caused by the cold, the seaweed separated with a sudden movement, that part of the fleshings covering the body gaped, and the laws of perspective thus suddenly surprised revealed to me—revealed marvels. It was that evening, I recollect, that the question of modelling in *chiar oscuro* became quite clear to me. But for the third time, let that pass.

At that moment there was a knock at the door opening

from the baron's dressing-room, and instinctively I turned towards it.

"Who is there? Oh! you are letting it stream all over me!" exclaimed the baroness. "You can't come in, what is it?"

"What is the matter, aunt?"

"You can't come in," exclaimed someone behind the screen, "my cuirass has split. Marie, Rosine, pins, a needle and thread, the gum."

"Oh! there is a stream all down my back, your horrid white is running down," said the baroness, quite exasperated.

"I will wipe it. I am very sorry. I am really very sorry."

"You think that you can get your hand down my back?"

"Why not, aunt?"

"Why not, why not! Because where there is room for a drop of water, there is not room for the hand of a lancer."

"You are too tightly laced then?"

"No, I am not too tightly laced. You are very rude, Ernest, to think of putting your hand down my back."

"Well, you are very tightly laced, that is what I meant to say."

"Very is not too much. But please finish painting me."

There was another knock at the door of the dressing-room, and I recognised the soft voice of Monsieur de V. saying:

"I am very sorry, baroness, to trouble you, but—"

"You can't come in," was the cry on all sides.

"I am not trying to come in, though I should like to; but Raoul has an urgent need of the forget-me-not blue, the forget-me-not blue, baroness."

"You shall have it—Ernest, it is beginning to run again!"

—I will send it round to you,” and in a low voice, “What a nuisance he is.”

“That is not all, my dear baroness.”

“What else is it? Be quick, my white is drying, and I can’t stir.”

“My apple. I don’t know where it is. Have you got it?”

“Your apple, your apple, as if I had your apple.”

“Ah! and then Monsieur de Saint P. has broken his trident, and torn his fleshings; could you not send one of the maids—”

“Do you think my maids are girls to run about sewing up gentlemen’s tights? I think it very strange for you to—”

“Do not be uneasy, baroness, the tear is in the arm; it was the trident breaking that—”

“All right, I will send Rosine, she is a trustworthy girl— You are going to brush me now, Ernest, are you not? I am literally frozen. He is too much of a good thing with his trident, he only appears in the third tableau, ‘Venus rising from the waves.’”

There was another knock, this time at the door opening from the passage.

“What is it now?”

“The torches have come, madame,” said a footman. “Will you have them lit?”

“Ah! the torches of Mesdemoiselles de N. who are dressing in the boudoir. No, certainly not, do not light them, they are not wanted till the second tableau.”

“Do not stir, aunt, I beg of you. Mesdemoiselles de N. appear too, then?”

“Yes, with their mamma, they represent ‘The Lights of Faith driving out Unbelief,’ and so they naturally have torches. You know, they are tin tubes with spirits of

wine which blazes up. It will be, perhaps, the prettiest tableau of the evening. It is an indirect compliment we wish to pay to the Cardinal's nephew, you know the dark young man with very curly hair and heavenly eyes, you saw him last Monday. He is in high favour at court, the Count di Geloni, he was kind enough to promise to come this evening, and then Monsieur de Saint P. had the idea of this tableau. He has an inexhaustible imagination, Monsieur de Saint P., and good taste, if he would not break his properties."

"Is he not besides a Chevalier of the Order of Saint Gregory?"

"Yes, and between ourselves, I think that he would not be vexed to become an officer in it."

"Ah! I understand, 'The Lights of Faith driving out,' et cetera. But tell me, aunt, I am not brushing you too hard, am I? Lift up your arm a little please. Tell me who it is who has undertaken the part of Unbelief?"

"Don't speak of it, it is quite a history. As it happened, the casting of the parts took place the very evening on which his Holiness's Encyclical was published, so that the gentlemen were somewhat excited. Monsieur de Saint P. took high grounds, really very high grounds; I thought for a moment that the general was going to break out. In short, no one would have anything to do with Unbelief, and I was obliged to have recourse to the general's coachman, John, you know him? He is a good-looking fellow, and besides he is a Protestant I believe, so that the part is not a novel one to him."

"No matter, it must be disagreeable for the De N.'s to appear side by side with a servant."

"Oh! come, such scruples must not be carried too far; he is smeared over with black and stretched on his face, and the

three ladies are trampling on him, so you see that social proprieties are observed. Come, have you done yet? My hair is rather a success, is it not? Silvani is the only man who knows how to powder one. He wanted to dye it red, but I prefer to wait till red hair has made its way a little more in society. All the same I am a trifle undressed, but after all the sea-weeds cover everything."

"Certainly, aunt, certainly. There it is finished. Is it long before you have to go on?"

"No. Good Heavens, it is close on eleven o'clock. I am as nervous as a child. The thought of appearing before all those people . . . don't the flowers drooping from my head make my neck look rather awkward, Ernest? Will you push them up a little?"

Then going to the door of the dressing-room she tapped at it gently, saying, "Are you ready, Monsieur de V.?"

"Yes, baroness, I have found my apple, but I am very nervous. Are Minerva and Juno dressed? Oh! nervous to a degree you have no idea of."

"Yes, yes, every one is ready, send word to the company in the drawing-room. My poor heart is throbbing to bursting, captain."

"Take care, aunt, it can be seen."





HUSBAND AND WIFE.

I. INTRODUCTORY LECTURE BY FATHER Z.



Y dear sisters,

Marriage, as you understand it, is not exactly favourable to love. I do not think that I am stating an anomaly. Love in marriage is too much at his ease, he stretches himself with too great listlessness in arm-chairs too well padded. He assumes the unconstrained habits of dressing-gown and slippers ; the sweetmeats with which he gluttonously stuffs himself at the outset, soon render his stomach queasy, his digestion goes wrong, his appetite fails, and of an evening in the too soothing warmth of a nest made for him, he yawns over his newspaper, goes to sleep, snores and dies away. It is all very well, my sisters to say, "But not at all—but how can it be, Father Z.—but you know nothing about it, reverend father."

I affirm that things are as I have stated, and that in your heart you are absolutely of my opinion. Yes, your poor heart has suffered very often ; there are nights during which you have wept, poor angel, vainly awaiting the dream of the evening before.

"Alas," your thoughts have run, "is it then all over ?

A summer's day, thirty years of autumn, and I who am so fond of sunshine." That is what you have thought.

But you say nothing, not knowing anything of what you ought to say. Doubtful of yourself, ignorant of yourself, you have made it a virtue to keep silence and not wake your husband when he was asleep, you have got into the habit of walking on the tips of your little tootsicums so as not to disturb the quiet of the household, and your husband in the midst of this refreshing half sleep has begun to yawn luxuriously, and then has gone out to his club where he has been received like the prodigal son, whilst you, poor poet without pen or ink, have consoled yourself by watching your sisters follow the same road as yourself.

You have all of you, ladies, your pockets full of manuscripts, charming poems, delightful romances ; it is a reader who is lacking to you, and your husband takes up his hat and stick at the very sight of your hand-writing ; he sincerely believes that there are no more romances save those which are in print. From having read too many he considers that no more are to be written.

It is this state of things that I think absolutely detestable.

I look upon you, my dear sisters, as poor victims, and if you will allow me I will give you my opinion upon the subject.

Esteem and friendship between husband and wife are very pleasant and respectable like our daily bread ; but a trifle of jam would not spoil that, you will admit ! If therefore one of your friends complains of the freedom that reigns in this little book, let her say on and be sure beforehand that very probably this friend eats her bread dry. We have put forward marriage as we understand it, depicted smiling spouses, happy to be together.

Is it because love is rare between husband and wife that it should be unbecoming to relate its joys?

Is it regret or envy that renders you ticklish on the subject, sisters?

Reserve your blushes for the pictures of that society of courtesans where love is a bargain, where kisses are paid for in advance. Hold the relation of these coarse pleasures immodest and revolting, be indignant, scold your brethren, I will admit that you are in the right beforehand; but for the love of Heaven do not take umbrage when we undertake your defence, when we try to render married life pleasant and seductive, when we advise husbands to love their wives, wives to love their husbands.

Do you not understand that there is a truly moral side to all this? To prove that you are adorable and that there are pleasures, joys, caresses, to be found outside the society of those young women, such was our object, since we must tell you it, and I venture to hope that after having reflected for a couple of minutes you will find our intentions praise-worthy, and will allow us to persevere in them.

I do not know why they have chosen to surround marriage with man-traps and all manner of frightful things, to stick up all round it boards on which one reads: "Take heed of the sacred ties of marriage." "Do not jest with the sacred duties of a husband." "Meditate on the sacerdotal condition of the father of a family." "Remember that the serious side of life is beginning." "No weakness, you are bound to find yourself face to face with stern reality," &c., &c.

I do not say that it is not prudent to put forth all those fine things, but it should be done with less affectation. To warn people that there are thorns is all very well; but, hang it! there is something else in married life, something that renders delightful these duties, this sacerdotal position,

these ties which, if one were to believe you, would soon be nothing more than insupportable burthens. One would really think that to take a pretty little wife, fresh in heart and mind, and to condemn oneself to saw wood for the rest of one's days was one and the same thing.

Well, my dear sisters, do you know those who have painted the picture in these gloomy colours and transformed into a punishment that which should be a reward? The husbands with a past and the rheumatism. Being weary and—how shall I put it?—experienced, they want to make marriage an asylum of which you are to be the angels. It is very nice to be an angel, but believe me, it is too much or too little. Do not seek to rise so high all at once, but request a short apprenticeship. It will be time enough to assume the crown of glory when you have no longer hair enough to dress in any other fashion.

But oh, husbands with a past, do you fancy that your own angelic quietude and the prudent austerity of your principles are taken for anything else than what they really mean—exhaustion?

You wish to rest, well and good, but I think it strange of you to want everybody else about you to rest too, to want the trees to be withered and the grass faded in May, to want the lamps turned down and the lamp-shades doubled, to want one to put water in the soup and to refuse oneself a glass of claret, to want virtuous wives to be overpoweringly respectable and somewhat wearisome beings, dressing nicely, having had neither poetry, youth, brisk gaiety, nor vague desires, ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything; impotent, thanks to the too weighty virtues with which you have crammed them; and further to want these poor creatures to bless your wisdom, caress your bald forehead, and blush with shame at the echo of a kiss.

Deuce take me ! but that is a pretty pickle for marriage to come to.

Delightful institution ! and how much your sons, who are now five and twenty years of age, are in the right to be afraid of it. How right they are to say to you, twirling their moustaches :

“ But, my dear father, let us wait a bit, I am not quite ripe for it.”

“ But it is a splendid match, and the young lady is charming.”

“ Yes, no doubt, but I feel that I should not make her happy. I am not old enough—indeed, I am not.”

But when the young man is ripe for it, how happy she will be, poor little thing !—a ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree, fit to be put away in the apple-loft. What happiness ! a good husband, who the day after his marriage will piously install his wife in a niche and light a taper in front of her, and then take his hat and go off to spend outside a scrap of youth left by chance at the bottom of his pocket.

Ah ! my good little sisters, who are so very much shocked and cry ‘shame,’ follow our train of thought a little. That you should be treated like saints, well and good, but do not let it be forgotten that you are women, and believe me, do not forget it yourselves.

A husband, majestic and slightly bald, is good ; a young husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better. If he rumples your dress a little, and prints a kiss on passing on the back of your neck, let him. When, after coming home from a ball, he tears out the pins, tangles the strings, and laughs like a madman if you are ticklish, let him. Do not cry “murder” if his moustache pricks you, and think that it is because at heart he loves you well. He adores



If he rumples your dress a little, and prints a kiss on the back of
your neck, let him.

your virtues ; is it astonishing then that he should cherish their envelope ? You have a noble soul, it is true, but your body is not bad either, and when one loves fervently, one loves everything at the same time. Do not be alarmed if in the evening, when the fire is burning brightly and you are chatting beside it, he should take off one of your shoes and stockings, put your foot on his lap, and in a moment of forgetfulness carry irreverence so far as to kiss it ; if he likes to pass your large tortoise-shell comb through your hair, if he chooses your perfumes, arranges your plaits, and suddenly says, striking his forehead : “ Sit down there, darling ; I have a notion of a *coiffure*.”

If he turns up his sleeves, and by chance tangles your curls a bit, really where is the harm ? Thank heaven if in the marriage which has been allotted to you as your career, you find a laughing, joyous side ; if in your husband you find the loved reader of the pretty romance you have in your pocket ; if, whilst wearing cashmere shawls and hanging costly gew-gaws in your ears, which is agreeable, you find the joys of a real intimacy, which is delicious. In short, reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a . . . But there again, a word which would make you cry out shame, I wish you the thing, but I will not tell you its name.

Before accepting my theories, ladies, although in your heart and conscience you find them perfect, you will no doubt have several little prejudices to overcome, you will have to struggle above all against your education which is deplorable as I have already said and as I repeat, but that is not a great matter. Think that under pretext of education you are stuffed, my dear sisters. You are varnished too soon like those pictures painted for sales which crack all over six months after purchase. Your disposition is not

guided, you are not cultivated ; you are stifled, you are pruned, you are shaped like those yew trees at Versailles which represent goblets and birds. You are women at the bottom but you no longer look it.

You are handed over to us swaddled, distorted, stuffed with prejudices and principles, heavy as paving stones, and all the more difficult to dislodge inasmuch as you look upon them as sacred ; you are started on the matrimonial journey with so much luggage reckoned indispensable, that at the first station your husband, who is not an angel, loses his temper amidst all these encumbrances, sends it all to the deuce under some pretext or other, lets you go on alone and gets into another carriage. I do not ask, mark me, that you should be allowed to grow up at hap-hazard, that good or evil instinct should be suffered to spring up in you anyhow ; but I would rather that they should not treat your poor mind like the foot of a well born Chinese girl, that they should not enclose it in a porcelain slipper. I shall never believe that woman's virtue depends upon these deformations.

A marriageable young lady is a product of maternal industry, which takes ten years to finish, and which it needs from five to six more years of study on the part of the husband to cleanse, strip, and restore to its real shape.

It takes ten years to make a bride and six years at least to turn this bride into a woman again.

Admit that it is time lost as regards happiness and try to make it up if your husband will let you.

The sole guarantee of fidelity between husband and wife is love. One only keeps side by side with a fellow traveller when one experiences pleasure and happiness in his company. Laws, decrees, oaths may hinder faithlessness or at least punish it, but they can neither hinder nor punish in-

tention. But then so far as regards love, intention and deed are the same.

Is it not true, my dear little sisters, that you are of my opinion? Do not you thoroughly understand that love which is excluded from marriage, should be on the contrary its real pivot? To make oneself loved is the main thing. Believe my white hairs that it is so and let me give you some more advice.

Yes, I urge marriage, I do not conceal it, the happy marriage in which we cast into the common lot our ideas and our sorrows, but also our good humour and our affections. Suppress, in this partnership, gravity and affectation, but add a sprinkling of gallantry and good-fellowship. Have even in your intimacy that coquetry you so readily put on in society. Seek to please him. Be amiable. Consider that your husband is an audience which you must render sympathetic.

Note in your ways of loving those shades, those feminine delicacies which double the price of things. Do not be miserly, but remember, that the way in which we give, adds to the value of the gift; or rather do not give, make yourself sought after. Think of those precious jewels that are arranged with such art in their satin-lined jewel case; never forget the case. Let your nest be soft, let yourself be felt in all its thousand trifles. Put a little of yourself in the arrangement of everything. Be artistic, delicate and refined—you can be so without effort—and let your husband divine in everything that surrounds him, from the lace on the curtains to the perfume of your cuffs, the wish to please him.

Do not say to him, "I love you," that expression may perhaps recall to him a recollection or two. But lead him to say to you "You do love me then?" and answer "No,"

with a little kiss which means "Yes." Let him find beside you the present so pleasant that his past will fade from his memory; and to this end let nothing in you recall that past, for despite himself, he would not forgive it in you. Do not imitate the women whom he may have known, nor the head-dresses, nor the toilettes; that would be to make him believe that he has not changed his manner of life. You have in yourselves another kind of grace, another wit, another coquetry, and above all that springtide of heart and mind which those women have never had. You have a curiosity in life, a need of expansion, a freshness of impression which are—though perhaps you may not imagine it—irresistible charms. Be yourselves and you will be for this loved spouse a novelty, a thousand times more charming than all the by-gones possible. Hide from him neither your candour, nor your inexperience, nor your childish joys, nor your childish fears, be as coquettish of all these as you are of the features of your face, your fine black eyes and your long fair hair.

Nothing more than a little adroitness; do not throw yourselves at his head and have confidence in yourselves.

A man marries the day on which he thinks himself ruined, he feels in his waistcoat pocket—not a *louis*—he is ripe, he goes before the registrar.

Well, I tell you sisters, he is still rich. He has another pocket which he is ignorant of, the fool, and which is full of gold. It is for you to act so that he shall perceive it and be grateful to you for the happiness he has had in finding a fortune.

I will sum up, the more so, as time is getting on and I should not like to cause you to be late for dinner. For mercy's sake, ladies, tear from the clutches of the hussies, whose toilettes you do very wrong in imitating, your husbands'



Do not content yourselves with being virtuous, be seductive,

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hearts. Are you not more refined, more delicate, than they? Do for him whom you love, that which they do for all the world; do not content yourselves with being virtuous, be seductive, perfume your hair, cherish illusion as a rare plant in a golden vase.

A dash of folly if it be possible; hide away your marriage contract and only look at it once in ten years, love one another as if you had not sworn to do so; forget that there are bonds, contracts, pledges, banish from your mind the recollection of the mayor and his scarf. From time to time when you are together fancy that you are only sweethearts; is that not, sister, what you wish at the bottom of your heart?

Ah! Lord, may frankness and youth flourish. Let us love and laugh whilst spring flourishes. Let us love our babies, the little loves, and kiss our wives. Yes, that is moral and healthy; the world is not a damp convent, marriage is not a tomb. Shame on those who in it only find sadness, boredom and sleep. And do not you see that we are defending the cause of the family, that we are preaching the happiness of life, the joy of being together, that joy which renders us better—

Ah! do not speak to me of those young shrivelled-up fellows who have dried up in the ripening. It is they who make a parade of their pretended respect for honest women after having worshipped those who are not so. This respect resembles that which one has for certain big books in the library, which we notice as we pass when there is any one there, but which we never read.

My sisters, my sisters, try to be read, that is the blessing I wish you.

II. AT THE TOWN HALL--AT THE CHURCH--MADAME'S IMPRESSIONS.



It is true that the marriage ceremony at the Town Hall has a tolerable importance, but is it really possible for a well-bred person to take this importance seriously. I have been through it, I have undergone like everyone else this painful formality, and I cannot look back at it without a species of humiliation. On alighting from the carriage I saw to the right a muddy staircase, the walls were placarded with bills of every colour, and in front of one of them a man in a snuff-coloured coat, bare-headed, a pen behind his ear, and a lot of papers under his arm, was rolling a cigarette between his inky fingers. To the left a door opened and I caught a glimpse of a low dark room in which a dozen drummers belonging to the National Guard were smoking black pipes. My first thought on entering this barrack was that I had done wisely in not putting on my grey dress. We ascended the staircase and I saw a long, dirty, ill lit passage, with a number of half glass doors, on which I read, "Burials. Turn the handle," "Expropriations," "Deaths. Knock loudly," "Enquiries," "Births," "Public Health," &c., and at length "Marriages."

We went in in company with a small lad carrying a bottle of ink; the air was thick, heavy, and hot, and turned one sick. Happily an attendant in a blue livery, resembling in appearance the drummers whom I had seen below, came forward to ask us to excuse him for not having ushered us at once into the mayor's drawing-room; which is the first-class waiting-room. I rushed into it as one jumps into a cab when it comes on to rain suddenly. The mayor's draw

ing-room had about it something at once tradesman-like and official that amused me; the clock was one of those which one wins in the lotteries of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; an old-fashioned barometer, a bookcase that seemed to me to have been put there to hide a door, and above it a plaster cast of the sovereign. In the middle of this room was a large office table covered with a green cloth, ink-stained in several places. Imagine the consulting room of a dentist who had been a lawyer. Almost immediately two persons, one of whom was as like as two peas to the cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas, brought in two registers, and after having opened them, wrote in them for some time. They broke off to ask the name, age and baptismal names of both of us, and then continued to write, saying to themselves, "Semi-colon . . . between the aforesaid . . . fresh paragraph, &c., &c."

When he was done writing, the cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas read aloud, through his nose, that which he had composed, and of which I could not understand anything at all, except that my name was several times repeated as well as that of the other "aforesaid." A pen was handed to us and we signed. There. Two struck by the mayor's clock, and I had an appointment with my dressmaker about the fit of the body.

"Is it over?" said I to George, whom to my great astonishment was very pale.

"Not yet, dear," said he, "we are now going into the hall where the marriage ceremony takes place."

The body that wanted altering haunted me. We went into a large empty hall with great bare walls, a bust of the Emperor at the further end over a raised platform, some arm-chairs, and some benches behind them, and dust upon everything. I was in a wrong mood it appears, for it seemed

to me that I was entering the waiting-room at a railway station, and I could not help looking at mamma and my aunts, who were very merry, over the empty chairs. The gentlemen, who no doubt affected not to think as we did, were on the contrary all very serious, and I could see very well that George was really trembling. At length the mayor came in by a little door and appeared before us, awkward and stumpy in his dress-coat, which was too large for him, and which his scarf caused to ruck up. He is a very respectable man who has acquired a decent fortune from the sale of iron bedsteads, but how could I bring myself to imagine that this embarrassed-looking, ill-dressed, timid little fellow could, with a word hesitatingly uttered, unite me in eternal bonds? And then he had a fatal likeness to my piano tuner. Such things only happen to me. Just before it had been the cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas. I bit my lips to keep from breaking out into a laugh.

The mayor, after having bowed to us, as a man bows when without his hat, and in a white neck-tie, that is to say clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms which he did not know what to do with, and briskly began the little ceremony. He hurriedly ran through several passages of the Code, giving the numbers of the paragraphs, and I confusedly understood that I was threatened with the police if I did not blindly obey the orders and the crotchets of my husband, and if I did not follow him wherever he might choose to take me, even if it should be a sixth floor in the Rue-Saint-Victor. A score of times I was on the point of interrupting the mayor, and saying, "Excuse me, sir, but those remarks are scarcely polite as regards myself, and you must know yourself that they are devoid of common sense."

But I restrained myself for fear of frightening the magistrate, who seemed to me to be in a hurry to finish. He

added, however, a few words on the mutual duties of husband and wife—co-partnership—paternity, &c., &c., but all these fine things which would perhaps have made me cry anywhere else seemed grotesque to me, and I could not forget that dozen of drummers playing piquet round the stove, and that range of doors on which I had read “Public Health,” “Burials,” “Deaths,” “Expropriations,” &c. I should have been really hurt at this dealer in iron bedsteads touching on my cherished dreams if the comic side of the situation had not absorbed my whole attention, and if a mad wish to laugh out had not seized me.

“Monsieur Georges. . . do you swear to take for your wife, Mademoiselle. . . &c.,” said the mayor bending forward.

My husband bowed and answered “Yes,” in a very low voice. He has since acknowledged to me that he never felt more emotion in his life than in uttering that “Yes.”

“Mademoiselle Berthe. . .” continued the magistrate, turning to me, “do you swear to take for your husband, &c.”

I bowed with a smile and said to myself, “Certainly ; it is plain enough, since I came here expressly for that.”

That was all. I was married it seems.

My father and my husband shook hands like men who have not met for twenty years, their eyes were moist. As to myself it was impossible for me to share their emotion. I was very hungry, and mamma and I pulled up the carriage at the pastrycook’s before going on to the dressmaker’s.

It was my last maiden tart.

The next morning was the great day, and when I woke it was scarcely daylight. I opened the door leading into the drawing-room, my dress was spread out on the sofa, the veil folded beside it, my boots, my wreath in a large white box, nothing was lacking. I drank a big glass of water. I was

nervous, uneasy, happy, trembling. The morning of a battle in which one is sure of winning a medal. I thought neither of my past nor my future; I was wholly taken up by the idea of the ceremony, of that sacrament, the most solemn of all, of the oath I was about to take before God, and also by the notion of the crowd gathered expressly to see me pass.

We breakfasted early. My father in his boots, his trousers, his white tie and his dressing-gown. My mother was also half dressed. It seemed to me that the servants took greater pains in waiting on me and showed me more respect. I even remember that Marie said, "The hairdresser has come, madame." Madame! Good girl, I have not forgotten it.

It was impossible for me to eat, my throat was parched and I felt all over me shudders of impatience, something like the sensation one experiences when one is very thirsty and waiting for the sugar to melt. The sound of the organ seemed to haunt me and the wedding of Emma and Louis recurred to my mind. I dressed, the hairdresser called me "Madame," too, and did up my hair so nicely that I said, I remember, "Things are beginning well, this coiffure is a good omen." I checked Marie who wanted to lace me more tightly than usual. I know that white makes one look stouter and that Marie was right, but I was afraid least it should drive the blood to my head; I have always had a horror of brides who look as if they had just got up from table. Religious emotions should be too profound to be betrayed by aught save pallor. It is silly to blush under certain circumstances.

When I was dressed I went into the drawing-room to have a little more room and to spread my skirt a bit. My father and George were already there talking busily.

"Have the carriages come?—Yes—And about the *Salutaris*?—Very good then, you will see to everything—And

the marriage coin—Certainly, I have the ring—Good heavens! where is my certificate of confession?—Ah! good, I left it in the carriage, &c. &c.”

They were saying all this hurriedly and gesticulating like the busiest people in the world. When George caught sight of me he kissed my hand, and whilst the maids kneeling about me were settling the skirt, and the hairdresser was clipping the tulle of the veil, he said in a husky voice, “You look charming, dear.”

He was not thinking in the least of what he was saying, and I answered mechanically :

“Do you think so? Not too short, the veil, Monsieur Silvani. Don't forget the bow on the body, Marie.”

When one has to have an eye to everything, one needs all one's wits about one. However, George's husky voice recurred to me, and I said to myself, “I am sure that he has a cold; it is plain that he has had his hair cut too short.”

I soon acquired the certainty of it.

“But you have a cold, my dear fellow,” said my father.

“Don't speak of it,” he answered in a low voice. And still lower and with a somewhat embarrassed smile: “Will you be so obliging as to give me an extra pocket handkerchief, I have one but . . .”

“Certainly, my dear boy.”

“Thanks very much.”

It was a trifle certainly, but I felt vexed, and I remember that going down stairs with them holding up my train behind me, I said to myself, “Provided that he does not sneeze at the altar.”

I soon forgot all about it. We got into the carriage; I felt that everyone was looking at me, and I caught sight of groups of spectators in the street beyond the carriage gates. What I felt is impossible to describe but it was delightful.

The sound of the beadies' canes on the pavement will re-echo eternally in my heart. We halted for a moment on the red drugget. The great organ poured forth the full swell of a triumphal march; thousands of smiling faces turned towards me, and right in the background, amidst a heavenly atmosphere of sunshine, incense, velvet and gold, were two gilt arm-chairs for us to seat ourselves on before the Lord.

I do not know why an old engraving in my father's study crossed my mind. It represents the entry of Alexander the Great into Babylon; he is on an elephant glittering with precious stones. You must know it? Only Alexander was a heathen who had many things to reproach himself with, whilst I was pure. Oh! I felt it was so, I should not have enjoyed it so deliciously otherwise, and besides I had performed my devotions the day before, I was pure! God smiled on me, and with His paternal hand invited me to seat myself in His house, on His red drugget, in His gilt arm-chair. The heavens, full of joy, made music for me, and on high, through the glittering stained-glass windows, the archangels full of kind feeling whispered as they watched me. As I advanced, heads were bent as a wheat field bends beneath the breeze. My friends, my relatives, my enemies, bowed to us and I saw—for one sees everything in spite of oneself on these solemn occasions—that they did not think that I looked bad. On reaching the gilt chair, I bent forward with restrained eagerness—my chignon was high, revealing my neck which is passable—and thanked the Lord. The organ ceased its triumphal song and I could hear my poor mother bursting into tears beside me. Oh! I understand what a mother's heart must feel during such a ceremony. Whilst watching with satisfaction the clergy who were solemnly advancing, I noticed George; he seemed

irritated, he was stiff, upright, his nostrils dilated and his lips set. I have always been a little vexed at him for not having been more sensible to what I was experiencing that day, but men do not understand this poetry.

The discourse of his Lordship who married us was a masterpiece, and was delivered, moreover, with that unction, that dignity, that persuasive charm peculiar to him. He spoke of our two families "in which pious belief was hereditary like honour." You could have heard a pin drop, such was the attention with which the prelate's voice was listened to. Then at one point he turned towards me, and gave me to understand with a thousand delicacies that I was wedding one of the noblest officers in the army. "Heaven smiles," said he, "on the warrior who places at the service of his country a sword blessed by God, and who when he darts into the fray can place his hand upon his heart and shout to the enemy that noble war cry, 'I believe.'" How well that is turned. What grandeur in this holy eloquence. A thrill ran through the assembly. But that was not all. His Lordship then addressed George in a voice as soft and unctuous as it had before been ringing and enthusiastic.

"Sir, you are about to take as your companion a young girl." I scarcely dare recall the graceful and delicate things that his Lordship said respecting me. "Piously reared by a Christian mother who has been able to share with her, if I may say so, all the virtues of her heart, all the charms of her mind"—Mamma was sobbing—"She will love her husband as she has loved her father, that father full of kindness who, from the cradle, implanted in her the sentiments of nobility and disinterestedness which. . ."—Papa smiled despite himself—"Her father whose name is known to the poor, and who in the house of God has his place

marked amongst the elect"—Since his retirement, papa has become churchwarden—"And you, sir, will respect, I feel certain, so much purity, such ineffable candour."—I felt my eyes grow moist—"And without forgetting the physical and perishable charms of this angel whom God bestows upon you, you will thank heaven for those qualities a thousand times more precious and more lasting contained in her heart and mind."—I burst into tears; never had our holy religion appeared nobler, grander, more persuasive. Whilst his Lordship uttered these last words, a ray of sunlight fell upon his venerable brow; I saw him thus through my tears, he was no longer a man, he was an angel, and it seemed to me that it was God Himself who was speaking through his lips.

How mad those are who shun His altars and do not understand the delicious intoxication of a heart which contemplates itself in God.

We were bidden to stand up, and stood face to face with one another like the divine spouses in the picture of Raphael. We exchanged the golden ring, and his Lordship, in a slow, grave voice, uttered some Latin words, the sense of which I did not understand, but which greatly moved me, for the prelate's hand, white, delicate, and transparent, seemed to be blessing me. The censer with its bluish smoke, swung by the hands of children, shed in the air its holy perfume. What a day, great heavens! All that subsequently took place grows confused in my memory. I was dazzled, I was transported. I can remember, however, the bonnet with white roses in which Louise had decked herself out. Strange it is how some people are wanting in taste.

Going to the vestry I leant on the general's arm, and it was then that I saw the spectators' faces. All seemed touched.

Soon they thronged round to greet me. The vestry was



I compared the commonplace words of the mayor with the
eloquent outbursts of the prelate.

full, they pushed and pressed round me, and I replied to all these smiles, to all these compliments, by a slight bow in which religious emotion peeped forth in spite of me. I felt conscious that something solemn had just taken place before God and man; I felt conscious of being linked in eternal bonds. I was married.

By a strange fancy I then fell to thinking of the pitiful marriage of the day before. I compared, God forgive me for doing so, the ex-dealer in iron bedsteads, ill at ease in his dress coat, to his Lordship; the trivial and commonplace words of the mayor, with the eloquent outbursts of the venerable prelate. What a lesson! There earth, here heaven, there the coarse prose of the man of business, here celestial poesy.

George, to whom I lately spoke about this, said :—

“ But, my dear, perhaps you don’t know that marriage at the town hall before the registrar is gratis, whilst. . . .” I put my hand over his mouth to prevent him from finishing; it seemed to me that he was about to utter some impiety.

Gratis, gratis. That is exactly what I find unseemly.

III. A WEDDING NIGHT.



THANKS to country manners and the solemnity of the occasion, the guests had left fairly early. Almost every one had shaken hands with me, some with a cunning smile and others with a foolish one, some with an officious gravity that suggested condolence, and others with a stupid cordiality verging on indiscretion.

General de S. and the prefect, two old friends of the family, were lingering over a game at *écarté*, and frankly

in spite of all the good-will I bore towards them I should have liked to have seen them at the devil, so irritable did I feel that evening.

All this took place, I had forgotten to tell you, the very day of my marriage, and I was really rather tired. Since morning I had been overwhelmed by an average of about two hundred people, all actuated by the best intentions, but as oppressive as the atmosphere before a storm. Since morning I had kept up a perpetual smile for all, and then the good village priest who had married us had thought it his duty, in a very neat sermon as far as the rest of it went, to compare me to Saint Joseph, and that sort of thing is annoying when one is a captain in a lancer regiment. The mayor, who had been good enough to bring his register to the chateau, had for his part not been able, on catching sight of the prefect, to resist the pleasure of crying, "Long live the Emperor." On quitting the church they had fired off guns close to my ears and presented me with an immense bouquet. Finally—I tell you this between ourselves—since eight o'clock in the morning I had had on a pair of boots rather too tight for me, and at the moment this narrative commences it was about half an hour after midnight.

I had spoken to every one except my dear little wife whom they seemed to take a pleasure in keeping away from me. Once, however, on ascending the steps, I had squeezed her hand on the sly. Even then this rash act had cost me a look, half sharp and half sour, from my mother-in-law, which had recalled me to a true sense of the situation. If, sir, you happen to have gone through a similar day of violent effusion and general expansion, you will agree with me that during no other moment of your life were you more inclined to irritability.

What can you say to the cousins who kiss you, to the

aunts who cling round your neck and weep into your waistcoat, to all these smiling faces ranged one beyond the other before you, to all these eyes which have been staring at you for twelve hours past, to all these outbursts of affection which you have not sought but which claim a word from the heart in reply?

At the end of such a day one's very heart is foundered. You say to yourself, "Come, is it all over? Is there yet a tear to wipe away, a compliment to receive, an agitated hand to clasp? Is everyone satisfied? Have they seen enough of the bridegroom? Does anyone want any more of him? Can I at length give a thought to my own happiness, think of my dear little wife who . . . is waiting for me with her head buried in the folds of her pillow? Who is waiting for me?" That flashes through your mind all at once like a train of powder. You had not thought of it. During the whole of the day this luminous side of the question had remained veiled, but the hour approaches, at this very moment the silken laces of her bodice are swishing as they are unloosed, she is blushing, agitated, and dare not look at herself in the glass for fear of noting her own confusion. Her aunt and her mother, her cousin and her bosom friend, surround and smile at her, and it is a question of who shall unhook her dress, remove the orange blossoms from her hair, and have the last kiss.

Good, now come the tears, they are wiped away and followed by kisses. The mother whispers something in her daughter's ear, about a sacrifice, the future, necessity, obedience, a holocaust, and finds means to mingle with these simple but carefully prepared words, the hope of celestial benedictions and of the intercession of a dove or two hidden amongst the bed-curtains.

The poor child does not understand anything about it,

except it be that something unheard of is about to take place, that the young man—she dare not call him anything else in her thoughts—is about to appear as a conqueror and address her in wondrous phrases, the very anticipation of which makes her quiver with impatience and alarm. Phrases, will there be nothing but phrases? The poor child says not a word, she trembles, she weeps, she quivers like a partridge in a furrow. The last words of her mother, the last farewells of her family, ring confusedly in her ears, but it is in vain that she strives to seize on their meaning; her mind, where is that poor mind of hers, she really does not know, but it is no longer under her control. Like a recruit in his first engagement ordered on the field of battle to take care not to break his watch glass, she is neither able to listen to nor to understand the direction given; the coming fusillade invades her thoughts; perhaps they fly back at that supreme moment to the quiet village, the old church spire, perhaps too, a vague smell of powder causes her little nostrils to dilate and her little heart throbs beneath her white chemise with ardour rather than alarm? Who knows, we have seen more than one hero in the guise of a recruit.

“Ah! captain,” I said to myself, “what joys are hidden beneath these alarms, for she loves you. Do you remember that kiss which she let you snatch coming out of church that evening when the Abbé What’s-his-name preached so well, and those hand-squeezings and those softened glances, and— Happy captain, floods of love will inundate you; she is awaiting you, you seducer, you Don Juan, you hero you!” And I furiously gnawed my moustache, I tore my gloves off and then put them on again, I walked up and down the little drawing-room, I shifted the clock which stood on the mantelshelf; I could not keep still. I had already experienced such sensations on the morning of the

assault on the Malakoff. Suddenly the general, who was still going on with his eternal game at *écarté* with the prefect, turned round.

"What a noise you are making, George," said he. "Cards, if you please, Monsieur le Préfet."

"But, general, the fact is that I feel, I will not conceal from you, a certain degree of emotion and—"

"The king—one—and four trumps. My dear friend, you are not in luck," said he to the prefect, and pulling up with an effort the white waistcoat covering his stomach, he slipped some louis which were on the table into his fob; then bethinking himself, he added, "In fact, my poor fellow, you think yourself bound to keep us company. It is late and we have three leagues to cover from here to B. Everyone has left, too." Then taking me by the arm and putting his mouth to my ear, "Eh! captain, now is the time to prove that you are a credit to the regiment," and he burst out laughing.

"He, he, he, general; good night, general."

One does not make a fool of oneself by halves on these solemn occasions.

My superior officer departed, I can still see his thick neck, the back of which formed a roll of fat over his collar of the Legion of Honour. I heard him get into his carriage; he was still laughing at intervals. I could have thrashed him.

"At last," I said to myself, "at last." I mechanically glanced at myself in the glass, I was crimson, and my boots, I am ashamed to say, were horribly uncomfortable. I was furious that such a grotesque detail as tight boots should at such a moment have power to attract my attention, but I promised to be sincere, and I am telling you the whole truth.

Just then the clock struck one, and my mother-in-law made her appearance. Her eyes were red, and her ungloved hand was crumpling up a handkerchief visibly moistened.

At the sight of her my first movement was one of impatience ; I said to myself, "I am in for a quarter of an hour of it at least."

Indeed Madame de C. sank down on to a couch, took my hand and burst into tears. Amidst her sobs, she ejaculated, "George—my dear boy—George—my son."

I felt that I could not rise to the occasion. "Come, captain," I said to myself, "a tear, squeeze forth a tear ; you cannot get out of this becomingly without a tear, or it will be, 'My son-in-law, it is all off.'"

When this stupid phrase, derived from I do not know where—a Palais Royal farce I believe—had once got into my head, it was impossible for me to get rid of it, and I felt bursts of wild merriment welling up to my lips.

"Calm yourself, madame, calm yourself."

"How can I, George ? forgive me, my dear boy."

"Can you doubt, madame ?"

I felt that "madame" was somewhat cold, but I was afraid of making Madame de C. look old by calling her "mother." I knew her to be somewhat of a coquette.

"Oh, I do not doubt your affection ; go, my dear boy, go and . . . make her happy, yes, oh ! yes. Fear nothing on my account, I am strong."

Nothing is more unbearable than emotion when one does not share it. I murmured "Mother," feeling that after all, she must appreciate such an outburst, then approaching, I kissed her, and made a face in spite of myself, such a salt and disagreeable flavour had been imparted to my mother-in-law's countenance by her tears.

II.

It had been decided that we should pass the first week of our honeymoon at Madame de C.'s chateau. A little suite

of apartments had been fitted up for us, upholstered in blue chintz, delightfully cool-looking. The term cool-looking may pass here for a kind of bad joke, for in reality it was somewhat damp in this little Paradise, owing to the freshly repaired walls.

A room had been specially reserved for me, and it was thither that, after having heartily kissed my mother-in-law, I flew up the stairs four at a time. On an arm-chair, drawn in front of the fire, was spread out my maroon velvet dressing gown and close beside it were my slippers. I could not resist and I frantically pulled off my boots. Be that as it may, my heart was full of love, and a thousand thoughts were whirling through my head in frightful confusion. I made an effort, and reflected for a moment on my position.

"Captain," said I to myself, "the approaching moment is a solemn one. On the manner in which you cross the threshold of married life depends your future happiness. It is not a small matter to lay the first stone of an edifice. A husband's first kiss"—I felt a thrill run down my back—"a husband's first kiss is like the fundamental axiom that serves as a basis for a whole volume. Be prudent, captain. She is there beyond that wall, the fair young bride, who is awaiting you; her ear on the alert, her neck outstretched, she is listening to each of your movements. At every creak of the boards she shivers, dear little soul." As I said this, I took off my coat and untied my cravat. "Your line of conduct lies before you ready traced out," I added, "be impassioned with due restraint, calm with some warmth, good, kind, tender, but at the same time let her have a glimpse of the vivacities of an ardent affection, and the seductive aspects of a robust temperament." All at once I put my coat on again. I felt ashamed to enter my wife's room in a dressing gown and night attire. Was it not equal to say-

ing to her, "My dear, I am at home, see how I make myself so." It was making a show of rights which I did not yet possess, so I put on my coat again, and after the thousand details of a careful toilette, I approached the door and gave three discreet little taps. Oh! I can assure you that I was all in a tremble, and my heart was beating so violently, that I pressed my hand to my chest to restrain its throbs. All that was possible of respectful affection, entreaty and discretion had been thrown by me into those three knocks. Saint Peter himself, who is accustomed to keep people waiting at the door, would have been touched by them, and would have answered, I feel certain, "Come in, captain." She answered nothing, and after a moment of anguish I decided to knock again. I felt tempted to say in an earnest voice, "It is I dear, may I come in?" But I also felt that it was necessary that this phrase should be delivered in the most perfect fashion, and I was afraid of marring its effect; I remained therefore with a smile upon my lips as if she had been able to see me, and I twirled the ends of my moustache which, without affectation, I had slightly perfumed.

I soon heard a faint cough which seemed to answer me, and to grant me admission. Women, you see, possess that exquisite tact, that extreme delicacy which is wholly lacking to us. Could one say more cleverly, in a more charming manner, "Come, I await you, my love, my spouse." Saint Peter would not have hit upon it. That cough was heaven opening to me. I turned the handle, the door swept noiselessly over the soft carpet. I was in my wife's room.

A delightful warmth met me face to face, and I breathed a vague perfume of violets and orris root, or something akin, with which the air of the room was laden. A charming disorder was apparent, the ball dress was spread upon



The door swept noiselessly over the soft carpet. I was in
my wife's room.

a lounging chair, two candles were discreetly burning beneath rose-coloured shades; on the mantelshef amidst a thousand trifles, close to a white bouquet slightly faded, was prominently placed a small bottle of Eau des Carmes—the sovereign remedy against fainting fits. I recognised maternal forethought in this detail, and was sincerely touched by it. I drew near the bed on which Louise was reposing; right on the further side of it with her face to the wall, and her head buried in the pillows. Motionless, and with closed eyes she appeared to be asleep, but her heightened colour betrayed her emotion. I must acknowledge that at that moment I felt the most embarrassed of mankind. To take off my garments and unceremoniously slip under the bedclothes was my right; but I felt the brutality of such a proceeding, and resolved to humbly request hospitality. That would be delicate and irreproachable. Oh! you who have gone through these trials, search your memories and recall that ridiculous yet delightful moment, that moment of mingled anguish and joy, when it becomes necessary, without any preliminary rehearsal, to play the most difficult of parts, and to avoid the ridicule which is grinning at you from the folds of the curtains; to be at one and the same time a diplomatist, a barrister, and a man of action, and by skill, tact, and eloquence, render the sternest of realities acceptable without banishing the most ideal of dreams, bite the peach without bruising its skin, and trample upon a foe one adores, without earning her hatred, when it is necessary to drive back the blood mounting to your head, and when your very knowledge is as inconvenient as a packet of gunpowder would be close to a fire.

Good Lord! when I think of it the perspiration breaks out all over my forehead.

I bent over the bed, and in the softest notes, the sweetest

tones my voice could compass, I murmured, "Well, darling?"

One does what one can at such moments; I could not think of anything better, and yet, Heaven knows, I had tried.

No reply, and yet she was awake. I will admit that my embarrassment was doubled. I had reckoned—I can say as much between ourselves—upon more confidence and greater yielding. I had calculated on a moment of effusiveness, full of modesty and alarm it is true, but, at any-rate, I had counted upon such effusiveness, and I found myself strangely disappointed. This silence chilled me.

"You sleep very soundly, dear. Yet I have a great many things to say, won't you talk a little?"

As I spoke I touched her shoulder with the tip of my finger, and saw her suddenly shiver.

"Come," said I, "must I kiss you to wake you up altogether?"

She could not help smiling, and I saw that she was blushing.

"Oh! do not be afraid, dear, I will only just kiss the tips of your fingers gently, like that," and seeing that she let me do so I sat down on the bed.

She gave a little cry, I had sat down on her foot which was straying beneath the bed-clothes.

"Please let me go to sleep," she said with a supplicating air, "I am so tired."

"And how about myself, my dear child, I am ready to drop. See I am in evening dress, and have not a pillow to rest my head on, not one, except this one." I had her hand in mine, and I squeezed it whilst kissing it. "Would you be very vexed to lend this pillow to your husband? Come, are you going to refuse me a little bit of room? I am not troublesome, I can assure you."

I thought I noted a smile on her lips, and, impatient to escape from my delicate position, in a moment I rose, and whilst continuing to converse, hastily and noiselessly undressed. I was burning my ships. When my ships were burnt there was absolutely nothing left for me to do but to get into bed. Lifting up the clothes, therefore, I recommended my soul to God, and boldly advanced one leg. The approach of a red-hot iron could not have had a greater effect. She gave a cry of terror, and I saw her poor little form writhe beneath the bed-clothes like a serpent, then she threw herself towards the wall, and I heard a kind of sob.

I had one leg in and the other out, and remained petrified, a smile on my lips, and supporting myself wholly on one arm.

"What is the matter, dear, what is the matter? Forgive me if I have offended you."

I felt like some brutal animal. I was in the condition of a gunner who has fired the first shot against a beleaguered town. I felt ashamed at having commenced the massacre, and yet I dreamt of a feat which should procure me promotion.

I brought my head closer to her own, and whilst inhaling the perfume of her hair, whispered in her ear :

"I love you, my dear child, I love you, little wifey ; don't you think that I do ?"

She turned towards me her eyes, moistened with tears, and said in a voice broken by emotion and so soft, so low, so tender, that it penetrated to the marrow of my bones.

"I love you too. But let me sleep, it would be so kind of you to let me sleep."

A smack in the face would not have humiliated me more. Yes, I was a coarse swashbuckler, and I felt myself blushing to the tips of my ears. I had badly judged this poor little

heart as pure as the petal of a lily ; I had judged it from my own point of view, that of a man who no longer believes in anything ; I had breathed in her virgin ears words that I had already made use of. I had in my fancied cleverness sought in my past for weapons against the dear little thing who was holding out her supplicating hands to me.

"Sleep, my loved angel, sleep fearlessly, my love, I am going away, sleep whilst I watch over you."

Upon my honour I felt a sob rise in my throat, and yet the idea that my last remark was not badly turned shot through my brain. I pulled the coverings over her again and tucked her up like a child. I can still see her rosy face buried in that big pillow, the curls of fair hair escaping from under the lace of her little night-cap. With her left hand she held the counterpane close up under her chin, and I saw on one of her fingers the new and glittering wedding-ring I had given her that morning. She was charming, a bird nestling in cotton wool, a rose-bud fallen amidst snow. When she was settled I bent over her and kissed her on the forehead.

"I am repaid," said I to her laughing ; "are you comfortable, Louise ?"

She did not answer, but her eyes met mine and I saw in them a smile which seemed to thank me, but a smile so subtle that in any other circumstances I should have seen a shadow of raillery in it.

"Now, captain, settle yourself in this arm-chair and good-night." I said this to myself and I made an effort to raise my unfortunate leg which I had forgotten, an heroic effort, but it was impossible to accomplish it. The leg was so benumbed that I could not move it. As well as I could I hoisted myself upon the other leg, and hobbling reached my arm-chair without appearing too lame. The room seemed to

me twice as wide to cross as the Champ de Mars, for scarcely had I taken a step in its chilly atmosphere—the fire had gone out, it was April, and the chateau overlooked the Loire—than the cold reminded me of the scantiness of my costume. What, to cross the room before that angel, who was doubtless watching me, in the most grotesque of get-ups, and with a helpless leg into the bargain! Why had I forgotten my dressing-gown? However, I reached the arm-chair into which I sank. I seized my dress coat which was beside me, threw it over my shoulders, twisted my white tie round my neck, and like a soldier bivouacking I sought a comfortable position.

It would have been all very well without the icy cold that assailed my legs, and I saw nothing in reach to cover me. I said to myself, "Captain, the position is not tenable," when at length I perceived on the couch . . . One sometimes is childishly ashamed, but I really dared not, and I waited for a long minute struggling between a sense of the ridiculous, and the cold which I felt was increasing. At last when I heard my wife's breathing become more regular and thought that she must be asleep, I stretched out my arm, and pulled towards me her ball dress which was on the couch—the silk rustled enough to wake the dead—and with the energy which one always finds on an emergency, wrapped it round me savagely like a railway rug. Then yielding to an involuntary fit of sybaritism, I unhooked the bellows and tried to get the fire to burn up.

"After all," I said to myself, arranging the blackened embers and working the little instrument with a thousand precautions, "after all I have behaved like a gentleman. If the general saw me at this moment he would laugh in my face; but no matter, I have acted rightly." How timid, awkward, ashamed of oneself one feels in presence of so

much purity and innocence. All my past then rose up before me, and I trampled it under foot, I abused it, I said to myself, "This is a new life, a life of innocence and happiness of which you were unworthy, captain, cap—" If I had not sworn to be sincere, dear reader, I do not know whether I should acknowledge to you that I suddenly felt horrible tinglings in the nasal regions. I wished to restrain myself, but the laws of nature are those which one cannot escape. My respiration suddenly ceased, I felt a superhuman power contract my facial muscles, my nostrils dilated, my eyes closed, and all at once I sneezed with such violence that the bottle of Eau des Carmes shook again. God forgive me. A little cry came from the bed, and immediately afterwards the most silvery frank and ringing outbreak of laughter followed. Then she added in her simple, sweet, musical tones :

"Have you hurt yourself . . . George?" She had said George after a brief silence, and in so low a voice that I scarcely heard it.

"I am very ridiculous, am I not, dear? and you are quite right to laugh at me. What would you have? I am camping out and I am undergoing the consequences."

"You are not ridiculous, but you are catching cold," and she began to laugh again.

"Naughty girl."

"Cruel one, you ought to say, and you would not be wrong if I were to let you fall ill." She said this with charming grace. There was a mingling of timidity and tenderness, modesty and chaff which I find it impossible to express, but which stupefied me. She smiled at me, then I saw her get nearer to the wall in order to leave room for me, and as I hesitated to cross the room,

"Come, forgive me," she said.

I lifted up the bed-clothes, my teeth were chattering.

"How kind you are to me, dear," she said to me after a moment or so; "will you wish me good-night?" and she held out her cheek to me. I approached her, but as the candle had just gone out I made a mistake as to the spot, and my lips brushed hers. She quivered, then after a brief silence she murmured in a low tone, "You must forgive me, you frightened me so just now."

"I wanted to kiss you, dear."

"Well, kiss me, husband."

Within the trembling young girl, the coquetry of the woman was breaking forth in spite of herself.

I could not help it, she exhaled a delightful perfume which mounted to my brain, and the contact of this dear creature whom I touched, despite myself, swept away all my resolutions. Did you do better than I, reader? Perhaps; or perhaps worse? it is possible. In any case do not throw the first stone at me; I did my best and heaven recompensed me for it.

My lips—I do not know how it was—met hers, and we remained thus for a long moment; I felt against my breast the echo of the beating of her heart, and her rapid breathing came full into my face.

"You do love me a little, dear?" I whispered in her ear.

I distinguished amidst a confused sigh a little "yes" that resembled a mere breath.

"I don't frighten you any longer?" I trembled like a leaf and she trembled too.

"No," she murmured very softly.

"You will be my little wife then, Louise; you will let me teach you to love me as I love you?"

"I do love you," said she, but so softly and so gently that she seemed to be dreaming.

How many times have we not laughed over these recollections, already so remote.

IV. THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK.



OWARDS midnight mamma made a sign to me with her eyes, and under cover of a lively waltz we slipped out of the drawing-room. In the hall, the servants, who were passing to and fro, drew aside to let us go by them, but I felt that their eyes were fixed upon me with the curiosity which had pursued me since the morning. The large door giving on to the park was open, although the night was cool, and in the shadow I could make out groups of country folk gathered there to catch a glimpse of the festivities through the windows. These good people were laughing and whispering; they were silent for a moment as we advanced to ascend the staircase, but I once more felt that I was the mark of all these inquisitive looks and the object of all these smiles. The face of mamma who accompanied me was much flushed and large tears were flowing from her eyes.

How was it that an event so gay for some was so sad for others?

As to myself, as little inclined to laugh as to weep, I felt at one and the same time confused, triumphant, humiliated, enchanted, and uneasy. My heart seemed a regular chaos. After having crossed the threshold of the drawing-room, I seemed for a moment like one who has just seen a display of fireworks. No more light, no more noise, I found myself in midnight darkness, face to face with a mysterious horror which, nevertheless, fascinated me.

When I think over it now I can scarcely keep my countenance. What silly terrors at that frightful yet charming moment! Yet, after all, one exaggerates things a great deal.

On reaching the first floor mamma stopped, choking, took my head in her hands and kissed me on the forehead, and exclaimed : "Valentine !" I was not greatly moved by this outburst, knowing that mamma, since she has grown a little too stout, has some difficulty in getting upstairs. I judged, therefore, that the wish to take breath for a moment without appearing to do so, had something to do with this sudden halt, and said to myself : "The danger is not just here." I felt, however, that there was one, threatening, hidden beneath my feet, which was on the point of exploding, and at each creak of the floor, I thought, "It is perhaps coming."

We entered the nuptial chamber ; it was as coquettish as possible, refreshing to the eye, snug, elegant, and adorned with fine Louis XVI, furniture, upholstered in Beauvais tapestry. The bed, above all, was a marvel of elegance, but to tell the truth I had no idea of it till a week later. At the outset it seemed to me that I was entering an austere-looking locality, the very air we breathed there appeared to me to have something solemn and awe-striking about it.

"Here is your room, child," said mamma ; "but first of all come and sit here beside me, my dear girl."

At these words we both burst into tears and mamma then expressed herself as follows :

"The kiss you are giving me, Valentine, is the last kiss that I shall have from you as a girl. Your husband, for George is that now—"

At these words I shuddered slightly, and by a singular freak of my brain pictured to myself Monsieur George . . . George . . . my husband . . in a cotton night-cap and a dressing-gown. The vision flashed across my mind in the midst of the storm. I saw him just as plainly as if he had been there, it was dreadful. The night-cap came over his forehead, down

to his eyebrows, and he said to me, pressing my hand, "At last, Valentine, you are mine; do you love me, oh! tell me do you love me?" And as his head moved as he uttered these words, the horrible tuft at the end of his night-cap waggled as an accompaniment.

"No," I said to myself, "it is impossible for my husband to be got up in such a fashion; let me banish this image. . . and yet my father wears the hideous things, and my brother, who is quite young, has them already. Men wear them at all ages, unless though" . . . It is frightful to relate, but George now appeared to me with a red and green bandanna handkerchief tied round his head. I would have given ten years of my life to be two hours older, and hurriedly passed my hand across my eyes to drive away these diabolical visions.

However, mamma, who had been still speaking all the time, attributing this movement to the emotion caused by her words, said, with great sweetness :

"Do not be alarmed, my dear Valentine, perhaps I am painting the picture in too gloomy colours; but my experience and my love render this duty incumbent upon me."

I have never heard mamma express herself so fluently. I was all the more surprised as, not having heard a word of what she had already said, this sentence seemed suddenly sprung upon me. Not knowing what to answer, I threw myself into the arms of mamma, who, after a minute or so, put me away gently, saying: "You are suffocating me, dear."

She blew her nose loudly, wiped her eyes with her little cambric handkerchief which was soaking, and said, smilingly :

"Now that I have told you what my conscience imposed upon me, I am strong; see, dear, I think that I can smile. Your husband, my dear child, is a man full of delicacy.

Have confidence, accept all that comes from him without misgiving and without resistance. Your position as a wife, my dear Valentine, exposes you from to-day . . . exposes you to . . .” mamma coughed for a moment, and repressed a slight sob ; I could see very well that she was seeking an expression . . . “exposes you to astonishments . . . painful, perhaps, at the outset, but which will leave in your life many delightful recollections. Happiness must be bought, my dear child, do not forget these words, and you must pay for it in advance in this world. You will see that I am speaking truly . . . I have been a young wife like yourself . . . it not a century ago ; I remember that a husband’s first kiss makes one shiver, but . . . however—”

Mamma kissed me on the forehead, which finished off her sentence, and added :

“Now, dear one, that I have fulfilled a duty I regarded as sacred, come here and let me take your wreath off.”

“Good heavens,” I said to myself, as I took the hairpins out of my hair, “whither am I going ? What obscurity ! Mamma has been telling me a number of solemn things it appears, which are a sacred duty on her part, and I have not understood a word, not one.” I was a little angry with mamma, I dare scarcely acknowledge it, for having said so many words which had evidently been so carefully chosen as to be incomprehensible. I was vexed at her having touched on my inmost terrors, increased them without explaining any one of them to me, and obliged me to blush without re-assuring me.

All these reflections only occurred to me later on ; at that moment I only felt a frightful discomfort, a prodigious uneasiness. At each hairpin which fell, at each ribbon which was unfastened, it seemed to me that I was advancing further into a stream which would soon bear me away.

"By this time," I thought, "they have noticed that I have left the drawing-room; they are saying, 'Where is the bride?' and smiling. Monsieur George is getting uneasy. What is he doing? what is he thinking? where is he?"

"Have you tried on your night-cap, dear?" said mamma, who had recovered herself; "it looks rather small to me, but it is nicely embroidered. Oh, it is lovely."

And she examined it from every point of view.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. "It is I," said several voices, amongst which I distinguished the flute-like tones of my aunt Laura, and those of my god-mother. Madame de P., who never misses a chance of pressing her two thick lips to someone's cheeks, accompanied them. Their eyes glittered, and all three had a sly and triumphant look, ferreting and inquisitive, which greatly intimidated me. Would they also set about fulfilling a sacred duty?

"Oh, you are really too pretty, my angel," said Madame de P., kissing me on the forehead, after the moist fashion peculiar to her, and then sitting down in the large Louis XVI arm-chair.

"You are quite pale, pet," said my aunt, "do not tremble like that. Haven't you put a bottle of Eau des Carmes somewhere about?" she added in a lower tone to my mother, who was again bathed in tears.

"Do not confound the white with the yellow," continued aunt Laura, referring to the Eau des Carmes. "Poor dear pet, how easily I can put myself in her place."

At these words the four ladies involuntarily glanced at one another, and a little burst of laughter escaped them. You cannot have any idea of the impression produced on me by this indiscreet gaiety. My maid had not been allowed to



'Oh, you are really too pretty, my angel," said Madame de P.,
kissing me on the forehead.

come up and undress me, so that all of them, taking off their gloves, set to work, to render me this service. They tangled the laces, caught their own lace in the hooks, and laughed heartily all the while.

"It is the least that the oldest friend of the family"—she loved to speak of herself as such—"should make herself useful at such a moment," muttered Madame de P., holding her eye-glass in one hand, and working with the other. "Poor little dove, what fine arms she has, and what shoulders. There is a husband not very far from here whom I do not feel inclined to pity very much."

"But there is a wife whom I do not pity either," replied my aunt. "You must not blush, my dear. The fact is that the captain is one of the handsomest men I know. He is not what one calls a fine man, like your uncle, for instance. Oh, I have pricked my finger with this nuisance of a pin. You do not recollect your uncle, but Madame de P. must remember him."

"Ideal! oh, truly ideal. I can still see him at the altar, he was a picture. At that time they still wore knee-breeches, and they showed off his legs which were matchless."

"Yes, certainly, he was imposing; but I know what it costs one to have a fine man for a husband. You have chosen yours simply amongst the handsome ones, my dear, and you have done well, they keep better . . . You see in a man the look and the leg go for a great deal . . . the gentleman is summed up in that. . . . The captain has the look . . . I am sure that he has the leg. You will tell me that, won't you? Kiss me, dear; you make me feel five and thirty years younger. The leg is the bearing, the look is the mind. How are you going to do your hair up for the night?"

"But, as usual, aunt."

"As usual! little lamb, you are an angel. Does the captain imagine what a treasure is going to be handed over to him? As usual! Madame de P., do you hear what Valentine says?—As usual. Oh, five and thirty years ago I should have said the same. The first time that I caught sight of your uncle in his dressing-gown, I was ready to throw myself out of the window. I had an unreasonable modesty, I can say. Modesty, and a fine head of hair, those were my strong points. Well, thanks to God, for it was God's will certainly, your uncle . . . consoled me with kindness."

"What a heart he had!" exclaimed the oldest friend of the family, tugging at a last lace.

"A real St. Vincent de Paul," said my aunt, with a sigh. "Ah! you did well not to choose what they call a fine man, Valentine."

I passed into a little boudoir to complete my toilet for the night, and found on the marble of the dressing table five or six bottles of scent, tied up with red, white, and blue ribbons, an act of attention on the part of my aunt Laura. I felt the blood flying to my head, there was an unbearable singing in my ears. Now that I can coolly weigh the impressions I underwent, I can tell that what I felt above all was anger. I would have liked to be in the furthest depths of the wildest forest in America, so unseemly did I find this curious kindness which haunted me with its attentions. I should have liked to have conversed a little with myself, to have fathomed my own emotion somewhat, and, in short, to have uttered a brief prayer before throwing myself into the torrent.

However, through the open door, I could hear the four ladies whispering together and stifling their outbursts of laughter; I had never seen them so gay. I made up my mind, I crossed the room and shaking off the pretty little

white velvet slippers which Louise had embroidered for me jumped into my bed . . the bed. I was not long in finding out that it was no longer my own narrow little bed. It was immense and I hesitated a moment, not knowing which way to turn. I felt nevertheless a physical feeling of comfort. The bed was warm and I do not know what scent rose from its silken coverlet. I felt myself sink into the mass of feathers, the pillows twice over too large and trimmed with embroidery, gave way as it were beneath me, burying me in a soft and perfumed abyss. But all this did not calm the fever of my mind nor the impatience—how can I dare say so—the impatience of my heart. Yes, amidst all this medley of emotion, I could distinguish an inexplicable desire which from time to time rose up and smiled at me; but I was nevertheless afraid, and this phantom would have been horrible, if I had not vaguely recognized in its eyes George's glance and upon its lips a fair and silky moustache which often in my dreams I had touched with my fingers. It was a nightmare horrible in its very sweetness, and I strove to banish it with all my might lest it should intoxicate me.

At length the ladies rose, and after having given a glance round the room, doubtless to make sure that nothing was lacking, approached the bed.

"Good-night, my dear girl," said my mother bending over me.

She kissed me, carried her handkerchief, now reduced to a wet dab, to her eyes and went out with a certain precipitation.

"Remember that the old friend of the family kissed you, on this night, my love," said Madame de P. as she moistened my forehead.

"Come, my little spotless lamb, good night and sleep

well," said my aunt with her deuce of a smile that seemed to issue from her nose. She added in a whisper, "You love him, don't you? The sly-boots, she won't answer. Well, since you love him so much, don't tell him so, my dear. But I must leave you, you are sleepy. Good-night."

And she went away smiling.

At length I was alone. I listened, the doors were being closed, I heard a carriage roll along the road, the flame of the two candles placed upon the mantel-shelf quivered silently and were reflected in the looking-glass. This isolation after so much bustle, and perhaps also another reason which I did not dare to acknowledge to myself, troubled me so that I felt myself trembling from head to foot. I plunged further into the bed and took refuge against the wall, tightly twisted up in the sheets. It seemed to me that the wall protected me, on one side at any rate. I sought to think about the ceremony of that morning, the dinner, the ball. I said to myself, clenching my fists to concentrate my thoughts: "How was Marie dressed? She was dressed in—dressed in—dressed in—" I repeated the words aloud to impart more authority to them and oblige my mind to reply; but do what I would it was impossible for me to drive away the thought that invaded my whole being.

"He is coming. What is he doing? Where is he? Perhaps he is on the stairs now. How shall I receive him?"

I loved him, oh! with my whole soul, I can acknowledge it now; but I loved him quite at the bottom, quite at the bottom. In order to think of him I went down into the very bottomest chamber of my heart, bolted the door and crouched down in the darkest corner. I had there, in my hiding place, hundreds of caresses, strings of sounding kisses which I tried myself on my own bare arms and which ap-

peared to me very sweet to receive. I had many things to tell him, many confidences to impart to him, I had all the keys of my heart to place in his hands. But how find courage to do all this. Heavens, how unhappy I was in that little nook! From time to time I thought I heard a noise and I held my breath and strained my ears. At length at a certain moment the floor creaked, a door was opened in the passage with a thousand precautions, and I heard the tread of a boot—a boot! I felt I was going mad. Involuntarily I drew the bed-clothes up to my chin and exclaimed inwardly, "My God protect me;" but almost immediately added despite myself, "But do not protect me too much, Lord." For I experienced a stern pleasure in not drawing back before the peril and in feeling that I was wholly exposed to it. I know that on the battle-field soldiers undergo this infernal sensation.

The boot ceased to creak and I heard quite close to me, on the other side of the wall which was nothing but a thin partition, an arm-chair being rolled across the carpet, and then a little cough, which seemed to me to vibrate with emotion. It was he. But for the partition I could have touched him with my finger. A few moments later I could distinguish the almost imperceptible sound of footsteps on the carpet; this faint sound rang violently in my head. All at once my breathing and my heart both stopped together, there was a tap at the door. The tapping was discreet, full of entreaty and delicacy. I wanted to reply, "Come in," but I had no longer any voice, and besides was it becoming to answer like that, so curtly and plainly? I thought "Come in," would sound horribly unseemly, and I said nothing. There was another tap. I should really have preferred the door to have been broken open with a hatchet or for him to have come down the chimney. In

my agony, I coughed faintly amongst my sheets. That was enough ; the door opened and I divined from the alteration in the light shed by the candles that someone whom I did not dare look at was interposing between them and myself.

This someone, who seemed to glide across the carpet, drew near the bed, and I could distinguish out of the corner of my eye, his shadow on the wall. I could scarcely restrain my joy ; my captain wore neither cotton night-cap nor bandanna handkerchief, that was indeed something. However, in this shadow which represented him in profile, his nose had so much importance that amidst all my uneasiness a smile flitted across my lips. Is it not strange how all these little details recur to your mind ? I did not dare turn round, but I devoured with my eyes this shadow representing my husband ; I tried to trace in it the slightest of his gestures, I even sought the varying expressions of his physiognomy, but alas ! in vain.

I do not know how to express in words all that I felt at that moment ; my pen seems too clumsy to write, and besides, did I really see clear in my heart ? No doubt I was curious to at length enter that unknown world, concerning which I had heard so much whispering going on ; but at the same time, I trembled lest the doors should be all at once thrown wide open to me. No doubt, I wanted the mysterious veil to be lifted up for me, but bit by bit, beginning with one corner.

Do men comprehend all this ? Do they understand that the heart requires gradual changes, and that if a half light awakens, a noon-day blaze dazzles and burns ? It is not that the poor child who is trembling in a corner refuses to learn ; far from that, she has aptitude, good will, and a quick and ready intelligence ; she knows she has reached the age at which it is necessary to know how to read, she rejects

neither the science nor even the teacher. It is the method of instruction that makes her uneasy. She is afraid least this young professor, whose knowledge must be so extensive, should turn over the pages of the book too quickly and neglect the A B C. She dreads too much eloquence, and then, too, she is ashamed of being ignorant of a world of things, of acknowledging herself a simple child, before this man whom she only loves as yet with precaution, and who is only after all her husband before God and man ; which is something but not all. A few hours back he was the betrothed, submissive, humble, ready to kneel down before her, hiding his knowledge as one hides a sin, speaking his own language with a thousand circumspections, at any moment it might have been thought that he was going to blush. She was a queen, he a child ; and now all at once the rôles are changed, it is the submissive subject who arrives in the college cap of a professor, hiding under his arm an unknown and mysterious book. Is the man in the college cap going to command, to smile, to obtrude himself and his book, to speak Latin, to deliver a lecture ?

She does not know that this learned individual is trembling too, that he is greatly embarrassed over his opening lesson, that emotion has caused him to forget his Latin, that his throat is parched, and his legs are trembling beneath him. She does not know this, and I tell you between ourselves, it is not her self-esteem that suffers least at this conjuncture. She suffers at finding herself after so many signatures, contracts and ceremonies—still a charming child—and nothing more. For the first time her snow-white virtue seems to her rather heavy, thick and unseasonable, a winter garment. But how can she explain this ? She shudders at the idea of being understood, she trembles also lest she should not be. Her little heart says “ Yes ” and “ No ” at one and the same

time, and she is silent, hiding the tempest within herself. She does not want to appear too stupid, nor at the same time too sure of herself. Her dread of letting her terror be seen further increases it. She would like to feign sleep, simulate a horrible headache, or a sudden faintness; she would like to break her leg in order to have a subject of conversation; she would give half her beautiful fair hair to find herself as yesterday, were it only for a moment, seated in an arm-chair with a fan in her hand. Alas, my dear child, the thing is impossible; and, believe me, you need not be too sorry that it is.

I believe that this first step in conjugal life will, according to the circumstances accompanying it, give birth to captivating sympathies or invincible repulsion. But to give birth to these sympathies, to strike the spark that is to set light to this explosion of infinite gratitude and joyful love, what art, what tact, what delicacy, and at the same time what presence of mind is needed by the workman! I have always thought that soldiers, accustomed to make up their minds quickly, and to keep cool, were more . . . but perhaps I am judging this matter a little too much in accordance with my personal impressions.

How was it that at the first word George uttered my terrors vanished? His voice was so firm and so sweet, he asked me so gaily for leave to draw near the fire and warm his feet, and spoke to me with such ease and animation of the incidents of the day. I said to myself, "It is impossible for the least baseness to be hidden under all this." In presence of so much good humour and affability my scaffolding fell to pieces. I ventured a look from beneath the sheets; I saw him comfortably installed in the big arm-chair, and I bit my lips. I am still at a loss to understand this little fit of ill-temper. When one is reckoning on a fright one is

really disappointed at its delaying itself. Never had George been more witty, more affectionate, more well-bred ; he was still the man of the day before. He must really have been a monster of dissimulation, or I myself must have been very excited.

"You are tired out, I am certain, darling," he said.

The word "darling" made me start, but did not frighten me ; it was the first time he had called me so, but I really could not refuse him the privilege of speaking thus. However it may be, I maintained my reserve, and in the same tone as one replies, "No thanks, I don't take tea," I answered :

"Oh ! yes, I am worn out."

"I thought so," he added, approaching the bed ; "you cannot keep your eyes open, you cannot even look at me, my dear little wife."

This "dear little wife" would not have been alarming in itself, save for the tone of voice, rather too thrilling, in which the words were uttered. It seemed to me that I had caught sight of a bayonet behind a bush.

"I will leave you," continued he, "I will leave you, you need repose." And he drew still more closely to me, which was not natural. Then stretching out his hand which I knew was white and well cared for, "Won't you give me a little shake of the hand, dear ? I am half asleep too, my pretty little wife." His face wore an expression which was infernal, though not without its charm ; as he said this I saw clearly that he had lied to me like a demon, and that he was no more sleepy than I was.

However that may be, I was guilty of the fault, the carelessness, it is always carelessness that causes disaster, of letting him take my hand which was straying by chance under the lace of the pillows.

I was that evening in a special condition of nervous

sensibility, for at this contact a strange sensation ran through me from head to foot. It was not that the captain's hand had the softness of satin—I believe that physical sensations in us women, have causes directly contrary to those which move men; for that which caused me such lively emotion was precisely its firmness. There was something strong, manly, and powerful about it. He squeezed my hand rather strongly. My rings which I have a fancy for wearing all at once hurt me, and—I really should not have believed it—but I liked it very much, perhaps too much. For the first time I found an inexplicable, an almost intoxicating charm, in this intimate contact with a being who could have crushed me between his fingers and that in the middle of the night too, in silence, without any possibility of help, I myself given over, abandoned to him. It was horribly delicious.

I did not withdraw my hand which he kissed, but so lingeringly. The clock struck two and the last sound had long since died away when his lips were still there quivering with rapid little movements which were so many imperceptible kisses, moist, warm, burning. I felt gleams of fire flashing around me. I wished to draw away my hand but could not; I remember perfectly well that I could not. His moustache pricked me, and whiffs of the scent with which he perfumed it reached me and completed my trouble. I felt my nostrils dilating despite myself, and striving but in vain to take refuge in my inmost being I exclaimed inwardly, "Protect me, Lord, but this time with all your might; a drop of water, Lord, a drop of water." I waited—no appreciable succour reached me from above. It was not till a week afterwards that I understood the intentions of Providence.

"You told me you were sleepy," I murmured in a trem-

bling voice. I was like a shipwrecked person clutching at a floating match-box; I knew quite well that the captain would not go away.

"Yes, I was sleepy, pet," said George, approaching his face to mine; "but now I am athirst;" he put his lips to my ear and whispered softly, "athirst for a kiss from you, love."

This "love" was the beginning of the catastrophe, it was the dawn of another life. The spouse, the lover was making his appearance, the past was fleeing away, I was entering on the future. At length I had crossed the frontier, I was in a foreign land. Oh! I acknowledge—for what is the use of feigning, that I drank in this "love," and I felt that it entered into and spread itself through me. I felt that I was getting out of my depth, I let go the last branch that held me to the shore and in myself I repeated, "Yes, I love you, yes, I am willing to follow you, yes, I am yours, love, love, love." I repeated "love" closing my eyes as I felt his face draw near mine and his hair mingle with my own.

An idea still tormented me; I thought that he must surely be ignorant of all that was taking place within me. I could not however tell him, good heavens, no. It was for him to see, to understand, to divine. I think that he had a suspicion of my inward trouble, for he added with a tenderness as penetrating as a bodkin of gold:

"Won't you kiss your husband, come, won't you?"

And his mouth was so near my own that it seemed to meet my lips.

"Yes," said I.

I had spoken in so low a tone that I hoped he would not hear me, but he did, and I felt myself dying beneath the embrace which followed this kiss, the last silent surrender of myself.

At the moment when a stream falling into some mighty

river mingles its waters, loses its name and its being, forgets itself for ever as it yields to the rushing current, it must feel what I felt then, a kind of death which resembles a resurrection. I was no longer. . .

August 7th, 185. . . How many times have I not read through you during the last two years, my little blue note-book ! How many things I might add as marginal notes if you were not doomed to the flames, to light my first fire this autumn ! How could I have written all this, and how is it that having done so I have not dared to complete my confidences ! No one has seen you at any rate, no one has turned your pages. Go back into your drawer, dear, with, pending the first autumn fire, a kiss from your Valentine.

NOTE.—Owing to what circumstances this blue note-book, doomed to the flames, was discovered by me in an old Louis Seize chiffonnier I had just bought, does not greatly matter to you, dear reader, and would be out of my power to explain even if it did.

V. THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK AGAIN.



WHEN I think that I was going to throw you into the fire, poor dear. Was I not foolish ? Whom else could I confide in ? If I had not you, to whom could I tell all those little things at which every one laughs, but which make you cry ?

This evening, for instance, I dined alone, for George was invited out ; well to whom else can I acknowledge that when I found myself alone face to face with a leg of mutton, cooked to his liking, and with the large carving knife which is usually beside his plate, before me, I began to cry like a child ? To whom else can I admit that I drank out of the Bohemian wine-glass he prefers, to console me a little ?

But if I was to mention this they would laugh in my face. Father Cyprien himself, who nevertheless has a heart running over with kindness, would say to me :

“Let us pass that by, my dear ehild, let us pass that by.”

I know him so well, Father Cyprien, whilst you, you always listen to me, my poor little note-book ; if a tear escapes me, you kindly absorb it and retain its trace like a good-hearted friend. Hence I love you.

And since we are in tête-à-tête let us have a chat. You won't be angry with me for writing with a pencil, dear. You see I am very comfortably settled in my big bye-bye and I do not want to have any ink-stains. The fire sparkles on the hearth, the street is silent, let us forget that George will not return till midnight and turn back to the past.

I cannot recall the first month of that dear past without laughing and weeping at one and the same time.

How foolish we were ! How sweet it was !

There is a method of teaching swimming which is not the least successful I am told. It consists in throwing the future swimmer into the water and praying God to help him. I am assured that after the first lesson he keeps himself afloat.

Well I think that we women are taught to be wives in pretty much the same fashion.

Happily or otherwise—the point is open to discussion—marriage is a hurricane,—something unheard of and horribly violent.

In a single night and without any transition, everything is transformed and changes colour, the erst white-cravatted, freshly curled, carefully dressed gentleman makes his appearance in a dressing gown. That which was prohibited becomes permissible, the code is altered, and words acquire a meaning they never had before, *et cetera, et cetera.*

It is not that all this is so alarming, if taken the right way—a woman with some courage in her heart and some flexibility in her mind supports the shock and does not die under it ; but the firmest of us are amazed at it and stand open-mouthed amidst all these strange novelties, like a penniless gourmet in the shop of Potel and Chabot.

They dare not touch these delicacies surrounding them, though invited to taste. It is not that the wish or the appetite is lacking to them, but all these fine fruits have been offered them so lately that they have still the somewhat acid charm of green apples or forbidden fruit. They approach but they hesitate to bite.

After all, why complain ? What would one have to remember if one had entered married life like an inn, if one had not trembled a little when knocking at the door ? And it is so pleasant to recall things, that one would sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past.

It was, I recollect, two days after the all-important one ; I had gone into his room, I no longer remember why ; for the pleasure of going in I suppose and thereby acting as a wife. A strong desire is that which springs up in your brain after leaving church to look like an old married woman. You put on caps with ribbons, you never lay aside your cashmere shawl, you talk of “my place,” two nice words, and then you bite your lips to keep from breaking out into a laugh. And “my husband,” and “my maid,” and the first dinner you order, when you forget the soup. All this is charming, and however ill at ease you may feel at first in all these new clothes, you are mad to put them on.

So I had gone into the dressing room of my husband, who, standing before the glass, and very lightly clad, was prosaically shaving.

“Excuse me, dear,” said he laughing, and he held up his

shaving brush, covered with white lather, "You will pardon my going on with this. Do you want anything?"

"I came, on the contrary," I answered, "to see whether you had need of anything," and greatly embarrassed myself, for I was afraid of being indiscreet, and I was not sure whether one ought to go into one's husband's room like this, I added innocently: "Your shirts have buttons, have they not?"

"Oh! what a good little housewife I have married. Do not bother yourself about such trifles, my pet; I will ask your maid to look after my buttons," said he.

I felt confused, I was afraid of appearing too much of a school-girl in his eyes. He went on working his soap into a lather with his shaving brush. I wanted to go away, but I was interested in such a novel fashion, by the sight of my husband, that I had not courage to do so. His neck was bare, a thick strong neck, but very white and changing its shape at every movement, the muscles, you know? It would have been horrible in a woman that neck, and yet it did not seem ugly to me. Nor was it admiration that inspired me with, it was rather like gluttony. I wanted to touch it. His hair, cut very short—according to regulation—grew very low down, and between its commencement and the ear, there was quite a smooth white place. The idea at once occurred to me that if ever I became brave enough, it was there that I should kiss him oftenest; it was strange that presentiment, for it is in fact on that little spot that I

He stopped short. I fancied I understood that he was afraid of appearing comical in my eyes, with his face smothered in lather; but he was wrong, I felt myself all in a quiver at being beside a man—the word man is rather distasteful to me, but I cannot find another, for husband would

not express my thoughts—at being beside a man in the exercise of his functions. I should have liked him to have gone on without troubling himself, I should have liked to have seen how he managed to shave himself without encroaching on his moustache, how he made his parting and brushed his hair with the two round brushes I saw on the table, what use he made of all the little instruments set out in order on the marble, tweezers, scissors, tiny combs, little pots and bottles with silver tops, and a whole arsenal of bright things, that aroused quite a desire to beautify oneself in one.

I should have liked him whilst talking to have attended to the nails of his hands which I was already very fond of, or better still, to have handed them over to me. How I should have rummaged in the little corners, cut, filed, arranged all that.

“Well, dear, what are you looking at me like that for?” said he smiling.

I lowered my eyes at once, and felt that I was blushing. I was uneasy, although charmed, amidst these new surroundings. I did not know what to answer, and mechanically I dipped the tip of my finger into the little china pot in which the soap was being lathered.

“What is the matter, darling?” said he approaching his face to mine, “have I offended you?”

I do not know what strange idea shot through my mind, but I suddenly took my hand from the pot and stuck the big ball of lather at the end of my finger on the tip of his nose. He broke out into a hearty laugh and so did I; though I had trembled for a moment, least he should be angry.

“So that’s the way in which you behave to a captain in the lancers? You shall pay me for this, you wicked little darling,” and shaving brush in hand he chased me round



He knelt down before me and yielded his head to me.

the room. I dodged round the table, I took refuge behind the arm-chair, upsetting his boots with my skirt, and getting the tongs entangled in it. Passing by the sofa I noticed his uniform laid out—he had to wait on the general that morning—and seizing his schapska I made use of it as a buckler. But laughter paralysed me, and besides what could a poor little woman do against a soldier, even with a buckler?

He ended by catching me—the struggle was a fearful one. It was all very well for me to scream as I threw my head backward over the arm by which he clasped me, I none the less saw the frightful brush like a big snowball at the end of a little stick, come nearer and nearer.

Thank Heaven he was merciful, and was satisfied with daubing just a little white spot on my chin, exclaiming. “The cavalry have avenged themselves.”

But seizing the brush in turn I said to him very prettily, “Captain, let me lather your face.”

I did so want to.

For an answer he held his face towards me, and seeing that I was obliged to stand on the tips of my toes and support myself a little on his shoulder, he knelt down before me, and yielded his head to me.

With the tip of my finger I made him bend his face to the right and the left, backwards and forwards, and I lathered and lathered, laughing like a madwoman. It amused me so to see my captain obey me like a child; I would have given I don't know what for him to have had his sword and spurs on at that moment. Unfortunately, he was in his slippers. I spread the lather over his nose and forehead; he closed his eyes, and put his two arms round me saying:—

“Go on, little woman, go on; don't put any into my mouth, that is all I ask,”

Well at that moment I was seized by a very strange feeling, my laughter died away all at once ; I felt ashamed of having my husband at my feet and of amusing myself with him like a doll.

I dropped the shaving brush, I felt my eyes grow moist and suddenly becoming more tender, I bent towards him and kissed him on the neck ; that was the only spot left clear.

His ear was so near that passing by it my lips moved almost in spite of myself, and I whispered :

"Don't be angry, dear," and as emotion overcame me, and repentance too I added, "I love you, I do love you."

"My own pet," he said suddenly rising. His voice shook.

What delightful moments were those. Unfortunately, oh ! yes, unfortunately, he could not press his lathered face to mine.

"Wait a bit," he exclaimed, darting towards the wash-hand basin, full of water, "Wait a bit !"

Oh ! how long it took him to wash it off.

VI. MY WIFE GOES TO A DANCE.



ADAME—Ah ! it is nice of you to come home early ! (*Looking at the clock.*) A quarter to six. But how cold you are ; your hands are frozen ; come and sit by the fire. (*She puts a log on the fire.*) I have been thinking of you all day. It is cruel to have to go out in such weather. Have you settled your business ? are you satisfied ?

MONSIEUR—Very well satisfied, dear. (*Aside.*) I have never known my wife so amiable. (*Aloud, taking up the bellows.*) Very well satisfied, and I am very hungry. Has baby been good ?

MADAME—You are hungry. Bravo! (*Calling out.*) Marie, tell them in the kitchen that your master wants to dine early. Let them look after you know what . . . and a lemon.

MONSIEUR—A mystery?

MADAME—Yes, sir, I have a little surprise for you, and I fancy that you will be delighted with it.

MONSIEUR—Well, what is the surprise?

MADAME—Oh, it is a real surprise. How curious you are! your eyes are glittering already. Suppose I was not to tell you anything?

MONSIEUR—Then you would break my heart.

MADAME—There, I don't want to tease you. You are going to have some little green oysters and a partridge. Am I good?

MONSIEUR—Oysters and a partridge! You are an angel. (*He kisses her.*) An angel. (*Aside.*) What the deuce is the matter with her? (*Aloud.*) Have you had any visitors to-day?

MADAME—I saw Ernestine this morning, but she only just popped in and out again. She has just turned away her maid. Would you believe it, that girl was seen the night before last dressed up as a man, and in her master's clothes, too? It was too much.

MONSIEUR—That comes of having confidential servants. And you have only seen Ernestine?

MADAME—And quite enough too. (*With an exclamation.*) How stupid of me! I forgot. I had a visit from Madame de Lyr.

MONSIEUR—God bless her! Does she still laugh on one side of her mouth to hide her black tooth?

MADAME—How wicked you are! She likes you very well though. Poor woman! I was truly touched by her

visit. She came to remind me that we . . now you will be angry. (*She kisses him and sits down beside him.*)

MONSIEUR—Be angry ! be angry ! I'm not a Turk. Come, what is it ?

MADAME—Come, let us go to dinner. You know that there are oysters and a partridge. I won't tell you—you are in a bad temper already. Besides, I almost told her that we are not going.

MONSIEUR (*raising his hands to heaven*)—I thought so. She and her evening may go to the deuce. What have I done to the woman that she should pester me so ?

MADAME—She thinks she is affording you pleasure. She is a charming friend. For my own part, I like her because she always speaks well of you. If you had been hidden in that cabinet during that visit, you could not have helped blushing. (*He shrugs his shoulders.*) “Your husband is so amiable,” she said to me, “so lively, so witty. Try to bring him ; it is a privilege to have him.” I said, “Certainly,” but without any meaning, you know. Oh, I don't care about it at all. It is not so very amusing at Madame de Lyr's. There are such a number of serious people there always. I know that they are influential personages, and may be useful, but what does that matter to me ? Come to dinner. You know that there is a bottle left of that famous Pomard ; I have kept it to wash down your partridge. You cannot imagine the pleasure I feel in seeing you eat a partridge. You do so with such gusto. You are a glutton, my dear. (*She takes his arm.*) Come, I can hear your rascal of a son getting impatient in the dining-room.

MONSIEUR (*with a preoccupied air*)—Hum ! and when is it ?

MADAME—When is what ?

MONSIEUR—The party, of course.



" Ah ! you have put on your Louis Seize ring. It is a very pretty ring."

MADAME—Ah! the ball you mean . . . I was no longer thinking of it. Madame de Lyr's ball. Why do you ask me that since we are not going? Let us make haste, dinner is getting cold. . . This evening."

MONSIEUR (*stopping short*)—What! this party is a ball, and this ball is for this evening. But, hang it! people don't fire off a ball at you like that. They give some notice beforehand.

MADAME—But she sent us an invitation a week ago. I don't know what has become of the card. I forgot to show it to you.

MONSIEUR—You forgot! you forgot!

MADAME—After all, it is all for the best; you would have been sulky all the week. Come to dinner.

They sit down to table. The cloth is white, the cutlery bright, the oysters fresh; the partridge, cooked to perfection, exhales a delightful odour. Madame is charming, and laughs at everything. Monsieur unbends his brows and stretches himself on his chair.

MONSIEUR—This Pomard is very good. Won't you have some, little woman?

MADAME—Yes, your little woman will. (*She pushes forward her glass with a coquettish movement.*)

MONSIEUR—Ah! you have put on your Louis Seize ring. It is a very pretty ring.

MADAME (*putting her hand under her husband's nose*)—Yes; but look—there is a little bit that is coming off.

MONSIEUR (*kissing his wife's hand*)—Where is the little bit?

MADAME (*smiling*)—You joke at everything. I am speaking seriously. There—look—it is plain enough! (*They draw near one another and bend their heads together to see better.*) Don't you see it? (*She points out a spot on the ring with a rosy and slender finger.*) There! do you see . . . there?

MONSIEUR—That little pearl which . . . What the deuce have you been putting on your hair, my dear? It smells horribly nice. . . . You must send it to the jeweller. That scent is exquisite. Curls don't become you badly.

MADAME—Do you think so? (*She adjusts her coiffure with her white hand.*) I thought that you would like that scent; now, for my part, if I were in your place I should . . .

MONSIEUR—What would you do in my place, my dear?

MADAME—I should stupidly kiss my wife.

MONSIEUR (*kissing her*)—Do you know that you have very bright ideas sometimes? Give me a little bit more part-ridge, please. (*With his mouth full.*) How pretty these poor little creatures look running amongst the corn. You know the little cry they give when the sun sets? . . . A little gravy . . . There are moments when the poetic side of country life appeals to one. To think that there are barbarians who eat them with cabbage. But (*filling his glass*) you have no dress ready, have you?

MADAME—(*with innocent astonishment*)—What for, dear?

MONSIEUR—Why for Madame de Lyr's—

MADAME—For the ball?—What a memory you have— You are still thinking of it— No, I have not—ah! yes, I have my tarletan, you know, and then a woman needs such a little to make up a ball-room toilette.

MONSIEUR—And the hair-dresser has not been sent for?

MADAME—That is so, he has not been sent for; besides I do not care to go to this ball. We will settle down by the fireside, read a little and go to bed early. You remind me though, I recollect that on leaving Madame de Lyr did say, "Your hair-dresser is the same as mine, I will send him word." How stupid I am, I remember that I did not answer her. But it is not far, I can send Marie to tell him not to come.

MONSIEUR—Since he has been told, this blessed hair-dresser, let him come and we will go and—amuse ourselves a little at Madame de Lyr's. But on one condition, that I find all my dress things laid out in readiness on my bed with my gloves you know, and that you tie my necktie.

MADAME—A bargain. (*She kisses him.*) You are the best of husbands. I am delighted, my poor dear, because I see you are imposing a sacrifice upon yourself in order to please me ; for as to the ball itself I am quite indifferent about it. I did not care to go, really now I did not care to go.

MONSIEUR—Hum. Well, I will go and smoke a cigar so as not to be in your way, and at ten o'clock I will be back here. Your preparations will be over and in five minutes I shall be dressed. Adieu.

MADAME—Au revoir.

Once in the street Monsieur lights his cigar and buttons up his great-coat. Two hours to kill. It seems a trifle when one is busy, but when one has nothing to do it is quite another thing. The pavement is slippery, rain is beginning to fall—fortunately the Palais Royal is not far off. At the end of his fourteenth tour round the arcades, Monsieur looks at his watch. Five minutes to ten, he will be behindhand. He rushes off home.

In the courtyard the carriage is standing in readiness.

In the bed-room two unshaded lamps shed floods of light. Mountains of muslin and ribbons are piled on the bed and the furniture. Dresses, skirts, petticoats and under-petticoats, lace, scarves, flowers, jewels, are mingled in a charming chaos. Upon a table which seems to be in readiness, pots of pommade, sticks of cosmetique, hair-pins, combs and brushes are carefully set out. Two artificial plaits stretch themselves languishingly upon a dark mass not unlike a large handful of horse hair. A golden hair net, combs of

pale tortoiseshell and bright coral, clusters of roses, sprays of white lilac, bouquets of pale violets, await the choice of the artist or the caprice of the beauty. And yet, must I say it, amidst this luxury of wealth Madame's hair is undressed, Madame is uneasy, Madame is furious.

MONSIEUR (*looking at his watch*)—Well, my dear, is your hair dressed?

MADAME (*impatiently*)—He asks me whether my hair is dressed? Don't you see that I have been waiting for the hair-dresser for an hour and a half, a century? Can't you see that I am furious, for he won't come, the wretch.

MONSIEUR—The monster!

MADAME—Yes, the monster. I would just advise you to joke about it.

There is a ring. The door opens and the lady's-maid exclaims, "It is he, madame!"

MADAME—It is he!

MONSIEUR—It is he!

The artist enters hurriedly and bows whilst turning his sleeves up.

MADAME—My dear Silvani, this is unbearable.

SILVANI—Awfully sorry, awfully, but could not come any sooner. I have been dressing hair since three o'clock in the afternoon. I have just left the Duchess de W. who is going to the ministry this evening. She sent me home in her brougham. Lisette, give me your mistress's combs, and put the curling tongs in the fire.

MADAME—But, my dear Silvani, my maid's name is not Lisette.

SILVANI—You will understand, madame, that if I had to remember the names of all the lady's-maids who help me, I should need six clerks instead of four. Lisette is a pretty name which suits all these young ladies very well. Lisette, show

me your mistress's dress. Good. Is the ball an official one?

MADAME—But dress my hair, Silvani.

SILVANI—It is impossible for me to dress your hair, madame, unless I know the circle in which the coiffure will be worn. (*To the husband seated in the corner.*) May I beg you, sir, to take another place; I wish to be able to step back, the better to judge of the effect.

MONSIEUR—Certainly, Monsieur Silvani, only too happy to be agreeable to you. (*He sits down on a chair.*)

MADAME (*hastily*)—Not there, my dear, you will rumple my skirt. (*The husband gets up and looks for another seat.*) Take care behind you, you are stepping on my improver.

MONSIEUR (*turning round angrily*)—Her improver, her improver.

MADAME—Good, there you go upsetting my pins now.

SILVANI—May I beg a moment of immobility, madame.

MONSIEUR—Come, calm yourself, I will go into the drawing-room; is there a fire there?

MADAME (*inattentively*)—But, my dear, how can you expect there to be a fire in the drawing-room?

MONSIEUR—I will go to my study then.

MADAME—There is none there either. What do you want a fire in your study for? What a strange idea! High up, you know, Silvani, and a dash of disorder, it is all the rage.

SILVANI—Will you allow a touch of brown under the eyes? That would enable me to idealise the coiffure.

MONSIEUR (*impatiently*)—Marie, give me my great-coat and my cap. I will walk up and down in the ante-room. (*Aside*) Madame de Lyr shall pay for this.

SILVANI (*crimping*)—I leave your ear uncovered, madame, it would be a sin to veil it. It is like that of the Princess

de K. whose hair I dressed yesterday. Lisette, get the powder ready. Ears like yours, madame, are not numerous.

MADAME—You were saying ?

SILVANI—Would your ear, madame, carry modesty so far as not to listen.

Madame's hair is at length dressed. Silvani sheds a light cloud of scented powder over his work on which he casts a last look of satisfaction, and then bows and retires.

In passing through the ante-room, he runs against Monsieur who is walking up and down.

SILVANI—A thousand pardons, I have the honour to wish you good night.

MONSIEUR (*from the depths of his turned up collar*)—Good night.

A quarter of an hour later the sound of a carriage is heard. Madame is ready, her coiffure suits her, she smiles at herself in the glass as she slips the glove stretchers into her long gloves.

Monsieur has made a failure of his neck-tie and broken off three buttons. Traces of the worst ill-humour are stamped upon his features.

MONSIEUR—Come, let us go down, the carriage is waiting ; it is a quarter past eleven. (*Aside*) Another sleepless night. Sharp, coachman, Rue de la Pépinière, number 224.

They reach the street in question. The Rue de la Pépinière is in a tumult. Policemen are hurriedly making way through the crowd. In the distance, confused cries and a rapidly approaching rumbling sound are heard. Monsieur thrusts his head out of the window.

MONSIEUR—What is it, Jean ?

COACHMAN—A fire, sir ; here come the firemen.

MONSIEUR—Go on all the same to number 224.

COACHMAN—We are there, sir, the fire is at number 224.

DOOR-KEEPER OF THE HOUSE (*quitting a group of people and approaching the carriage*)—You are, I presume, sir, one of the guests of Madame de Lyr? She is in despair, but the fire is in her rooms. It is impossible for her to receive any one.

MADAME (*excitedly*)—It is scandalous.

MONSIEUR (*humming*)—Heart-breaking, heart-breaking. (*To the coachman*) Home again and quickly, I am all but asleep. (*He stretches himself out and turns up his collar.* *Aside*) After all I am the better for a well-cooked partridge.

VII. A FALSE ALARM.



VERY time I visit Paris, which unhappily is too often, it is raining in torrents. It is all very well for me to change the time of starting from that which I had fixed on at first, stop on the way, travel at night, resort in short to a thousand tricks to deceive the barometer. At ten leagues from Paris the clouds begin to bank up and I detrain amidst a general deluge.

On the occasion of my last visit, I found myself as usual in the middle of the street, followed by a street porter carrying my luggage and addressing despairing signals to all the cabs trotting quickly past amidst the driving rain. After ten minutes of this performance a driver, more sensible than the others, and hidden in his triple cape, checked his horses. With a single bound I was beside the cab, and opening the door with a kind of frenzy jumped in.

Unfortunately, whilst I was accomplishing all this, on one side a gentleman similarly circumstanced to myself opened the other door and also jumped in, exactly as I did. It is easy to understand there was a collision.

"Deuce take you," said my rival, apparently inclined to push still further forward.

I was about to answer him, and pretty sharply too, for I am from the South of France and rather hot-headed, when our eyes met. We looked one another in the face like two lions over a single sheep, and suddenly we both burst out laughing. This angry gentleman was Oscar V., that dear good fellow Oscar, whom I had not seen for ten years, and who is a very old friend of mine, a charming fellow whom I used to play with as a boy.

We embraced, and the driver who was looking at us through the window shrugged his shoulders, unable to understand it all. The two porters dripping with water stood one at each door with a trunk on his shoulder. We had the luggage put on the cab and drove off to the Hotel du Louvre where Oscar insisted on dropping me.

"But you are travelling too, then?" said I to my old friend after the first moments of expansion. "Don't you live in Paris?"

"I live in it as little as possible and have just come up from Les Roches, an old fashioned little place I inherited from my father, at which I pass a great deal of the year. Oh! it is not a chateau, it is rustic, countryfied, but I like it so and would not change anything about it. The countryside is fresh and green, a clear little river flows past about forty yards from the house amidst the trees; there is a mill in the background, a spreading valley, a steeple and its weather-cock on the horizon, flowers under the windows and happiness in the house. Can I grumble? My wife makes exquisite pastry which is very agreeable to me and helps to whiten her hands. By the way I did not tell you that I am married. My dear fellow, I came across an angel, and I rightly thought that if I let her slip by I should not find another. I did wisely. But I want to introduce you to my wife, to show you my little snuggery. When will you come and see me? It is three hours' journey from Paris, time to

smoke a couple of cigars. It is understood then, I am going back to-morrow morning and I will have a room ready for you. Give me your pocket-book and I will write down my address in it."

All this was said so cordially, that I could not resist my friend's invitation, and promised to visit him shortly.

Three or four days later, Paris being empty and the recollection of my old companion haunting me, I felt a strong desire to take a peep at his conjugal felicity and to see with my own eyes this stream, this mill, this steeple beside which one was so happy.

I reached Les Roches at about six in the evening and was charmed at the very first glance. Oscar's residence was a little Louis Quinze chateau buried in the trees; irregularly built but charmingly picturesque. The smallest details had been left unaltered for a century at least, and everything, from the blackened mansard roofs with their rococo weather-cocks, to the bay windows with their tiny squares of glass and the fantastic escutcheon over the door, was in keeping. Over the thick tiles of the somewhat sunken roof the rough barked old chestnuts lazily stretched their branches. Creepers and climbing roses wantoned over the front, framing the windows, peeping into the garrets and clinging to the water-spouts, laden with large bunches of flowers which swayed gently in the air. Amidst all these pointed roofs and this profusion of verdure and trees the blue sky could only be caught a glimpse of here and there.

The first person I saw was Oscar clad in white from head to foot, and wearing a straw hat. He was seated on an enormous block of stone which seemed part and parcel of the house, and appeared very much interested in a fine melon which his gardener had just brought to him. No sooner had he caught sight of me than he darted forward

and grasped me by the hand with such an expression of frank good humour and affection, that I said to myself, "Yes, certainly he was not deceiving me, he is happy." I found him just as I had known him in his youth, lively, rather wild, but kind and obliging.

"Pierre," said he to the gardener, "take this gentleman's portmanteau to the lower room," and as the gardener bestirred himself, slowly, and with an effort, Oscar seized the portmanteau and swung it, with a jerk, on to the shoulders of the poor fellow whose legs bent under the weight.

"Lazybones," said Oscar, laughing heartily. "Ah! now I must introduce you to the little queen. My wife, where is my wife?"

He ran to the bell and pulled it twice. At once a fat cook with a red face and tucked-up sleeves, and behind her a man servant wiping a plate, appeared at the ground-floor windows. Had they been chosen on purpose? I do not know, but their faces and bearing harmonized so thoroughly with the picture that I could not help smiling.

"Where is your mistress?" asked Oscar, and as they did not answer quickly enough, he exclaimed, "Marie, Marie, here is my friend George."

A young girl fair as a lily appeared at a narrow, little window, the one most garlanded by flowers, on the first floor. She was clad in a white dressing-gown of a particular shape that I could not make out at first; with one hand she gathered its folds about her, and with the other restrained her flowing hair. Scarcely did she see me than she blushed, considerably ashamed, no doubt, at having been surprised in the midst of her toilet, and, giving a most embarrassed yet charming bow, hurriedly disappeared. This vision completed the charm, it seemed to me that I had suddenly

been transported into fairy-land. I had fancied when strapping my portmanteau that I should find my friend Oscar installed in one of those pretty, little, smart-looking houses, with green shutters and gilt lightning conductor, dear to the countryfied Parisian, and here I found myself amidst an ideal blending of time-worn stones hidden in flowers, centenarian gables, and fanciful iron work reddened by rust. I was right in the midst of one of Morin's sketches, and, charmed and stupefied, I stood for some moments with my eyes fixed on the narrow window at which the fair girl had appeared.

"I call her the little queen," said Oscar, taking my arm. "It is my wife. Come this way, we shall meet my cousin who is fishing, and two other friends who are strolling about in this direction, good fellows, only they do not understand the country as I do—they have on silk stockings and pumps, but it does not matter, does it? Would you like a pair of slippers or a straw hat? I hope you have brought some linen jackets. I won't offer you a glass of Madeira, we shall dine at once. Ah! my dear fellow, you have turned up at the right moment; we are going to taste the first melon of the year this evening."

"Unfortunately, I never eat melons, though I like to see others do so."

"Well then I will offer you a consolation by looking out a bottle of my old Pomard for you. Between ourselves, I don't give it to the first comer; it is a capital wine which my poor father recommended to me on his death-bed. That is so, the morning of the very day on which he died; he was scarcely breathing, poor father, his eyes were closed, and his head stretched back on the pillow. I was sitting beside his bed, my hand in his, when I felt it feebly pressed. His eyes half opened, and I saw him smile. Then he said

in the weak, slow and quavering voice of an old man who is dying: 'The Pomard at the further end. . . . on the left. . . . you know, my boy. . . . only for friends.' He pressed my hand again, and, as if exhausted, closed his eyes, though I could see by the imperceptible motion of his lips that he was still smiling inwardly. . . . Come with me to the cellar," continued Oscar, after a brief silence, "at the further end to the left, you shall hold the lantern for me."

When we came up again from the cellar, the bell was ringing furiously, and flocks of startled birds were flying out of the chestnut trees. It was for dinner. All the guests were in the garden. Oscar introduced me in his off-hand way, and I offered my arm to the mistress of the house to conduct her to the dining-room where the smoking soup was awaiting us.

On examining my friend's wife I saw that my first impression had not been erroneous, she was literally a little angel, and a little angel in the shape of a woman which is all the better. She was delicate, slender as a young girl; her voice was as thrilling and harmonious as the song of the chaffinch, with an indefinable accent that smacked of no part of the country in particular, but lent a charm to her slightest word. She had besides a way of speaking of her own, a childish and coquettish way of modulating the ends of her sentences and turning her eyes towards her husband, as if to seek for his approbation. She blushed every moment, but at the same time her smile was so fine and her teeth so white, that she seemed to be laughing at herself and a little bit at her neighbours too. Singular little woman. Add to this a strange yet tasteful toilette, rather daring perhaps, but suiting this little queen so singular herself. Her beautiful fair hair, twisted up at hazard, apparently at least, was fixed

rather high up on the head by a steel comb worn somewhat on one side, and her white muslin dress trimmed with wide, flat ruches, cut square at the neck, short in the skirt and looped up all round, had a delicious eighteenth century appearance. The angel was certainly a trifle coquettish, but in her own way and her way was exquisite.

Scarcely were we seated at table, than Oscar threw towards his little queen a rapid glance, but one so full of happiness and—why should not I say it—love, that I experienced a kind of shiver, a thrill of envy, astonishment and admiration perhaps. He took from the basket of flowers on the table a red rose scarcely opened, and, pushing it towards her, said with a smile:

“For your hair, madame.”

The fair girl blushed deeply, took the flower and without hesitation, quickly and dexterously stuck in her hair, high up on the left, just in the right spot, and delightedly turning round to each of us, repeated several times amidst bursts of laughter:

“Is it right like that?”

Then she wafted a tiny kiss with the tips of her fingers to her husband like a child of twelve would have done, and gaily plunged her spoon into the soup, turning up her little finger as she did so.

The other guests had nothing very remarkable about them; they laughed very good naturedly at these childish ways, but seemed somewhat out of place amidst all this charming freedom from restraint. The cousin, above all, the angler, with his white waistcoat, his blue tie, his full beard and his almond eyes especially displeased me. He rolled his r's like an actor at a country theatre. He broke his bread into little bits and nibbled them as he talked. I divined that the pleasure of showing off a large ring he wore had something to do with this fancy for playing with his bread. Once or

twice I caught his glance melancholily turned towards the mistress of the house, but at first I did not pay much notice to it, my attention being besides diverted by the brilliant gaiety of Oscar.

It seemed to me though, at the end of a minute or so, that this young man was striving in a thousand ways to attract the attention of the little queen.

The latter, however, answered him in the most natural way in the world, neither betraying constraint nor embarrassment.

I was mistaken no doubt.

Have you ever noticed when you are suddenly brought into the midst of a circle with which you are unacquainted, how certain little details, matters of indifference to everyone else, assume importance in your eyes? The first impression is based upon a number of trifles that catch your attention at the outset. A stain in the ceiling, a nail in the wall, a feature of your neighbour's countenance graves itself upon your mind, installs itself there, assumes importance, and, in spite of yourself, all the other observations subsequently made by you group around this spot, this nail, this grimace. Think over it, dear reader, and you will see that every opinion you may have as to a fact, a person, or an object, has been sensibly influenced by the recollection of the little trifle that caught your eye at the first glance. What young girl victim of first impressions, has not refused one or two husbands on account of a waistcoat too loose, a cravat badly tied, an inopportune sneeze, a foolish smile, or a boot too pointed at the toe?

One does not like admitting to oneself that such trifles can serve as a base to the opinion one has of anyone, and one must seek attentively in order to discover within one's mind these unacknowledged germs.

I recollect quite well that the first time I had the honour of calling on Madame de M., I noticed that one of her teeth, the first molar on the right, was quite black. I only caught a glimpse of the little black monster, such was the care taken to hide it, but I could not get this discovery out of my head. I soon saw that Madame de M. made frightful grimaces to hide her tooth, and that she only took the smallest possible mouthfuls at table to spare the nervous susceptibilities of the little monster.

I arrived at the pitch of accounting for all the mental and physical lackadaisicalities of Madame de M. by the presence of this slight blemish, and despite myself this black tooth personified the countess so well that even now, although it has been replaced by another magnificent one, twice as big and as white as the bottom of a plate, even now, as I said, Madame de M. cannot open her mouth without my looking quite naturally for it.

But to return to our subject.

Amidst all this conjugal happiness, so delightfully surrounded, face to face with dear old Oscar so good, so confiding, so much in love with this little cherub in a Louis XV dress, who carried grace and naiveté to so strange a pitch, I had been struck by the too well combed and foolishly handsome head of the cousin in the white waistcoat. This head had attracted my attention like the stain on the ceiling of which I spoke just now, like the countess's black tooth, and despite myself I did not take my eyes off the angler as he passed the silver blade of his knife through a slice of that indigestible fruit which I like to see on the plates of others, but cannot tolerate on my own.

After dinner, which lasted a very long time, we went into the garden where coffee had been served and stretched ourselves out beatifically, cigar in mouth. All was calm and

silent about us, the insects had ceased their music, and in an opaline sky, little violet clouds were peacefully sleeping.

Oscar with a happy air pointed out to me the famous mill, the quiet valley, and further on his loved stream, in which the sun before setting was reflecting itself amidst the reeds. Meanwhile the little queen on her high heels, flitted round the cups like a child playing at party giving, and with a thousand comical and charming precautions, poured out the boiling coffee, the odour of which blended deliciously with the perfume of the flowers, the hay, and the woods.

When she had finished she sat down beside her husband, so close that her skirt half hid my friend, and unceremoniously taking the cigar from his lips, held it at a distance, with a little pout, that meant, "Oh, the horrid thing," and knocked off with her little finger, the ash which fell on to the gravel. Then she broke into a laugh, and put the cigar back between the lips her husband held out to her.

It was charming. Oscar was no doubt accustomed to this, for he did not seem astonished, but placed his hand on his wife's shoulder, as one would upon a child's, and kissing her on the forehead, said, "Thanks, dear."

"Yes, but you are only humbugging me," said the young wife, in a whisper, leaning her head against her husband's arm.

I could not help smiling, there was so much coaxing childishness and grace in this little whispered sentence. I do not know why I turned towards the cousin who had remained a little apart, smoking in silence. He seemed to me rather pale; he took three or four sudden puffs, rose suddenly under the evident influence of some moral discomfort and walked away beneath the trees.

"What is the matter with cousin?" said Oscar with some interest. "What ails him?"

"I don't know," answered the little queen in the most

natural manner in the world, "some idea about fishing no doubt."

And the conversation went on.

Night began to fall, we had remained as I have said a long time at table. It was about nine o'clock. The cousin returned and took the seat he had occupied before, but from this moment it seemed to me that a strange constraint crept in amongst us, a singular coolness showed itself. The talk, so lively at first, slackened gradually and, despite all my efforts to impart a little life to it, dragged wretchedly. I myself did not feel very bright; I was haunted by the most absurd notions in the world; I thought I had detected in the sudden departure of the cousin, in his pallor, in his embarrassed movements, the expression of some strong feeling which he had been powerless to hide. But how was it that that adorable little woman with such a keen intelligent look did not understand all this, since I understood it myself? Had not Oscar, however confiding he might be, noted that the departure of the cousin exactly coincided with the kiss he had given his wife? Were these two blind, or did they pretend not to see, or was I myself the victim of an illusion? However, conversation had died away, the mistress of the house, singular symptom, was silent and serious, and Oscar wriggled in his chair, like a man who is not altogether at ease.

What was passing in their minds?

Soon we heard the clock in the drawing-room strike ten, and Oscar suddenly rising, said: "My dear fellow, in the country it is Liberty Hall you know; so I will ask your permission to go in, I am rather tired this evening. George," he added to me, "they will show you your room, it is on the ground floor; I hope that you will be comfortable there."

Everybody got up silently, and after bidding one another good night in a somewhat constrained fashion, sought their respective rooms. I thought, I must acknowledge, that they went to bed rather too early at my friend's. I had no wish to sleep; I therefore examined my room, which was charming. It was completely hung with an old figured tapestry framed in grey wainscot. The bed, draped in dimity curtains, was turned down and exhaled that odour of freshly washed linen which invites one to stretch oneself in it. On the table, a little gem dating from the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, were four or five books, evidently chosen by Oscar, and placed there for me. These little attentions touch one, and naturally my thoughts recurred to the dear fellow, to the strange incident of the evening, to the vexations and tortures hidden perhaps by this apparent happiness. I was ridiculous that night, I already pitied him, my poor friend; I felt quite touched, and full of melancholy, went and leant against the sill of the open window. The moon had just risen, the sky was beautifully clear, whiffs of delicious perfumes assailed my nostrils. I saw in the shadow of the trees glow-worms sparkling on the grass, and in the masses of verdure lit up mysteriously by the moon, I traced strange shapes of fantastic monsters. There was, above all, a little pointed roof surmounted by a weathercock, buried in the trees at about fifty paces from my window, which greatly interested me. I could not in the obscurity make out either door or windows belonging to this singular tower. Was it an old pigeon house, a tomb, a deserted summer house? I could not tell, but its little pointed roof with round dormer window, was extremely graceful. Was it chance or an artist full of taste that had covered this tower with creepers and flowers, and surrounded it with foliage in such coquettish fashion, that it seemed to



I saw a phantom clad in a white robe, and walking with mysterious
and agitated rapidity.

be hiding itself in order to catch all glances? I was gazing at all this, when I heard a faint noise in the shrubbery. I looked in that direction, and I saw—really, it was an anxious moment—I saw a phantom clad in a white robe, and walking with mysterious and agitated rapidity. At a turning of the path, the moon shone on this phantom. Doubt was impossible, I had before my eyes my friend's wife. Her gait no longer had that coquettish ease which I had noticed, but clearly indicated the agitation due to some strong emotion. I strove to banish the horrible suspicion which suddenly forced itself into my mind. "No," I said to myself, "so much innocence and beauty cannot be capable of deception, no doubt she has forgotten her fan, or her embroidery, on one of the benches there?" But instead of making her way towards the benches I noticed on the right, the young wife turned to the left, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the grove in which was hidden the mysterious turret.

My heart ached. "Where is she going, the hapless woman?" I exclaimed to myself. "At any rate I will not let her imagine that anyone is watching her." And I hurriedly blew out my candle. I wanted to close my window, go to bed and see nothing more, but an invincible curiosity took me back to the window. I had only been there a few minutes when I plainly distinguished halting and timid footsteps on the gravel. I could see no one at first, but there was no doubt that the footsteps were those of a man. I soon had a proof that I was not mistaken; the elongated outline of the cousin showed up clearly against the dark mass of shrubbery. I should have liked to have stopped him, the wretch, for his intention was evident; he was making his way towards the thicket in which the little queen had disappeared. I should have liked to have said to

him, "You are a villain, you shall go no further." But had I really any right to act thus? I was silent, but I coughed however, loud enough to be heard by him.

He suddenly paused in his uneasy walk, looked round on all sides with visible anxiety; then seized by I know not what impulse, darted towards the pavilion. I was overwhelmed. What ought I to do? Warn my friend, my childhood's companion? Yes, no doubt, but I felt ashamed to pour despair into the mind of this good fellow, and to cause a horrible exposure. "If he can be kept in ignorance," I said to myself, "and then perhaps I am wrong, who knows? Perhaps this rendezvous is due to the most natural motive possible." I was seeking to deceive myself, to veil the evidence to my own eyes, when suddenly one of the house doors opened noisily, and Oscar, Oscar himself, in all the disorder of night attire, his hair rumpled, and his dressing-gown floating loosely, passed before my window. He ran rather than walked; but the anguish of his heart was too plainly revealed in the strangeness of his movements. He knew all. I felt that a mishap was inevitable. "Behold the outcome of all this happiness, behold the bitter poison enclosed in so fair a vessel!" All these thoughts shot through my mind like arrows. It was necessary above all to delay the explosion, were it only for a moment, a second, and beside myself, without giving myself time to think of what I was going to say to him, I cried in a sharp, imperative tone:

"Oscar, come here, I want to speak to you."

He stopped as if petrified. He was ghastly pale, and with an infernal smile, replied, "I have no time, later on."

"Oscar, you must, I beg of you—you are mistaken."

At these words he broke into a fearful laugh.

"Mistaken, mistaken."

And he darted towards the pavilion.

Seizing the skirt of his dressing-gown, I held him with a grip of iron, exclaiming :

“Don’t go, my dear fellow, don’t go ; I beg of you on my knees.”

In reply he gave me a tremendous blow on the arm with his fist, exclaiming :

“What the devil is the matter with you ?”

“I tell you that you cannot go there, Oscar,” I said in a voice which admitted of no contradiction.

“Why did not you tell me at once that there was some one there already, you donkey. Oh ! that confounded melon, that confounded melon. I will try and wait.”

And feverishly snatching his dressing-gown from my grasp, he began to walk frantically up and down.

VIII. I SUP WITH MY WIFE.



HAT evening, which happened to be Christmas Eve, it was infernally cold. The snow was falling in heavy flakes, and driven by the wind beat against the window panes. The distant chiming of the bells sounded faint and confused through this heavy and woolly atmosphere. Foot passengers wrapped in their cloaks slipped rapidly along, keeping close to the house and bending their heads to the blast.

Wrapped in my dressing-gown, and drumming with my fingers on the window panes, I was smiling at the half-frozen passers-by, the north wind, and the snow, with the contented look of a man who is in a warm room and has on his feet comfortable flannel lined slippers, the soles of which are buried in a thick carpet. At the fireside my wife was cutting out something and smiling at me from time to time ; a

new book awaited me on the mantelshelf, and the log on the hearth kept shooting out with a hissing sound those little blue flames which invite one to poke the fire.

"There is nothing that looks more stupid than a man tramping through the snow, is there?" said I to my wife.

"Hush," said she lowering the scissors which she held in her hand, and after smoothing her chin with her fingers, slender, rosy and plump at their tips, she went on examining the pieces of stuff she had cut out.

"I say that it is ridiculous to go out in the cold when it is so easy to remain at home by one's fireside."

"Hush."

"But what are you doing that is so important?"

"I—I am cutting out a pair of braces for you," and she set to work again. But as in cutting out she kept her head bent, I noticed, on passing behind her, her soft white neck, which she had left bare that evening by doing her hair up higher than usual. A number of little downy hairs were curling there. This kind of down made me think of those ripe peaches one bites so greedily. I drew near, the better to see, and I kissed the back of my wife's neck.

"Sir!" said Louise, suddenly turning round.

"Madame," I replied, and we both burst out laughing.

"Christmas Eve," said I.

"Do you want to excuse yourself?"

"Do you mean to complain?"

"Yes, I complain that you are not sufficiently impressed by the fact of its being Christmas Eve. The ding ding dong of the bells of Notre Dame fails to move you; and just now when the magic lantern passed beneath the window, I looked at you whilst pretending to work, and you were quite calm."

"I remain calm when the magic lantern is going by. Ah! my dear, you are very severe on me, and really—"

"Yes, yes, jest about it, but it is none the less true that the recollections of your childhood have faded."

"Come, my dear, do you want me to leave my boots out on the hearth this evening on going to bed ; do you want me to have up the magic lantern man, and look out a big sheet and a candle end for him, as my poor mother used to ? I can still see her as she used to entrust her white sheet to him. 'Don't make a hole in it at anyrate,' she would say. How we used to clap our hands in the mysterious darkness. I can recall all those joys, my dear, but you know so many other things have taken place since then. Other pleasures have effaced those."

"Yes, I understand, your bachelor pleasures ; and there, I am sure that this Christmas Eve is the first you have passed by your fireside, in your dressing gown, without supper ; for you used to sup on Christmas Eve."

"To sup, to sup."

"Yes, you supped ; I will wager you did."

"I have supped two or three times, perhaps, with friends, you know ; two sous' worth of roasted chestnuts and—"

"A glass of sugar and water."

"Oh, pretty nearly so. It was all very simple ; as far as I can recollect. We chatted a bit and went to bed."

"And he says that without a smile. You have never breathed a word to me of all these simple pleasures."

"But, my dear, all that I am telling you is strictly true. I remember that once, however, it was rather lively. It was at Ernest's, and we had some music. Will you push that log towards me ? But it is useless though, it will soon be midnight, and that is the hour when reasonable people—"

Louise, rising and throwing her arms round my neck, interrupted me with : "Well, I don't want to be reasonable,

and I want to wipe out all your memories of chestnuts and glasses of sugar and water."

Then pushing me into my dressing-room she locked the door.

"But, my dear, what is the matter with you?" said I through the keyhole.

"I want ten minutes, no more. Your newspaper is on the mantelshelf; you have not read it this evening. There are some matches in the corner."

I heard a clatter of crockery, a rustling of silk. Was my wife mad?

Louise soon came and opened the door.

"Don't scold me for having shut you up," she said, kissing me. "Look how I have beautified myself? Do you recognise the coiffure you are so fond of, the chignon high, and the neck bare? Only as my poor neck is excessively timid, it would have never consented to show itself thus if I had not encouraged it a little by wearing my dress low. And then one must put on full uniform to sup with the authorities."

"To sup?"

"Certainly, to sup with you; don't you see my illuminations and this table covered with flowers and a heap of good things? I had got it all ready in the alcove; but you understand that to roll the table up to the fire and make a little toilette, I wanted to be alone. Come, sir, take your place at table. I am as hungry as a hunter. May I offer you a wing of cold chicken?"

"Your idea is charming, my dear, but really I am ashamed; I am in my dressing gown."

"Take it off if it incommodes you, sir, your dressing-gown, but don't leave this chicken wing on my hands. I want to serve you myself," and rising, she turned her sleeves up to the elbow, and placed her table napkin on her arm.

"It is like that the waiters at the restaurant do it, is it not?"

"Exactly; but, waiter, allow me at least to kiss your hand."

"I have not time," said she, laughing, and bravely sticking the corkscrew into the neck of the bottle. "Chambertin—it is a pretty name; and then do you remember that before our marriage—how hard this cork is—you told me that you liked it on account of a poem by Alfred de Musset? which, by the way, you have not let me read yet. Do you see the two little Bohemian glasses which I bought expressly for this evening? We will drink one another's health in them."

"And his too, eh?"

"The heir's, poor dear love of an heir, I should think so. And then I will put away the two glasses against this time next year. Is not that so, they shall be our Christmas Eve glasses? Every year we will sup like this together, however old we may get."

"But, my dear, how about the time when we have no longer any teeth?"

"Well, we will sup on good strong soups; it will be very nice all the same. Another piece, please, with some of the jelly, thanks."

As she held out her plate, I noticed her arm, the outline of which was lost in lace.

"Why are you looking up my sleeve instead of eating?"

"I am looking at your arm, dear. You are charming, do you know, this evening? That coiffure suits you so well, and that dress which I was unacquainted with."

"Well, when one seeks to make a conquest."

"How pretty you look, pet."

"Is it true that you think me charming, pretty, and a pet

this evening? Well then," lowering her eyes, and smiling at her bracelets, "in that case I do not see why—"

"What is it you do not see, dear?"

"I do not see why you should not come and give me just a little kiss."

And as the kiss was prolonged, she said to me, amidst bursts of laughter, her head thrown back, and showing the double row of her white teeth: "I should like some pie, I should like some pie. You will break my Bohemian glass, the fruit of my economy. You always cause some mishap when you want to kiss me. Do you recollect at Madame de Brill's ball, two days before our marriage, how you tore my dress whilst waltzing in the little drawing-room?"

"Because it is difficult to do two things at once, to keep step and kiss one's partner."

"I recollect that when mamma asked how my dress had got torn, I felt that I was blushing up to my ears. And Madame D., that old jaundiced fairy who said to me with her Lenten smile, 'How flushed you are to-night, my dear child.' I could have strangled her—I said it was the key of the door that had caught it—I looked at you out of the corner of my eye; you were pulling your moustache and seemed greatly annoyed— You are keeping all the truffles for yourself, that is kind . . not that one, I want the big black one there in the corner. . It was very wrong all the same for. . Oh! not quite full, I do not want to be tipsy. . For after all if we had not been married, and that might have happened, for you know they say that marriages only depend on a thread. Well if the thread had not been strong enough, I should have remained a maid with a kiss on my shoulder and a nice thing that would have been."

"Bah, it does not stain."

"Yes, sir, it does, I beg your pardon; it stains so much

that there are husbands I believe who even shed their blood to wash out such little stains."

"But I was joking, dear. The deuce—don't you think—yes, certainly, the deuce."

"Ah! that's right, I love to see you angry. You are a trifle jealous, dear. . Oh! that is too bad; I asked you for the big black one and you have gone and eaten it."

"I am heart-broken, dear; I quite forgot about it."

"Just as at the town hall where I was obliged to jog your elbow to make you answer 'Yes' to the mayor's kind words."

"Kind!"

"Yes, kind. I thought him charming. No one could have been more graceful than he was in addressing me. 'Mademoiselle, will you consent to accept for your husband that great ugly fellow standing beside you.'" Laughing with her mouth full, "I wanted to say to him, 'Let us come to an understanding, Mr. Mayor, there is something to be said on either side.' I am choking—" she bursts out laughing—"I was wrong not to impose restrictions. Your health, dear, I am teasing you, it is very stupid. I said 'Yes,' with all my heart, I can assure you, dear, and I thought the word too weak a one. When I think that all women, even the worst, say that word, I feel ashamed not to have found another." Holding out her glass, "To our golden wedding, will you touch glasses?"

"And to his baptism, mamma."

In a low voice. "Tell me, are you sorry you married me?"

Laughing, "Yes." Kissing her on the shoulder, "I think I have found the stain again, it was just there."

"It is two in the morning, the fire is out, and I am a little. . . You won't laugh now? Well I am a little dizzy."

"A capital pie, eh?"

"A capital pie. We will have a cup of tea for breakfast to-morrow, will we not?"

IX. FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER.

A MORAL SCENE.

SCENE.—*The country in autumn—The wind is blowing without—MADAME seated by the fireside in a large arm-chair is engaged in needle-work—MONSIEUR seated in front of her is watching the flames of the fire—A long silence.*



MONSIEUR—Will you pass me the tongs, my dear?

MADAME (*humming to herself*)—"And yet despite so many fears." (*Spoken.*) Here are the tongs. (*Humming.*) "Despite the painful—" —

MONSIEUR—That is by Méhul, is it not, my dear? Ah! that is music. . I saw Delaunay Riquier in *Joseph*. (*He hums as he makes up the fire.*) "Holy pains." (*Spoken.*) One wonders why it does not burn, and, by Jove! it turns out to be green wood. Only he was a little too robust, Riquier. A charming voice, but he is too stout.

MADAME (*holding her needle-work at a distance, the better to judge of the effect*)—Tell me, George, would you have this square red or black? you see, the square near the point? Tell me frankly.

MONSIEUR (*singing*)—"If you can repent." (*Spoken without turning his head.*) Red, my dear, red; I should not hesitate, I hate black.

MADAME—Yes, but if I make that red it will lead me on to — (*She reflects.*)



' Would you have this square red or black ? '

MONSIEUR—Well, my dear, if it leads you away you must cling to something to save yourself.

MADAME—Come, George, I am speaking seriously; you know that if this little square is red, the point cannot remain violet, and I would not change that for anything.

MONSIEUR (*slowly and seriously*)—My dear, will you blindly follow the advice of an irreproachable individual to whose existence you have linked your lot? Well, make that square pea-green and say no more about it. Just look whether a coal fire ever looked like that.

MADAME—I should only be too well pleased to use up my pea-green wool, I have a pile of it.

MONSIEUR—Then where lies the difficulty?

MADAME—The difficulty is that pea-green is not—sufficiently religious.

MONSIEUR—Hum—(*humming.*) “Holy pains.” (*Spoken.*) Will you be kind enough to pass the bellows? Would it be indiscreet to ask why the poor pea-green, which does not look very guilty, has such an evil reputation? You go in for religious needlework then, at present, my dear?

MADAME—Oh! George, I beg of you to spare me your jests; I have been familiar with them for a long time, you know, and they are horribly disagreeable to me—I am simply making a little mat for the confessional box of the vicar. There, are you satisfied? You know what it is a question of, and you must understand that under the circumstances pea-green would be out of place.

MONSIEUR—Not the least in the world. I can swear to you that I could just as well confess with pea-green under my feet. It is true that I am naturally of a resolute disposition. Use up your wool, I can assure you that the vicar will accept it all the same. He does not know how to refuse. (*He plies the bellows briskly.*)

MADAME—You are pleased, are you not ?

MONSIEUR—Pleased at what, dear ?

MADAME—Pleased at having vented your sarcasm, at having passed a jest on one who is absent. Well, I tell you that you are a dangerous man since you seek to shake the faith of those about you. I had need of a very fervent belief, strong principles, and really some virtue to resist these incessant attacks. Well, why are you looking at me like that ?

MONSIEUR—I want to be converted, my little apostle. You are so pretty when you speak out, your eyes glisten, your voice rings, your gestures—I am sure that you could speak like that for a long time, eh ? *(He kisses her hand, then takes two of her curls and ties them under her chin.)* You are looking very pretty, my pet.

MADAME—Oh ! you think you have reduced me to silence because you have interrupted me. Ah ! there you have tangled my hair. How provoking you are, it will take me an hour to put it straight. You are not satisfied with being a prodigy of impiety, but you must also tangle my hair. Come, hold out your hands and take this skein of wool.

MONSIEUR *(Sitting down on a stool, which he draws as closely as possible to Madame, and holding up his hands.)*
—My little St. John.

MADAME—Not so close, George, not so close. *(She smiles despite herself.)* How silly you are. Please be careful, you will break my wool.

MONSIEUR—Your religious wool.

MADAME—Yes, my religious wool. *(She gives him a little pat on the cheek.)* Why do you part your hair so much on one side, George ? It would suit you much better in the middle, here. Yes, you may kiss me, but gently, without violence.

MONSIEUR—Do you know what I am thinking of ?

MADAME—How do you imagine I could know that ?

MONSIEUR—Well, I am thinking of the barometer which is falling and of the thermometer which is falling too.

MADAME—You see, cold weather is coming on and my mat will never be finished. Come, let us make haste.

MONSIEUR—I was thinking of the thermometer which is falling and of my room which faces due north.

MADAME—Did you not choose it yourself ? My wool, good Heavens, my wool ! Oh ! the wicked wretch.

MONSIEUR—In summer my room with the northern aspect is very pleasant, no doubt ; but when autumn comes, when the wind creeps in, when the rain trickles down the window panes, when the fields, the country, seems hidden under a huge veil of sadness, when the spoils of our woodlands strew the earth, when the groves have lost their mystery and the nightingale her voice, oh ! then, the room with the northern aspect has a very northern aspect, and—

MADAME (*continuing to wind her wool*)—What nonsense you are talking.

MONSIEUR—I protest against autumns, that is all. God's sun is hidden and I seek another ; is not that natural, my little fair-haired saint, my little mystic lamb, my little blessed palm branch ? This new sun I find in you, pet, in your look, in the sweet odour of your person, in the rustling of your skirt, in the down on your neck which one notices by the lamp-light when you bend over the vicar's mat, in your nostril which expands when my lips approach yours, in your bodice which throbs and betrays you, in—

MADAME—Will you be quiet, George ? it is Friday and ember week.

MONSIEUR—And your dispensation ? (*He kisses her.*)

Don't you see that your hand shakes, that you blush, that your heart is beating ?

MADAME—George, will you have done, sir ? (*She pulls away her hand, throws herself back in the chair, and avoids her husband's glance.*)

MONSIEUR—Your poor little heart beats and it is right, dear ; it knows that autumn is the time for confidential chats and evening caresses, the time for kisses. And you know it too, for you defend yourself badly, and I defy you to look me in the face. Come, come, look me in the face.

MADAME—(*She suddenly leans towards her husband, the ball of wool rolling into the fireplace, the pious task falling to the ground. She takes his head between her hands*)—Oh, what a dear, charming husband you would be if you had—

MONSIEUR—If I had what ? Tell me quickly.

MADAME—If you had a little religion. I should only ask for such a little at the beginning. It is not very difficult, I can assure you. Whilst, now, you are really too—

MONSIEUR—Pea-green, eh ?

MADAME—Yes, pea-green, you great goose. (*She laughs frankly.*)

MONSIEUR (*lifting his hands in the air*)—Sound trumpets, madame has laughed, madame is disarmed. Well, my snow-white lamb, I am going to finish my story ; listen nicely, there, like that, your hands here, my head so. Hush ! don't laugh, I am speaking seriously. As I was saying to you, the north room is large but cold, poetic but gloomy, and I will add that two are not too many in this wintry season to contend against the rigours of the night. I will further remark that if the sacred ties of marriage have a profoundly social significance it is—do not interrupt me—at that hour of one's existence when one shivers on one's solitary couch.

MADAME—You cannot be serious.

MONSIEUR—Well, seriously, I should like the vicar's mat piously spread upon your bed, to keep us both warm together, this very evening. I wish to return as speedily as possible to the intimacy of conjugal life. Do you hear how the wind blows and whistles through the doors? The fire splutters, and your feet are frozen. (*He takes her foot in his hands.*)

MADAME—But you are taking off my slipper, George.

MONSIEUR—Do you think, my little white lamb, that I am going to leave your poor little trotter in that state? Let it stay in my hand to be warmed. Nothing is so cold as silk. What! open-work stockings? My dear, you are rather dainty about your foot-gear for a Friday. Do you know, pet, you cannot imagine how gay I wake up when the morning sun shines into my room. You shall see. I am no longer a man, I am a chaffinch, all the joys of spring recur to me. I laugh, I sing, I speechify, I tell tales to make one die of laughter. Sometimes I even dance.

MADAME—Come now, I who in the morning like neither noise nor broad daylight, how little all that suits.

MONSIEUR (*suddenly changing his tone*)—Did I say that I liked all that? The morning sun? Never in autumn my sweet dove, never. I awake, on the contrary, full of langour and poesy; I was like that in my very cradle. We will prolong the night, and behind the drawn curtain, behind the closed shutter, we will remain asleep without sleeping. Buried in silence and shadow, delightfully stretched beneath your warm eider-down coverlets, we will slowly enjoy the happiness of being together, and we will only wish one another good morning, on the stroke of noon. You do not like noise, dear. I will not say a word. Not a murmur to disturb your unfinished dream, and warn you

that you are no longer sleeping ; not a breath to recall you to reality, not a movement to rustle the coverings. I will be silent as a shade, motionless as a statue ; and if I kiss you—for, after all, I have my weaknesses—it will be discreetly with a thousand precautions, my lips will scarcely brush your sleeping shoulder, and if you quiver with pleasure as you stretch out your arms, if your eye half uncloses at the murmur of my kiss, if your lips smile at me, if I kiss you, it will be because you would like me to, and I shall have nothing to reproach myself with.

MADAME (*her eyes half closed, leaning back in her arm-chair, her head bent, red with emotion she places her two hands before his mouth. In a low voice*)—Hush, hush, don't say that, dear, not another word ; if you knew how wrong it was.

MONSIEUR—Wrong ! What is there that is wrong ? Is your heart of marble or adamant, that you do not see that I love you, you naughty child ? That I hold out my arms to you, that I long to clasp you to my heart, and to fall asleep in your hair ? What is there more sacred in the world than to love one's wife or love one's husband ? (*Midnight strikes.*)

MADAME—(*She suddenly changes her expression at the sound, throws her arms round her husband, and hurriedly kisses him thrice*)—You thought I did not love you, eh, dear ? Oh ! yes, I love you. Great baby, not to see that I was waiting the time.

MONSIEUR—What time, dear ?

MADAME—The time. It has struck twelve, see. (*She blushes crimson.*) Friday is over. (*She holds out her hand for him to kiss.*)

MONSIEUR—Are you sure the clock is not fast, love ?

X. A LITTLE CHAT.

MADAME A—MADAME B.

(These ladies are seated at needlework as they talk.)

MADAME A.—For myself, you know, my dear, I fulfil my duties respectably, but after all I am not what would be called a devotee. Oh ! not at all. Pass me your scissors. Thanks.

MADAME B.—You are quite welcome, dear. What a time those little squares of lace must take. I am like yourself as regards religion ; in the first place, I think that nothing should be overdone. Have you ever—I have never spoken to anyone on the subject, but I see that your ideas are so in accordance with my own that—

MADAME A.—Come, speak out, dear ; you trust me a little, I hope.

MADAME B.—Well then, have you, frankly, ever had any doubts ?

MADAME A. *(after reflecting for a moment)*—Doubts ! No, and you !

MADAME B.—I have had them, and it has been a real grief to me. Heavens ! how I have wept.

MADAME A.—I should think so, my poor dear. For my own part I have a very strong faith. Those doubts must have made you very unhappy.

MADAME B.—Terribly so. You know it seems as if everything failed you, there is vacancy all about you—I have never spoken about it to my husband of course—Leon is a jewel of a man, but he will not listen to anything of that kind. The day after our marriage, I can still see him ;

I was smoothing my hair, broad bands were still worn, you know?

MADAME A.—Yes, yes, they were charming, you will see that we shall go back to them.

MADAME B.—I should not be surprised, fashion is a wheel that turns.—Leon, then, said to me the day after our wedding: “My dear child, I shall not hinder your going to church, but I beg of you for mercy’s sake never to say a word to me about it.”

MADAME A.—Really, Monsieur B. said that to you?

MADAME B.—Upon my honour. Oh! my husband is all that is most—or, if you prefer it, all that is least—

MADAME A.—Yes, yes, I understand. It is a grief that, you know. Mine is only indifferent. From time to time he fires off some naughty words at me, but I am sure that he could be very easily brought back to good. At the first illness he has, you shall see. When he has only a cold in the head I notice the change. You have not seen my thimble?

MADAME B.—Here it is. Do not be too sure of that, dear; men are not to be brought back by going “clk clk” to them like little chickens. And then besides—though certainly I greatly admire the men who observe religious practices, you know me well enough not to doubt that—I think, as I told you, that nothing should be exaggerated. And yourself, pet, should you like to see your husband walking before the banner with a great wax taper in his right hand, and a bouquet of flowers in his left?

MADAME A.—Ah! no, indeed. Ha, ha, ha, you are crazy! Why not ask me at once whether I should like to see Leon in a black silk scull cap, with cotton in his ears and a holy water sprinkler in his hand? One has no need to go singing about a church with one’s nose buried in a book to be a



"When my husband has only a cold in the head, I notice
the change."

pious man ; there is a more elevated form of religion which is that of—of refined people.

MADAME B.—Ah ! if you speak like that I am of your opinion. I think for instance that there is nothing looks finer than a man during the elevation of the host. Arms crossed, no book, head slightly bowed, grave look, frock coat buttoned up. Have you seen Monsieur de P. at mass ? How well he looks.

MADAME A.—He is such a fine man and then he dresses so well. Have you seen him on horseback ? Ah ! so you have doubts, and as to what, since we are indulging in confidences ?

MADAME B.—I can hardly tell you. Doubts, in short ; about Hell, for instance, I have had horrible ones. Oh ! but do not let us speak about that ; I believe that it is wrong even to speak of it.

MADAME A.—I have very broad views on that point ; I never even think about it. Besides, my confessor helped me. “Do not seek too much,” he always said to me, “do not strive to understand that which is unfathomable.” You did not know Father Gideon ? he was a jewel of a confessor ; I was extremely satisfied with him. Not too tedious, discreet, and besides well-bred. He turned monk through quite a romance. A penitent who was madly in love with him.

MADAME B.—Impossible.

MADAME A.—Yes, really. What, did you not know about it ? The success of the monastery was due to that accident. Before the coming of Father Gideon it vegetated, but the ladies soon flocked there in crowds ; they organised a little guild entitled “The Ladies of the Agony.” They prayed for the Chinese who had died without confession, and wore little death’s heads in aluminium as sleeve-links. It became very fashionable as you are aware, and the good fathers organised

in turn a registry office for men servants, and in the end from one thing leading to another, the community has become extremely wealthy. I have even heard that one of the most important railway stations in Paris is shortly to be shifted to increase the size of their garden which is rather restricted at present.

MADAME B.—As to that, it is natural enough that men who never go out should want a place to walk in at home; but what I do not understand is that a woman, however pious she may be, should fall in love with a priest. It is all very well, but that is no longer piety, it is—fanaticism. I venerate priests, I can say so truly, but after all I cannot imagine myself— You will laugh at me, ha, ha, ha.

MADAME A.—Not at all. Ha, ha, ha, what a child you are!

MADAME B. (*working with great briskness*)—Well, I cannot imagine that they are men—like the others.

MADAME A. (*resuming work with equal ardour*)—And yet, my dear, they say it is so.

MADAME B.—There are so many false reports set afloat. (*A long silence.*)

MADAME A. (*in a discreet tone of voice*)—After all there are priests who have beards, the capuchins for instance.

MADAME B.—Madame de V. has a beard right up to her eyes, so that counts for nothing, dear.

MADAME A.—That count for nothing. I do not think so. In the first place Madame de V.'s beard is not a perennial beard; her niece told me that she sheds her moustaches every autumn. What is a beard that cannot stand the winter? A mere trifle.

MADAME B.—A mere trifle that is horribly ugly, my dear.

MADAME A.—Oh! if Madame de V. had only moustaches to frighten away people, one might still look upon her without sorrow, but—

MADAME B.—I grant all that. Let us allow that the countess's moustache and imperial are a nameless species of vegetation. I do not attach much importance to the point, you understand. She has a chin of heartbreaking fertility, that is all.

MADAME A.—How is it, to return to what we were saying, that the men who are strongest, most courageous, most manly, soldiers in fact, are precisely those who have most beard?

MADAME B.—That is nonsense, for then the pioneers would be braver than the generals; and in any case there is not in France, I am sure, a general with as much beard as a capuchin. You have never looked at a capuchin then?

MADAME A.—Oh! yes, I have seen one quite close. It is a rather funny story, fancy Clementine's cook has a brother a capuchin; an ex-jeweller, a very decent man. In consequence of misfortunes in business—it was in 1848, business was at a standstill—in short he lost his head—no, he did not lose his head, but he threw himself into the arms of Heaven.

MADAME B.—Oh! but it is unheard of. What, Clementine—

MADAME A.—I was like you, I would not believe it, but one day Clementine said to me, "Since you will not believe in my capuchin, come and see me to-morrow about three o'clock, he will be paying a visit to his sister. Don't have lunch first, we will lunch together." Very good. I go the next day with Louise who absolutely insisted upon accompanying me, and I find at Clementine's five or six ladies installed in the drawing-room and laughing like madcaps. They had all come to see the capuchin. "Well," said I, as I went in, and all of them began to make signs to me and whisper, "Hush, hush." He was in the kitchen.

MADAME B.—And what was he like ?

MADAME A.—Oh ! very nice except his feet ; you know it always gives one a chill to look at their feet ; but in short he was very amiable. He was sent for into the drawing-room, but he would not take anything but a little biscuit and a glass of water, that took away our appetites. He was very lively, told us that we were coquettes with our little bonnets and our full skirts, et cetera ; he was very funny, always a little bit of the jeweller at the bottom, but with plenty of good nature and frankness. He imitated the buzzing of a fly for us ; it was wonderful. He also wanted to show us a little conjuring trick, but he needed two corks for it, and unfortunately his sister could only find one.

MADAME B.—No matter, I cannot understand Clementine engaging a servant like that.

MADAME A.—Why ? This brother is a guarantee.

MADAME B.—Of morality, I don't say no ; but it seems to me that a girl like that must not be very clean in her ways.

MADAME A.—How do you make that out ?

MADAME B.—Good heavens ! I don't know, I cannot reason the matter out, but it seems to me that it must be so, that is all, . . . besides, I should not like to see a monk in my kitchen close to the soup. Oh ! Lord, no.

MADAME A.—What a child you are !

MADAME B.—That has nothing in common with religious feelings, my dear ; I do not attack any dogma. Ah ! if I were to say, for instance, come now, if I were to say, what now ?

MADAME A.—In point of fact, what really is dogma ?

MADAME B.—Well, it is what cannot be attacked. Thus, for instance, a thing that is evident, you understand me, is unassailable, . . . or else it should be assailed, . . . in short,

it cannot be attacked. That is why it is monstrous to allow the Jewish religion and the Protestant religion in France, because these religions can be assailed, for they have no dogma. I give you this briefly, but in your prayer-book you will find the list of dogmas. I am a rod of iron as regards dogmas. My husband, who, as I said, has succeeded in inspiring me with doubts on many matters—without imagining it, for he has never required anything of me, I must do him that justice—but who, at anyrate, has succeeded in making me neglect many things belonging to religion, such as fasting, vespers, sermons, . . . confession.

MADAME A.—Confession. Oh! my dear, I should never have believed that.

MADAME B.—It is in confidence, dear pet, that I tell you this. You will swear never to speak of it?

MADAME A.—Confession. Oh! yes, I swear it. Come here, and let me kiss you.

MADAME B.—You pity me, do you not?

MADAME A.—I cannot pity you too much, for I am absolutely in the same position.

MADAME B.—You, too. Good heavens! how I love you. What can one do, eh? Must not one introduce some plan of conciliation into the household, sacrifice one's belief a little to that of one's husband?

MADAME A.—No doubt. For instance, how would you have me go to high mass, which is celebrated at my parish church at eleven o'clock exactly? That is just our breakfast time. Can I let my husband breakfast alone? He would never hinder me from going to high mass, he has said so a thousand times, only, he has always added, "When you want to go to mass during breakfast time, I only ask one thing, it is to give me notice the day before, so that I may invite some friends to keep me company."

MADAME B.—But only fancy, pet, our two husbands could not be more alike if they were brothers. Leon has always said, ‘My dear little chicken—’

MADAME A.—Ha, ha, ha.

MADAME B.—Yes, that is his name for me, you know how lively he is. He has always said to me, then, “My dear little chicken, I am not a man to do violence to your opinions, but in return give way to me as regards some of your pious practices.” I only give you just the gist of it, it was said with a thousand delicacies which I suppress. And I have agreed by degrees, . . . so that, whilst only paying very little attention to the outward observances of religion, I have remained, as I told you, a bar of iron as regards dogmas. Oh ! as to that, I would not give way an inch, a hair-breadth, and Leon is the first to tell me that I am right. After all, dogma is everything ; practice, well, what would you ? If I could bring Leon round, it would be quite another thing. How glad I am to have spoken to you about all this.

MADAME A.—Have we not been chattering ? But it is half-past five, and I must go and take my cinchona bark. Thirty minutes before meals, it is a sacred duty. Will you come, pet ?

MADAME B.—Stop a moment, I have lost my thimble again.

XI. THE HOT-WATER BOTTLE.



WHEN midnight strikes, when the embers die away into ashes, the lamp burns more feebly and your eyes close in spite of yourself, the best thing to do, dear madame, is to go to bed.

Leave your arm-chair, take off your bracelets, light your rose-coloured taper, and slowly to the soft accompaniment of

your trailing skirt rustling across the carpet, wend your way to your dressing-room, that perfumed sanctuary in which your beauty, knowing itself to be alone, raises its veils, indulges in self examination, revels in itself and reckons up its treasures as a miser does his wealth.

Before the muslin-framed mirror, which reveals all that it sees so well, you pause carelessly and with a smile give one long satisfied look, then with two fingers you withdraw the pin that kept up your hair, and its long fair tresses unroll and fall in waves, veiling your bare shoulders. With a coquettish hand of which the little finger is turned up, you caress, as you gather them together, the golden flood of your abundant locks, whilst with the other you pass through them the tortoise-shell comb that buries itself in the depths of this fair forest and bends with the effort.

Your tresses are so abundant that your little hand can scarcely grasp them. They are so long that your outstretched arm scarcely reaches their extremity. Hence it is not without difficulty that you manage to twist them up and imprison them in your embroidered night-cap.

This first duty accomplished, you turn the silver tap, and the pure and limpid water pours into a large bowl of enamelled porcelain. You throw in a few drops of that fluid which perfumes and softens the skin, and like a nymph in the depths of a quiet wood preparing for the toilet, you remove the drapery that might encumber you.

But what, madame, you frown. Have I said too much or not enough? Is it not well known that you love cold water, and do you think it is not guessed that at the contact of the dripping sponge you quiver from head to foot?

But what matters it, your toilette for the night is completed, you are fresh, restored, and white as a nun in your embroidered dressing-gown, you plunge your bare feet into

satin slippers and re-enter your bedroom, shivering slightly. To see you walking thus with hurried little steps, wrapped tightly in your dressing-gown, and with your pretty head hidden in its night-cap, you might be taken for a little girl leaving the confessional after having just confessed some big sin.

Gaining the bedside, Madame lays aside her slippers, and lightly and without effort, bounds into the depths of the alcove.

However, Monsieur, who was already asleep with his nose on the *Moniteur*, suddenly wakes up at the movement imparted to the bed.

"I thought that you were in bed already, dear," he murmurs, falling off to sleep again. "Good night."

"If I had been in bed you would have noticed it." Madame stretches out her feet and moves them about; she seems to be in quest of something. "I am not in such a hurry to go to sleep as you are, thank God."

Monsieur, suddenly and evidently annoyed, says: "But what is the matter, my dear? you fidget and fidget. I want to sleep." He turns over as he speaks.

"I fidget. I am simply feeling for my hot-water bottle; you are overpowering, you are,"

"Your hot-water bottle?" is Monsieur's reply, with a grunt.

"Certainly, my hot-water bottle, my feet are frozen." She goes on feeling for it. "You are really very amiable this evening; you began by dozing over the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and I find you snoring above the *Moniteur*. In your place I should vary my literature. I am sure you have taken my hot-water bottle."

"I have been in the wrong. I will subscribe to the *Tintamarre* in future. Come, good night, my dear." He turns over. "Hallo, your hot-water bottle is right

at the bottom of the bed ; I can feel it with the tips of my toes."

"Well, push it up ; do you think that I can dive down there after it."

"Shall I ring for your maid to help you?" He makes a movement of ill temper, pulls the clothes up to his chin, and buries his head in the pillow. "Good night, my dear."

Madame, somewhat vexed, says : "Good night, good night."

The respiration of Monsieur grows smooth, and even his brows relax, his forehead becomes calm, he is on the point of losing all consciousness of the realities of this life.

Madame taps lightly on her husband's shoulder.

"Hum," growls Monsieur.

Madame taps again.

"Well, what is it?"

Madame, in an angelic tone of voice, "My dear, would you put out the candle?"

Monsieur, without opening his eyes, "The hot-water bottle, the candle, the candle, the hot-water bottle."

"Good heavens, how irritable you are, Oscar. I will put it out myself. Don't trouble yourself. You really have a very evil disposition, my dear ; you are in a horrible temper, and if you were goaded a little, in five minutes you would be capable of anything."

Monsieur, his voice smothered in the pillow. "No, not at all ; I am sleepy, dear, that is all. Good night, my dear."

Madame, briskly, "You forget that in domestic life good intelligence has for its basis reciprocal consideration."

"I was in the wrong—come, good night." He raises himself up a little. "Would you like me to kiss you?"

"I don't want you to, but I permit it." She puts her face towards that of her husband, who kisses her on the

forehead. "You are really too good, you have kissed my night-cap."

Monsieur, smiling, "Your hair smells very nice. . . . You see I am so sleepy. Ah! you have it in little plaits, you are going to friz it out to-morrow."

"To friz it out. You were the first to find that that way of dressing it became me, besides, it is the fashion, and to-morrow is my reception day. Come, you irritable man, embrace me once for all and snore at your ease, you are dying to do so."

She holds her neck towards her husband.

Monsieur, laughing, "In the first place I never snore. I never joke." He kisses his wife's neck, and rests his head on her shoulder.

"Well, what are you doing there?" is her remark.

"I am digesting my kiss."

Madame affects the lackadaisical, and looks sideways at her husband with an eye half disarmed. Monsieur sniffs the loved perfume with open nostrils.

After a period of silence he whispers in his wife's ear, "I am not at all sleepy now, dear. Are your feet still cold? I will find the hot-water bottle."

"Oh, thanks, put out the light and let us go to sleep, I am quite tired out."

She turns round by resting her arm on his face.

"No, no, I won't have you go to sleep with your feet chilled; there is nothing worse. There, there is the hot-water bottle, warm your poor little feet . . . there . . . like that."

"Thanks, I am very comfortable. Good-night, dear, let us go to sleep."

"Good-night, my dear."

After a long silence Monsieur turns first on one side and

then on the other, and ends by tapping lightly on his wife's shoulder.

Madame, startled, "What is the matter? Good Heavens, how you startled me!"

Monsieur, smiling, "Would you be kind enough to put out the candle?"

"What, is it for that you wake me up in the middle of my sleep? I shall not be able to go off again. You are unbearable."

"You find me unbearable?" He comes quite close to his wife, "Come, let me explain my idea to you."

"But I want to go to sleep; this is torture. Oh! mamma."

"I want to get to sleep too, it is precisely for us to come to an understanding on that subject that I want to explain my idea to you."

Madame turns round—her eye meets the eye . . full of softness . . of her husband. "Dear me," she says, "you are a perfect tiger."

Then, putting her mouth to his ear, she murmurs with a smile, "Come, explain your idea, for the sake of peace and quiet."

Madame, after a very long silence, and half asleep, "Oscar."

Monsieur, his eyes closed, in a faint voice, "My dear."

"How about the candle, it is still alight?"

"Ah! the candle. I will put it out." He blows it out.

"If you were very nice you would give me a share of your hot-water bottle; one of my feet is frozen. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They clasp hands and fall asleep.

XII. A LONGING.

MONSIEUR and MADAME are quietly sitting together—The clock has just struck ten—MONSIEUR, in his dressing-gown and slippers, is leaning back in an arm-chair and reading the newspaper—MADAME is carelessly working squares of lace.



MADAME—Such things have taken place, have they not, dear?

MONSIEUR (*without raising his eyes*)—Yes my dear.

MADAME—There, well I should never have believed it. But they are monstrous, are they not?

MONSIEUR (*without raising his eyes*)—Yes, my dear.

MADAME—Well, and yet, see how strange it is, Louise acknowledged to me last month, you know ; the evening she called for me to go to the perpetual Adoration, and our hour of adoration, as it turned out, by the way, was from six to seven ; impossible, too, to change our turn ; none of the ladies caring to adore during dinner-time, as is natural enough. Good Heavens, what a rage you were in ! How good God must be to have forgiven you. Do you remember ?

MONSIEUR (*continuing to read*)—Yes, dear.

MADAME—Ah ! you remember that you said, ‘ I don’t care a . . . ’ Oh ! but I won’t repeat what you said, it is too naughty. How angry you were. ‘ I will go and dine at a restaurant, confound it ! ’ But you did not say confound, ha, ha, ha. Well, I loved you just the same at that moment ; it vexed me to see you in a rage on God’s account, but for my own part I was pleased ; I like to see you in a fury, your nostrils expand, and then your moustache bristles, you put me in mind of a lion, and I have always liked lions. When I was quite a child at the Zoological Gardens they could not

get me away from them ; I threw all my sous into their cage for them to buy gingerbread with ; it was quite a passion. Well, to continue my story. (*She looks towards her husband who is still reading, and after a pause,*) Is it interesting what you are reading ?

MONSIEUR (*like a man waking up*)—What is it, my dear child ? What I am reading ? Oh, it would scarcely interest you. (*With a grimace.*) There are Latin phrases, you know, and besides, I am hoarse. But I am listening, go on. (*He resumes his newspaper.*)

MADAME—Well, to return to the perpetual Adoration, Louise confided to me, under the pledge of secrecy, that being in the same condition as myself.

MONSIEUR—As yourself. What do you mean ?

MADAME—In the same condition as myself, that is plain enough.

MONSIEUR—Ah ! in your condition—yes, yes, yes—poor, dear little woman. The deuce if I understood.

MADAME—Well, Louise told me that she had an intolerable longing for . . . but you will not mention it, you must swear to me. . . a longing for . . . blacking.

MONSIEUR—Ah ! that is horrible.

MADAME—Is it not, on account of the colour ?

MONSIEUR—It is monstrous.

MADAME—I was saying so just now . . . but, after all, they say that it is very bad not to gratify such longings ; they even say that the children suffer from it all their lives. Oh, but that is certain.

MONSIEUR—You are talking nonsense, my little angel, follies as big as your chignon. You women will end by putting pillows into your chignons, my little doves.

MADAME (*resting her elbows on her husband's knees*)—But after all, the instincts, the resemblances we have from birth,

must certainly be attributed to something. Can anyone imagine, for instance, that God made your cousin as stupid as he is, and with a head like a pear?

MONSIEUR—My cousin! my cousin! Ferdinand is a cousin by marriage. I grant, however, that he is not very bright.

MADAME—Well, I am sure that his mother must have had a longing, a surprise, a shock, or something.

MONSIEUR—What can I do to help it, my angel?

MADAME—Nothing at all; but it plainly proves that such things are not to be laughed at; and if I were to tell you that I had a longing—

MONSIEUR (*letting fall his newspaper*)—The deuce! a longing for what?

MADAME—Ah, there your nostrils are dilating; you are going to resemble a lion again, and I never shall dare to tell you. It is so extraordinary, and yet my mother had exactly the same longing too.

MONSIEUR—Come, tell it me, you see that I am calm. If it is possible to gratify it, you know that I love you, my . . . Don't kiss me on the neck; you will make me jump up to the ceiling, my darling.

MADAME—Repeat those two little words. I am your darling, then.

MONSIEUR—Ha! ha! ha! She has little fingers which—ha, ha!—go into your neck—ha, ha!—you will make me break something, nervous as I am.

MADAME—Well, break something. If one may not touch one's husband, one may as well go into a convent at once. (*She puts her lips to MONSIEUR's ear and coquettishly pulls the end of his moustache.*) If it was not for our baby's health, I would not speak to you about it; but then I shall not be happy till I have what I am longing for, and then it would be so kind of you to do it.

MONSIEUR—Kind to do what? Come, pet, explain yourself.

MADAME—You must first of all take off that great ugly dressing-gown, pull on your boots, put on your hat and go. Oh, don't make any faces; if you grumble the least little bit, all the merit of your devotedness will disappear . . . and go to the grocer's at the corner of the street, a very reputable shop.

MONSIEUR—To the grocer's at ten o'clock at night! Are you mad? I will ring for John; it is his business, my child.

MADAME (*staying his hand*)—You indiscreet man, John must be ignorant of it all, and besides, could he select it with your tact, the Auvergnat? These are our own private affairs; we must not take anyone into our confidence. I will go into your dressing-room to get your things, and you will put your boots on before the fire comfortably . . . to please me, Alfred, my love, my life. I would give my little finger to have . . .

MONSIEUR—To have what, hang it all, what, what, what?

MADAME (*her face lit up and fixing her eyes on his*)—I want a sou's worth of paste. Had not you guessed it?

MONSIEUR—But it is madness, delirium, fol—

MADAME—I said paste, dearest; only a sou's worth, wrapped in strong paper. There is some fresh at the shop, in a tub to the right, near the prunes. I saw it as I came in for dinner; a cab passed by the shop, and all the tubful shook like a mountain of apple jelly. You will tell the man to take it from the middle of the tub—that is the spot that tempts me.

MONSIEUR—No, no. I am kind-hearted, but I should reproach myself—

MADAME (*closing his mouth with her little hand*)—Oh, not a word; you are going to utter some impiety. But when I

tell you that I have a mad longing for it, that I love you as I have never loved you yet, that my mother had the same desire—Oh! my poor mother (*she weeps in her hands*), if she could only know, if she was not at the other end of France. You have never cared for my parents; I saw that very well on our wedding-day, and (*she sobs*) it will be the sorrow of my whole life.

MONSIEUR (*freeing himself and suddenly rising*)—Give me my boots.

MADAME (*with effusion*)—Oh, thanks, Alfred, my love, you are good, yes, you are good. Will you have your walking-stick, dear?

MONSIEUR—I don't care. How much do you want of that abomination, a franc's worth, thirty sous' worth, a louis' worth?

MADAME—You know very well that I would not make an abuse of it—only a sou's worth. I have some sous for mass; here, take one. Adieu, Alfred; be quick, be quick!

[*Exit* MONSIEUR.]

Left alone, Madame wafts a kiss, in her most tender fashion towards the door Monsieur has just closed behind him, then goes towards the glass and smiles at herself with pleasure. Then she lights the wax candle in a little candlestick, and quietly makes her way to the kitchen, noiselessly opens a press, takes out three little dessert plates, bordered with gold and ornamented with her initials, next takes from a box lined with white leather, two silver spoons, and somewhat embarrassed by all this luggage returns to her bedroom.

Then she pokes the fire, draws a little buhl table up to the hearth, spreads a white cloth, sets out the plates, puts the spoons by them, and enchanted, impatient, with flushed

complexion, leans back in an arm-chair. Her little foot rapidly taps the floor, she smiles, pouts—she is waiting.

At last, after an interval of some minutes, the outer door is heard to close, rapid steps cross the drawing-room, Madame claps her hands and Monsieur comes in. He does not look very pleased, as he advances holding awkwardly in his left hand a flattened parcel the contents of which may be guessed.

MADAME (*taking a gold bordered plate and holding it out to her husband*)—Relieve yourself of it, dear. Could you not have been quicker?

MONSIEUR—Quicker?

MADAME—Oh! I am not angry with you, that is not meant for a reproach, you are an angel; but it seems to me a century since you started.

MONSIEUR—The man was just going to shut his shop up. My gloves are covered with it . . . it's sticky . . . it's horrid, pouah! the abomination. At last I shall have peace and quietness.

MADAME—Oh! no harsh words, they hurt me so. But look at this pretty little table, do you remember how we supped by the fireside? Ah! you have forgotten it, a man's heart has no memory.

MONSIEUR—Are you so mad as to imagine that I am going to touch it? Oh! indeed! that is carrying—

MADAME (*sadly*)—See what a state you get in over a little favour I ask of you. If in order to please me you were to overcome a slight repugnance, if you were just to touch this nice white jelly with your lips, where would be the harm?

MONSIEUR—The harm! the harm! it would be absurd. Never.

MADAME—That is the reason? "It would be absurd."

It is not from disgust, for there is nothing disgusting there, it is flour and water, nothing more. It is not then from a dislike, but out of pride that you refuse ?

MONSIEUR (*shrugging his shoulders*)—What you say is childish, puerile, silly. I do not care to answer it, I shall not answer.

MADAME—And what you say is neither generous nor worthy of you, since you abuse your superiority. You see me at your feet pleading for an insignificant thing, puerile, childish, foolish, perhaps, but one which would give me pleasure, and you think it heroic not to yield. Do you want me to speak out, well ? then, you men are mean, mean.

MONSIEUR—But you must understand, my dear, that . . .

MADAME—I understand that formerly if one of your mistresses, for you have had some—

MONSIEUR—Never.

MADAME—Why you admitted it to me yourself one night, on the Pont des Arts, as we were walking home from the theatre.

MONSIEUR—After all there is no great harm in that ; I never represented myself to you as a vestal.

MADAME—Well, if one of your mistresses had asked of you what I ask now, you would have overcome your dislike, your pride. (*With tearful voice.*) You no longer love me as you used to, and I—still love you. (*She takes her husband's hand and weeps over it.*)

MONSIEUR (*with emotion*)—Claire, my darling, come, you great baby. But she means what she says at any rate. Look at me, come. (*He kisses her.*)

MADAME (*sadly*)—I am not angry with you, this sternness is part of your nature, you are a rod of iron.

MONSIEUR—I have some energy when it is needed I grant you, but I have not the absurd pride you imagine, and there

(*he dips his finger in the paste and carries it to his lips*), is the proof, you spoilt child. Are you satisfied? It has no taste, it is insipid.

MADAME—You were pretending.

MONSIEUR—I swear to you . . .

MADAME (*taking a little spoon, filling it with her precious paste and holding it to her husband's lips*)—I want to see the face you will make, love.

MONSIEUR—(*Puts out his lips, buries his two front teeth with marked disgust in the paste, makes a horrible face and spits into the fire-place*)—Eugh.

MADAME (*still holding the spoon and with much interest*)—Well?

MONSIEUR—Well! it is awful, oh, awful, taste it.

MADAME (*dreamily stirring the paste with the spoon, her little finger in the air*)—I should never have believed that it was so nasty.

MONSIEUR—You will soon see for yourself, taste it, taste it

MADAME—I am in no hurry, I have plenty of time.

MONSIEUR—To see what it is like. Taste a little, come.

MADAME (*pushing away the plate with a look of horror*)—Oh! how you worry me. Be quiet, do; for a trifle I could hate you. It is disgusting, this paste of yours.





FAMILY LIFE.

1. MY FIRST-BORN.



It was the evening of the 15th of February. It was infernally cold. The snow drove against the windows and the wind whistled furiously under the doors. My two aunts, seated at a table in one corner of the drawing-room, gave vent from time to time to deep sighs, and wriggling in their arm-chairs kept casting uneasy glances towards the bed-room door. One of them had taken from a little leather bag placed on the table her blessed rosary and was repeating her prayers, whilst her sister was reading a volume of Voltaire's correspondence which she held at a distance from her eyes, her lips moving as she perused it.

For my own part I was striding up and down the room, gnawing my moustache, a bad habit I have never been able to get rid off, and halting from time to time in front of Dr. C., an old friend of mine who was quietly reading the paper in the most comfortable of the arm-chairs. I dared not disturb him, so absorbed did he seem in what he was reading, but in my heart I was furious to see him so quiet when I myself was so agitated.

All at once he tossed the paper on to the couch and passing his hand across his bald and shining head said :

"Ah! if I were minister, it would not take long, no it would not be very long. . . You have read that article on Algerian cotton. One of two things, either irrigation. . . But you are not listening to me, and yet it is a more serious matter than you think."

He rose and with his hands in his pocket walked across the room humming an old medical student's song. I followed him closely.

"Jacques," said I, as he turned round, "tell me frankly, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, I am satisfied . . observe my untroubled look," and he broke into his hearty and somewhat noisy laugh.

"You are not hiding anything from me, my dear fellow?"

"What a donkey you are, old fellow. I tell you that everything is going on well."

And he resumed his song, jingling the money in his pockets.

"All is going well, but it will take some time," he went on. "Let me have one of your dressing-gowns. I shall be more comfortable for the night and these ladies will excuse me, will they not?"

"Excuse you, I should think so, you, the doctor, and my friend." I felt devotedly attached to him that evening.

"Well then, if they will excuse me, you can very well let me have a pair of slippers."

At this moment a cry came from the next room and we distinctly hear these words in a voice choked by agony :

"Doctor . . oh! God . . doctor!"

"It is frightful," murmured my aunts wriggling in their chairs.

"My dear friend," I exclaimed, seizing the doctor's arm, "you are quite sure you are not concealing anything from me?"

"If you have a very loose pair they will suit me best; I have not the foot of a young girl . . . I am not concealing anything, I am not concealing anything. . . What do you think I am hiding from you? It is all going on very well, only as I said it will take time— By the way, tell Joseph to get me one of your smoking caps; once in dressing-gown and slippers a smoking cap is not out of the way, and I am getting bald, my dear captain. How infernally cold it is here. These windows face the north and there are no sand-bags. Mademoiselle de V.," he added turning to my aunt, "you will catch cold."

Then as fresh cries were heard he said: "Let us go and see the little lady."

And we entered the bedroom where my poor wife was awaiting her baby, in the midst of her agony. Her mother was beside her and kept smiling at her as she repeated, "Courage, my darling; it is the price you must pay for happiness, courage," but big tears were glistening in her eyes and she turned away from time to time to wipe them. On the chest of drawers were set out two or three white packages tied up with pink and blue ribbon; the baby's first toilet, sweet-smelling and all ready to be put on. I took one of the little caps and fitted it on my fist which quite filled it.

"Come here," said my wife, who had caught sight of me, in a low tone of voice, "come here and shake hands with me." Then she drew me towards her and whispered in my ear: "You will be pleased to kiss the little darling, won't you?" Her voice was so faint and so tender as she said this and she added: "Do not take your hand away, it gives me courage."

I remained beside her, therefore, whilst the doctor, who had put on my dressing-gown, vainly strove to button it.



The doctor pulled (the watch and drew near the l

From time to time my poor little wife squeezed my hand violently, closing her eyes as if suffering but not uttering a cry. The fire sparkled on the hearth. The pendulum of the clock went on with its monotonous ticking, but it seemed to me that all this calm was only apparent, that everything about me must be in a state of expectation like myself and sharing my emotion. In the bedroom beyond, the door of which was ajar, I could see the end of the cradle and the shadow of the nurse who was dozing whilst she waited.

What I felt was something strange. I felt a new sentiment springing up in my heart, I seemed to have some foreign body within my breast, and this sweet sensation was so new to me that I was, as it were, alarmed at it. I felt the little creature, who was there without yet being there, clinging to me; his whole life unrolled itself before me. I saw him at the same time a child and a grown-up man; it seemed to me that my own life was about to be renewed in his and I felt from time to time an irresistible need of giving him something of myself.

Towards half-past eleven, the doctor, like a captain consulting his compass, pulled out his watch, muttered something and drew near the bed.

"Do you think the time is approaching, Jacques?" said I.

"I think that in half-an-hour the little darling will have made her entrance into the world—mark the time now."

"Her entrance! But, my dear fellow, you know very well that it should be a boy, no tricks now."

"Have you any signs of that?" said my mother-in-law.

Jacques burst out laughing. "That reminds me," said he, "that at the Lying-in Hospital there was a parrot and this parrot was always repeating—"

"Be quiet. How can you have the heart to tell anecdotes when my poor wife is suffering? Courage, darling."

"Exactly, this parrot was always repeating 'courage, my good girl.' They had it killed, poor thing, because it eat Sister Ursula's slipper."

Soon the pains became intense; my dear little wife, about to become a mother, uttered shrieks that made me shudder. I was so angry at not being able to alleviate her suffering that, for a mere trifle, I could have smacked anyone in the face.

Jacques became serious, took off my dressing-gown and threw it on to a chair. I watched him as a sailor watches the sky on the approach of a storm.

"Come, my dear lady," said he to my wife, "courage, we are all round you and all is going well; within five minutes you will hear him cry out."

But the poor invalid uttered most heart-rending groans; she had gripped me by the arms and, from time to time, her nails buried themselves in my flesh, and I felt big drops of cold perspiration roll down my forehead. My mother-in-law, almost beside herself, was biting her lips and each pang of the sufferer was reflected upon her face. Her cap had got disarranged in such a singular fashion that, under any other circumstances, I should have burst out laughing. At that moment I heard the drawing-room door open and saw the heads of my aunts, one above the other, and behind them that of my father, who was twisting his heavy white moustache with a grimace that was customary to him.

"Shut the door," cried the doctor angrily, "and don't bother me."

And with the greatest coolness in the world he turned to my mother-in-law and added, "I ask a thousand pardons."

But just then there was something else to think of than my old friend's bluntness.

"Is everything ready to receive him?" he continued, growling.

"Yes, my dear doctor," replied my mother-in-law.

At length, after a fearful cry, there was an interval of silence, and then the doctor lifted into the air a little red object which almost immediately uttered a cry as piercing as a needle. I shall never forget the impression produced on me by this poor little thing, making its appearance thus, all of a sudden, in the middle of the family. We had thought and dreamed of it; I had seen him in my mind's eye, my darling child, playing with a hoop, pulling my moustache, trying to walk, or gorging himself with milk in his nurse's arms like a gluttonous little kitten; but I had never pictured him to myself, inanimate, almost lifeless, quite tiny, wrinkled, hairless, grinning and yet, charming, adorable, and beloved in spite of all—poor, ugly, little thing. It was a strange impression, and so singular that it is impossible to understand it, without having experienced it.

"What luck you have," said the doctor, holding the child towards me; "it is a boy."

"A boy!"

"And a stiff built one."

"Really, a boy."

That was a matter of indifference to me now. What was causing me indescribable emotion was the living proof of paternity, this little being who was my own. I felt stupefied in presence of the great mystery of child-birth. My wife was there fainting, overcome, and the little living creature, my own flesh, my own blood, was squalling and gesticulating in the hands of Jacques. I was dumbfounded, like a workman who has unconsciously produced a master-piece. I felt

myself quite small in presence of this quivering piece of work of mine, and, frankly, a little bit ashamed of having made it so well almost without troubling about it. I cannot undertake to explain all this, I merely relate my impressions.

My mother-in-law held out her apron and the doctor placed the child on his grandmother's knees saying: "Come, little savage, try not to be any worse than your rascal of a father. Now for five minutes of gush. Come, captain, embrace me."

We did so heartily. The doctor's little black eyes twinkled more brightly than usual; I saw very well that he was moved.

"Did it make you feel queer, captain? It was the cry. Ah! I know it, it is like a knitting needle through the heart. . . . Where is the nurse? Ah! here she is. No matter, he is a stiff built one, your little lancer. Open the door for the prisoners in the drawing-room."

I opened the door. Everyone was listening on the other side of it. My father, my two aunts, still holding in their hands, one her rosary and the other her Voltaire, my own nurse, poor old woman, who had come in a cab.

"Well," they exclaimed anxiously, "well?"

"It is all over, it is a boy, go in, he is there."

You cannot imagine how happy I was to see on all their faces the reflection of my own emotion. They embraced me and shook hands with me, and I responded to all these marks of affection without exactly knowing whom they came from.

"Damn it all," muttered my father, in my ear, holding me in his arms, with his stick still in his hand and his hat on his head, "Damn it all."

But he could not finish, however brave he might wish to appear, a big tear was glittering at the tip of his nose. He

muttered "Hum" under his moustache and finally burst into tears on my shoulder, saying: "I cannot help it."

And I did likewise, I could not help it either.

However everybody was flocking round the grandmamma, who lifted up a corner of her apron and said:

"How pretty he is, the darling, how pretty. Nurse, warm the linen, give me the caps."

"Smile at your aunty," said my aunt, jangling her rosary above the baby's head, "smile at aunty."

"Ask him at the same time to recite a fable," said the doctor.

Meanwhile my wife was coming to herself, she half opened her eyes and seemed to be looking for something.

"Where is he?" she murmured in a faint voice.

They showed her her mother's apron.

"A boy, is it not?"

Taking my hand she drew me down towards her and said in a whisper, "Are you satisfied with me? I did my best, dear."

"Come, no emotion," exclaimed the doctor, "you shall kiss one another to-morrow. Colonel," he said to my father who still retained his hat and stick, "keep them from kissing. No emotion, and every one outside. I am going to dress the little lancer. Give me the little man, grandmamma. Come here, little savage. You shall see whether I don't know how to fasten pins in."

He took the baby in his two large hands and sat down on a stool before the fire.

I watched my boy whom Jacques was turning about like a doll, but with great skill. He examined him all over, touching and feeling him, and at each test said with a smile:

"He is a stiff built one, he is a stiff built one."

Then he rolled him up in his clothes, put a triple cap on his little bald head, tied a folded ribbon under his chin to prevent his head from falling backwards, and then satisfied with his work, said :

"You saw how I did it, nurse? well you must dress this lancer every morning in the same way. Nothing but a little sugar and water till to-morrow. The mother has no fever, no. Come, all is going on well. Lucky captain. I am that hungry. Do you know that it is one in the morning? You haven't got cold partridge or a bit of pie that you don't know what to do with, have you? It would suit me down to the ground with a bottle of something."

We both went into the dining-room and laid the cloth without any more ceremony.

I never in my life eat and drank so much as on that occasion.

"Come, get off to bed," said the doctor, putting on his coat. "To-morrow morning you shall have the wet nurse. No, by the way. I'll call for you, and we will go and choose her together; it is curious. Be under arms at half-past eight."

II. NEW YEAR'S DAY.



It is barely seven o'clock. A pale ray of daylight is stealing through the double curtains, and already someone is tapping at the door. I can hear in the next room the stifled laughter and the silvery tones of Baby, who is quivering with impatience, and asking leave to come in.

"Papa," he cries, "it is Baby, it is Baby come for the New Year."

"Come in, my darling; come quick and kiss us."

The door opens and my boy, his eyes aglow, and his arms raised, rushes towards the bed. His curls, escaping from the night-cap covering his head, float on his forehead. His long loose night-shirt catching his little feet, increases his impatience, and causes him to stumble at every step.

At length he crosses the room, and holding out his two hands to mine! "Baby wishes you a Happy New Year," he says in an earnest voice.

"Poor little love, with his bare feet. Come, darling, and warm yourself under the counterpane."

I lift him towards me, but at this moment my wife, who is asleep, suddenly wakes up.

"Who is there?" she exclaims, feeling for the bell. "Thieves!"

"It is we two, dear."

"Who? Good heavens! how you frightened me. I was dreaming the place was on fire, and that I heard your voice amidst the flames. You were very imprudent, shouting like that!"

"Shouting! but you forget, mamma, that it is New Year's Day, the day of smiles and kisses? Baby was waiting for you to wake up, and I too."

However, I wrap my little man up in the eider-down quilt and warm his cold feet in my hands.

"Mamma, it is New Year's Day," he exclaims. With his arms he draws our two heads together, puts forward his own and kisses at hap-hazard with his moist lips. I feel his dimpled fists digging into my neck, his little fingers entangled in my beard.

My moustache tickles the tip of his nose, and he bursts into a fit of laughter as he throws his head back.

His mother, who has recovered from her fright, takes him in her arms and rings the bell.

"The year is beginning well, dear," she says, "but we must have a little daylight."

"Mamma, naughty children don't have any new toys on New Year's Day, do they?"

And as he says this the slyboots eyes a pile of parcels and packages reared up in one corner, and visible despite the semi-darkness.

Soon the curtains are drawn aside, the shutters opened, daylight floods the room, the fire crackles merrily on the hearth, and two large parcels, carefully tied up, are placed on the bed. One is for my wife, and the other for my boy.

"What is it? What is it?" I have multiplied the knots and tripled the wrappings, and I gleefully follow their impatient fingers entangled amongst the strings.

My wife gets impatient, smiles, pouts, kisses me and asks for the scissors.

Baby on his side tugs with all his might, biting his lips as he does so, and ends by asking my help. His look strives to penetrate the wrappers. All the signs of desire and expectation are stamped on his face. His hand, hidden under the coverlet, causes the silk to rustle with its convulsive movements, and his lips quiver as at the approach of some dainty.

At length the last paper falls aside. The lid is lifted, and joy breaks forth.

"A fur tippet!"

"A Noah's ark!"

"To match my muff, dear old husband."

"With a Noah on wheels, dear papa. I do love you so."

They throw themselves on my neck, four arms are clasped round me at once. Emotion gets the better of me, and a tear steals into my eye. There are two in those of my wife, and Baby, losing his head, sobs as he kisses my hand.

It is absurd, you will say.

Absurd, I don't know ; but delightful, I can answer for it.

Does not grief, after all, call forth enough tears for us to forgive joy the solitary one she perchance causes us to shed ?

Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it single-handed, and when the heart is empty, the way seems long.

It is so pleasant to feel oneself loved, to hear beside one the cadenced steps of one's fellow-travellers, and to say, "They are here, our three hearts beat in unison." So pleasant once a year, when the great clock strikes the first of January, to sit down beside the path, with hands locked together, and eyes fixed on the unknown dusty road losing itself in the horizon, and to say, whilst embracing one another, "We still love one another, my dear children ; you rely on me, and I rely on you. Let us have confidence, and walk straight."

This, sir, is how I explain that one may weep a little whilst examining a tippet and opening a Noah's ark.

But breakfast time draws near. I have cut myself twice whilst shaving, I have stepped on to my son's wild beasts in turning round, and I have the prospect of a dozen duty calls, as my wife terms them, before me ; yet I am delighted.

We sit down to the breakfast table, which has a more than usually festive aspect. A faint aroma of truffles perfumes the air, everyone is smiling, and through the glass I see, startling sight, the doorkeeper, with his own hands, wiping the handrail of the staircase. It is a glorious day.

Baby has ranged his elephants, lions, and giraffes round

his plate, and his mother, under pretext of a draught, breakfasts in her tippet.

"Have you ordered the carriage, dear, for our visits?" I ask.

"That cushion for Aunt Ursula will take up such a deal of room. It might be put beside the coachman, though."

"Poor aunt."

"Papa, don't let us go to Aunt Ursula," said Baby; "she does prick so when she kisses you."

"Naughty boy. . . Think of all we have to get into the carriage. Leon's rocking horse, Louise's muff, your father's slippers, Ernestine's quilt, the bonbons, the work-box. I declare, aunt's cushion must go under the coachman's feet."

"Papa, why doesn't the giraffe eat cutlets?"

"I really don't know, dear."

"Neither do I, papa."

An hour later we are ascending the staircase leading to Aunt Ursula's. My wife counts the steps as she pulls herself up by the hand-rail, and I carry the famous cushion, the bonbons, and my son, who has insisted on bringing his giraffe with him.

Aunt Ursula, who produces the same effect upon him as the sight of a rod would, is awaiting us in her icy little drawing-room. Four square arm-chairs, hidden beneath yellow covers, stand vacant behind four little foot-mats. A clock in the shape of a pyramid, surmounted by a sphere, ticks under a glass shade.

A portrait on the wall, covered with fly-spots, shows a nymph with a lyre standing beside a waterfall. This nymph was Aunt Ursula. How she has altered.

"My dear aunt, we have come to wish you a Happy New Year."

"To express our hopes that—"

"Thank you, nephew, thank you, niece," and she points to two chairs. "I am sensible of this step on your part; it proves to me that you have not altogether forgotten the duties imposed upon you by family ties."

"You are reckoning, my dear aunt, without the affection we feel for you, and which of itself is enough. . . . Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

Baby whispers in my ear, "But, papa, I tell you she does prick."

I place the bonbons on a side-table.

"You can, nephew, dispense with offering me that little gift; you know that sweetmeats disagree with me, and if I were not aware of your indifference as to the state of my health, I should see in your offering a veiled sarcasm. But let that pass. Does your father still bear up against his infirmities courageously?"

"Thank you, yes."

"I thought to please you, dear aunt," observes my wife, "by embroidering for you this cushion, which I beg you to accept."

"I thank you, child, but I can still hold myself sufficiently upright, thank God, not to have any need of a cushion. The embroidery is charming, it is an Oriental design. You might have made a better choice, knowing that I like things much more simple. It is charming, however, although this red next to the green here sets one's teeth on edge. Taste in colours is, however, not given to everyone. I have, in return, to offer you my photograph, which that dear Abbé Miron insisted on my having taken."

"How kind you are, and how like you it is. Do you recognise your aunt, Baby?"

"Do not think yourself obliged to speak contrary to your opinion. This photograph does not in any way resemble me,

my eyes are much brighter. I have also a packet of jujubes for your child. He seems to have grown."

"Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

"And then we shall go, mamma?"

"You are very rude, sir."

"Let him speak out, at any rate he is frank. But I see that your husband is getting impatient, you have other . . errands to fulfil; I will not keep you. Besides, I am going to church to pray for those who do not pray themselves."

From twelve duty calls, subtract one duty call, and eleven remain. Hum! "Coachman, Rue St. Louis au Marais."

"Papa, has Aunt Ursula needles in her chin?"

Let us pass over the eleven duty calls, they are no more agreeable to write than to make.

Towards seven o'clock, heaven be praised, the horses stop before my father's, where dinner awaits us. Baby claps his hands, and smiles at old Jeannette, who, at the sound of the wheels, has rushed to the door. "Here they are," she exclaims, and she carries off Baby to the kitchen, where my mother, with her sleeves turned up, is giving the finishing touch to her traditional cake.

My father, on his way to the cellar, lantern in hand, and escorted by his old servant Jean, who is carrying the basket, halts. "Why, children, how late you are. Come to my arms, my dears; this is the day on which one kisses in good earnest. Jean, hold my lantern a minute." And as my old father clasps me to his breast, his hand seeks out mine and grasps it with a long clasp. Baby, who glides in between our legs, pulls our coat-tails and holds up his little mouth for a kiss too.

"But I am keeping you here in the anteroom and you are

frozen ; go into the drawing-room, there are a good fire and good friends there."

They have heard us, the door opens, and a number of arms are held out to us. Amidst handshakings, embracings, good wishes, and kisses, boxes are opened, bonbons are showered forth, parcels are undone, mirth becomes deafening, and good humour tumultuous. Baby standing amidst his presents resembles a drunken man surrounded by a treasure, and from time to time gives a cry of joy at discovering some fresh toy.

"The little man's fable," exclaims my father, swinging his lantern which he has taken again from Jean.

A deep silence ensues, and the poor child, whose debut in the elocutionary art it is, suddenly loses countenance. He casts down his eyes, blushes and takes refuge in the arms of his mother, who, stooping down, whispers, "Come, darling, 'A lamb was quenching;' you know the wolf and the lamb."

"Yes, mamma, I know the little lamb that wanted to drink." And in a contrite voice, his head bent down on his breast, he repeats with a deep sigh, "'A lamb was quenching his thirst in a clear stream.'"

We all, with ears on the alert and a smile on our lips, follow his delightful little jargon.

Uncle Bertrand, who is rather deaf, has made an ear trumpet of his hand and drawn his chair up. "Ah ! I can follow it," he says, "it is the fox and the grapes." And as there is a murmur of "Hush," at this interruption, he adds : "Yes, yes, he recites with intelligence, great intelligence."

Success restores confidence to my darling, who finishes his fable with a burst of laughter. Joy is communicative, and we take our places at table amidst the liveliest mirth.

"By the way," says my father, "where the deuce is my lantern. I have forgotten all about the cellar. Jean, take your basket and let us go and rummage behind the faggots."

The soup is smoking, and my mother after having glanced smilingly round the table, plunges her ladle into the tureen. Hurrah for the family dinner table at which those we love are seated, at which we may risk resting our elbows at desert, and at which at thirty we once more taste the wine drank at our baptism.

III THE LETTERS OF A YOUNG MOTHER.

TO HER FRIEND.



HE little caps are the ones I want, Marie. Be good enough to send me the pattern of the braces, those of your own invention, you know. Thanks for your coverlet, my dear friend, it is soft, flexible, warm, and charming, and Baby, amidst its white wool, looks like a rose-bud hidden in the snow. I am becoming poetical, am I not? But what would you have, my poor heart is overflowing with joy. My son, do you understand that, dear, my own son? When I heard the sharp cry of the little being whom my mother showed me lying in her apron, it seemed to me that a burning thrill of love shot through my veins. My old doctor's bald head was close to me, I caught hold of it and kissed him thrice.

"Calm yourself, my dear child," said he.

"Doctor, be quiet or I will kiss you again. Give me my baby, my love. Are you quite sure it is a boy?"

And in the adjoining drawing-room, where the whole family

were waiting, I could hear amidst the sound of kisses, the delightful words, "It is a boy, a fine boy."

My poor husband, who for twelve hours had not left me, overcome with fatigue and emotion, was crying and laughing in one corner of the room.

"Come, nurse, swaddle him, quick now. No pins, confound it all, strings, I will have strings. What? Give me the child, you don't understand anything about it."

And the good doctor in the twinkling of an eye had dressed my child.

"He looks a colonel, your boy. Put him into the cradle with . . . now be calm, my dear patient . . . with a hot-water bottle to his feet. Not too much fire, especially in the colonel's room. Now, no more noise, repose, and every one out of the way."

And as through the opening of the door which was just ajar, Aunt Ursula whispered, "Doctor, let me come in; just to press her hand, doctor."

"Confound it, everyone must be off, silence and quiet are absolutely necessary." They all left.

"Octave," continued the doctor, "come and kiss your wife now, and make an end of it. Good little woman, she has been very brave. . . Octave, come and kiss your wife, and be quick about it if you don't want me to kiss her myself. I will do what I say," he added, threatening to make good his words.

Octave, buried in his child's cradle, did not hear.

"Good, now he is going to suffocate my colonel for me."

My husband came at length. He held out his hand which was quivering with emotion, and I grasped it with all my might. If my heart at that moment did not break from excess of feeling, it was because God no doubt knew that I should still have need of it.

in grand projects for his future, very silly no doubt, but so fascinating.

Octave wants him to follow a diplomatic career. He says that he has the eye of a statesman and that his gestures are few but full of meaning. Poor dear little ambassador, with only three hairs on your head ! But what loves of hairs they are, those threads of gold curling at the back of his neck, just above the rosy fold where the skin is so fine and so fresh that kisses nestle there of themselves.

The whole of his little body has a perfume which intoxicates me and makes my heart leap. What, dear friend, are the invisible ties which bind us to our children ? Is it an atom of our own soul, a part of our own life, which animates and vivifies them ? There must be something of the kind, for I can read amidst the mists of his little mind. I divine his wishes, I know when he is cold, I can tell when he is hungry.

Do you know the most delightful moment ? It is when after having taken his evening meal and gorged himself with milk like a gluttonous little kitten, he falls asleep with his rosy cheek resting on my arm. His limbs gently relax, his head sinks down on my breast, his eyes close, and his half opened mouth continues to repeat the action of suckling.

His warm moist breath brushes the hand that is supporting him. Then I wrap him up snugly in my turned up skirt, hide his little feet under his clothes and watch my darling. I have him there, all to myself, on my knees. There is not a quiver of his being that escapes me or that does not vibrate in myself. I feel at the bottom of my heart a mirror that reflects them all. He is still part of me. Is it not my milk that nourishes him, my voice that hushes him off to sleep, my hand that dresses and caresses, encourages and supports him ? The feeling that I am all in all for him

further adds a delicious charm of protection to the delight of having brought him into the world.

When I think that there are women who pass by such joys without turning their heads. The fools !

Yes, the present is delightful and I am drunk with happiness. There is also the future, far away in the clouds. I often think of it, and I do not know why I shudder as at the approach of a storm.

Madness. I shall love him so discreetly, I shall render the weight of my affection so light for him, that why should he wish to separate from me ? Shall I not in time become his friend ? Shall I not when a black down shadows those rosy little lips, when the bird, feeling its wings grown, seeks to leave the nest, shall I not be able to bring him back by invisible ties to the arms in which he now is sleeping ? Perhaps at that wretched moment they call a man's youth you will forget me, my little darling. Other hands than mine perhaps will brush the hair away from your forehead at twenty. Alas ! other lips, pressed burningly where mine are now pressed, will wipe out with a kiss twenty years of caresses. Yes, but when you return from this intoxicating and fatiguing journey, tired and exhausted, you will soon take refuge in the arms that once nursed you, you will rest your poor aching head where it rests now, you will ask me to wipe away your tears and to make you forget the bruises received on the way, and I shall give you, weeping for joy, the kiss which at once consoles and fills with hope.

But I see that I am writing a whole volume, dear Marie. I will not re-read it or I should never dare send it to you. What would you have ? I am losing my head a little. I am not yet accustomed to all this happiness.

Yours affectionately.

FOUR YEARS LATER.

Yes, my dear, he is a man and a man for good and all. He has come back from the country half as big again and as bold as brass. He climbs on to the chairs, stops the clocks and sticks his hands in his pockets like a grown up man.

When I see in the morning in the ante-room my baby's little shoes standing proudly beside the paternal boots, I experience, despite myself, a return towards that past which is yet so near. Yesterday swaddling clothes, to-day boots, to-morrow spurs. Ah! how the happy days fly by. Already four years old. I can scarcely carry him, even supposing he allowed me to, for his manly dignity is ticklish. He passes half his life armed for war, his pistols, his guns, his whips and his swords are all over the place. There is a healthy frankness about all his doings that charms me.

Do not believe from all this that my demon no longer has any good in him; he is an angel at times and freely returns the caresses I bestow upon him. In the evening after dinner he squats down in my arm-chair, takes my head in his hands and arranges my hair in his own way. His fresh little mouth travels all over my face. He bestows big sounding kisses on the back of my neck which makes me shudder all over. We have endless talks together. "Why's" come in showers, and all these "why's" require real answers, for the intelligence of children is above all things logical. I will only give one of his sayings as a proof.

His grandmother is rather unwell and every night he adds to his prayer these simple words, "Please God make granny well, because I love her so." But for greater certainty he has added on his own account, "You know, God, granny who lives in the Rue Saint-Louis, on the first floor." He says this with an expression of simple confidence

and such comic seriousness, the little love. You understand, it is to spare God the trouble of looking for the address.

I leave you ; I hear him cough. I do not know whether he has caught cold, but I think he has been looking rather languid since the morning. Do not laugh at me, I am not otherwise uneasy.

Yours most affectionately.

Yesterday there was a consultation. On leaving the house my old doctor's eyes were moist ; he strove to hide it, but I saw a tear. My child must be very ill then ? The thought is dreadful, dear. They seek to reassure me, but I tremble.

The night has not brought any improvement. Still this fever. If you could see the state of the pretty little body we used to admire so. I will not think of what God may have in store for me. Ice has been ordered to be put to his head. His hair had to be cut off. Poor fair little curls that used to float in the wind as he ran after his hoop. It is fearful. I have horrible forebodings.

My child, my poor child. He is so weak that not a word comes now from his pale parched lips. His large eyes that still shine in the depths of their sockets smile at me from time to time, but this smile is so gentle, so faint, that it resembles a farewell. A farewell ! But what would become of me ?

This morning thinking he was asleep, I could not restrain a sob. His lips opened, and he said, but in a whisper so low that I had to put my ear close down to catch it : " You do love me then, mamma ? "

Do I love him ? I should die.

Yours as ever.

NICE.

They have brought me here and I feel no better for it. Every day my weakness increases. I still spit blood. Besides, what do they seek to cure me of?

If I should never return to Paris, you will find in my wardrobe his last toys; the traces of his little fingers are still visible on them. To the left is the branch of the blessed box that used to hang at his bedside. Let your hands alone touch all this. Burn these dear relics, this poor evidence of shattered happiness. I can still see. . . . Sobs are choking me.

Farewell, dear friend. What would you? I built too high on too unstable a soil. I loved one object too well.

Yours from my heart.

IV. OLD RECOLLECTIONS.



OVER yourselves with fine green leaves, tall trees casting your peaceful shade. Steal through the branches, bright sunlight, and you, studious promenaders, contemplative idlers, mammas in bright toilettes, gossiping nurses, noisy children, and hungry babies, take possession of your kingdom; these long walks belong to you.

It is Sunday. Joy and festivity. The gaufre seller decks his shop and lights his stove. The white cloth is spread on the table and piles of golden cakes attract the customer.

The letter-out of chairs has put on her apron and her big pockets for the sous. The park keeper, your bogey, my dear little children, has curled his moustache, polished up his harmless sword and put on his best uniform. See how bright and seductive the marionette theatre looks in the sunshine under its striped covering.

Sunday requires all this in its honour.

Unhappy are those to whom the tall trees of the Luxembourg gardens do not recall one of those recollections which cling to the heart like its first perfume to a vase.

I was a general, under those trees, a general with a plume like a mourning coach-horse, and armed to the teeth. I held command from the hut of the newspaper vendor to the kiosk of the gaufre seller. No false modesty, my authority extended to the basin of the fountain, although the great white swans rather alarmed me. Ambushes behind the tree trunks, advanced posts behind the nursemaids, surprises, fights with cold steel, attacks by skirmishers, dust, encounters, carnage and no bloodshed. After which our mammas wipe our foreheads, rearranged our dishevelled hair, and tore us away from the battle of which we dreamed all night.

Now, as I pass through the garden with its army of children and nurses, leaning on my stick with halting step, how I regret my general's cocked hat, my paper plume, my wooden sword and my pistol. My pistol that would snap caps and was the cause of my rapid promotion.

Disport yourselves, small fry ; gossip, plump nurses, as you scold your soldiers. Embroider peaceably, young mothers, making from time to time a little game of your neighbours amongst yourselves ; and you, reflective idlers, look at that charming picture—babies making a garden.

Playing in the sand, a game as old as the world and always amusing. Hillocks built up in a line with little bits of wood stuck into them represent gardens in the walks of which the baby gravely places his little uncertain feet. What would he not give, dear little man, to be able to complete his work by creating a pond in his park, a pond, a gutter, three drops of water ?

Further on the sand is damper, and in the mountain the

little fingers pierce a tunnel. A gigantic work which the boot of a passer-by will soon destroy. What passer-by respects a baby's mountain? Hence the young rascal avenges himself. See that gentleman in the brown frock-coat, who is reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on the bench; our workers have piled up hillocks of sand and dust around him, the skirts of his coat have already lost their colour.

But let this equipage noisily dashing along go by. Four horses, two bits of string, and a fifth horse who is the driver. That is all, and yet one fancies oneself in a post chaise. How many places has one not visited by nightfall?

There are drivers who prefer to be horses, there are horses who would rather be drivers; first symptoms of ambition.

And the solitary baby who slowly draws his omnibus round the gaufre seller, eyeing his shop. An indefatigable consumer, but a poor paymaster.

Do you see down there under the plane trees, that group of nurses, a herd of Burgundian milch kine, and at their feet, rolling on a carpet, all those little rosy buttocked philosophers who only ask God for a little sunshine, pure titty, and quiet, in order to be happy. Frequently an accident disturbs the delightful calm. The Burgundian who mistrusted matters darts forward. It is too late.

"The course of a river is not to be checked," says Giboyer.

Sometimes the disaster is still more serious, and one repairs it as one can; but the philosopher who loves these disasters is indignant and squalls, swearing to himself to begin again.

These little folk are delightful; we love children, but this affection for the species in general becomes yet more sweet when it is no longer a question of a baby, but of one's own baby.

Bachelors must not read what follows, I wish to speak to

the family circle. Between those of a trade there is a better understanding.

I am a father, dear madame, but I have been a papa, and of course the papa of a love of a child. From beneath his cap there escaped a fair and curly tress that was our delight, and when I touched his white neck with my finger he broke into a laugh and showed me his little white pearls, as he clasped my head in his two arms.

His first tooth was an event. We went into the light the better to see. The grand-parents looked through their glasses at the little white spot, and I, with outstretched neck, demonstrated, explained and proved. And all at once I ran off to the cellar to seek out in the right corner a bottle of the best.

My son's first tooth. We spoke of his career during dinner, and at desert grandmamma gave us a song.

After this tooth came others, and with them tears and pain, but then when they were all there how proudly he bit into his slice of bread, how vigorously he attacked his chop in order to do "like papa."

"Like papa," do you remember how those two words warm the heart, and how many transgressions they cause to be forgiven.

My great happiness, is it yours too? was to be present at my darling's awakening. I knew the time. I would gently draw aside the curtains of his cradle and watch him as I waited.

I usually found him stretched diagonally, lost in a chaos of sheets and blankets, his legs in the air, his arms crossed above his head. Often his plump little hand still clutched the toy that had helped to send him off to sleep, and through his parted lips came the regular murmur of his soft breathing. The warmth of his bye-bye had given his cheeks the

tint of a well-ripened peach. His skin was warm, and the perspiration of the night glittered on his forehead in little imperceptible pearls.

Soon his hand would make a movement ; his foot pushed away the blanket, his whole body stirred, he rubbed an eye, stretched out his arms, and then his look from under his scarcely raised eye-lid would rest on me.

He would smile at me, murmuring softly, so softly that I would hold my breath to seize all the shades of his music.

“Dood mornin’ apa.”

“Good morning, my little man ; have you slept well ?”

We held out our arms to one another and embraced like old friends.

Then the talking would begin. He chatted as the larks sing to the rising sun. Endless stories.

He would tell me his dreams, asking after each sentence for “his nice, warm sop with plenty of sugar.” And when his nice warm sop came up smoking, what an outburst of laughter, what joy as he drew himself up to reach it by his curtains ; his eye glittered with a tear in the corner, and the chatter began again.

At other times he would come and surprise me in bed. I would pretend to be asleep, and he would pull my beard and shout in my ear. I feigned great alarm, and swore to avenge myself. From this arose fights among the counterpanes, entrenchments behind the pillows, &c. In sign of victory I would tickle him and then he shuddered, giving vent to the frank and involuntary outburst of laughter of happy childhood. He buried his head between his two shoulders like a tortoise withdrawing into his shell, and threatened me with his plump rosy foot. The skin of his heel was so delicate that a young girl’s cheek would have been proud of it. How

many kisses I would cover those dear tootsicums with when I warmed his long night-dress before the fire.

I had been forbidden to undress him, under the pretext that I entangled the knots instead of undoing them.

All this was charming, but when it was necessary to act rigorously and check the romping that was going too far, he would slowly drop his eyelids, whilst with dilated nostrils and trembling lips he tried to keep back the big tear glittering beneath his eyelid.

What courage was not necessary in order to refrain from calming with a kiss the storm on the point of bursting, from consoling the little swollen heart, from drying the tear that was overflowing and about to become a flood.

A child's expression is then so touching, there is so much grief in a warm tear slowly falling, in a little contracted face, a little heaving breast.

All this is long past. Yet years have gone by without effacing these loved recollections; and now that my baby is thirty years old, and has a heavy moustache, when he holds out his large hand and says in his bass voice, "Good morning, father," it still seems to me that an echo repeats afar off the dear words of old, "Dood mornin', papa."

V. THE LITTLE BOOTS.



N the morning when I left my room, I saw placed in line before the door his boots and mine. His were little lace up boots rather out of shape, and dulled by the rough usage to which he subjects them. The sole of the left boot was worn thin, and a little hole was threatening at the toe of the right. The laces worn and slack, hung to the right and left. Swellings in the leather marked the places of his toes, and the accustomed move-

ments of his little foot had left their traces in the shape of creases, slight or deep.

Why have I remembered all this? I really do not know, but it seems to me that I can still see the boots of the dear little one placed there on the mat beside my own, two grains of sand by two paving stones, a tomtit beside an elephant. They were his every-day boots, his play fellows, those with which he ascended sand hills, and explored puddles. They were devoted to him, and shared his existence so closely that something of himself was met with again in them. I should have recognised them amongst a thousand; they had an especial physiognomy for me, it seemed to me that an invisible tie attached them to him, and I could not look at their undecided shape, their comic and charming grace, without recalling their little master, and acknowledging to myself that they resembled him.

Everything belonging to a baby becomes a bit babyish itself, and assumes that expression of awkward and simple grace peculiar to him.

Beside these laughing, gay, good-humoured little boots, only asking leave to run about the country, my own seemed monstrous, heavy, coarse, ridiculous, with their high heels. From their heavy and disabused air one felt that for them life was a grave matter, its journeys long, and the burden borne quite a serious one.

The contrast was striking, and the lesson deep. I would softly approach these little boots in order not to wake the little man who was still asleep in the adjoining room; I felt them, I turned them over, I looked at them on all sides, and I found a delightful smile rise to my lips. Never did the old violet-scented glove that lay for so long in the inmost recess of my drawer, procure me so sweet an emotion.

Paternal love is no trifle; it has its follies and its weak-

nesses, it is puerile or sublime, it can neither be analysed nor explained, it is simply felt, and I yielded myself to it with delight.

Let the papa without weakness cast the first stone at me, the mammas will avenge me.

Remember that this little laced boot with a hole at the toe, reminded me of his plump little foot, and that a thousand recollections were connected with that dear tootsicum.

I recalled him, dear child, as when I cut his toe nails, wriggling about, pulling my beard, and laughing in spite or himself, for he was ticklish.

I recalled him as when of an evening in front of a good fire, I pulled off his little socks. What a treat.

I would say "one, two." And he, clad in his long nightgown, his hands lost in the sleeves, would wait with glittering eyes, and ready to break into a fit of laughter for the "three."

At last after a thousand delays, a thousand little teasings that excited his impatience and allowed me to snatch five or six kisses, I said "three."

The sock flew away. Then there was wild joy ; he would throw himself back on my arm, waving his bare legs in the air. From his open mouth, in which two rows of shining little pearls could be distinguished, welled forth a burst of ringing laughter.

His mother, who, however, laughed too, would say the next minute :

"Come, baby, come, my little angel, you will get cold. . . But leave off. . . Will you have done, you little demon?"

She wanted to scold, but she could not be serious at the sight of his fair-haired head, and flushed, smiling, happy face, thrown back on my knee.

She would look at me, and say,

"He is unbearable. Good heavens ! what a child."

But I understood that this meant :

"Look how handsome, sturdy and healthy he is, our baby, our little man, our son."

And indeed he was adorable, at least I thought so.

I had the wisdom—I can say it now that my hair is white—not to let one of these happy moments pass without amply profiting by it, and really I did well. Pity the fathers who do not know how to be papas as often as possible, who do not know how to roll on the carpet, play at being a horse, pretend to be the great wolf, undress their baby, imitate the barking of the dog and the roar of the lion, bite whole mouthfuls without hurting, and hide behind arm-chairs so as to let themselves be seen.

Pity sincerely these unfortunates. It is not only pleasant child's play that they neglect, but true pleasure, delightful enjoyment, the scraps of that happiness which is so greatly calumniated and accused of not existing because we expect it to fall from heaven in a solid mass, when it lies at our feet in fine powder. Let us pick up the fragments, and not grumble too much ; every day brings us with its bread its ration of happiness.

Let us walk slowly and look down on the ground, searching around us and seeking in the corners ; it is there that Providence has its hiding places.

I have always laughed at those people who rush through life at full speed, with dilated nostrils, uneasy eyes, and glance rivetted on the horizon. It seems as though the present scorched their feet, and when you say to them, "Stop a moment, alight, take a glass of this good old wine, let us chat a little, laugh a little, kiss your child."

"Impossible," they reply ; "I am expected over there.

There I shall converse, there I shall drink delicious wine, there I shall give expansion to paternal love, there I shall be happy, there."

And when they do get "there" breathless and tired out, and claim the price of their fatigue, the present laughing behind its spectacles say, "Sir, the bank is closed."

The future promises, it is the present that pays, and one should have a good understanding with the one that keeps the keys of the safe.

Why fancy that you are a dupe of Providence?

Do you think that Providence has the time to serve up to each of you perfect happiness, all ready dressed on a golden plate and to play music during your repast into the bargain? Yet that is what a great many people would like.

We must be reasonable, tuck up our sleeves and look after our cooking ourselves, and not insist that heaven should put itself out of the way to skim our soup.

I used to muse on all this of an evening when my baby was in my arms, and his moist, regular breathing fanned my hand. I thought of the happy moments he had already given me, and was grateful to him for them.

"How easy it is," I said to myself, "to be happy, and what a singular fancy is that of going as far as China in quest of amusement."

My wife was of my opinion, and we would sit for hours by the fire talking of what we felt.

"You, do you see, dear? love otherwise than I do," she often said to me. "Papàs calculate more. Their love requires a return. They do not really love their child till the day on which their self-esteem as its father is flattered. There is something of ownership in it. You can analyse paternal love, discover its causes, say 'I love my child because he is so and so, or so and so.' With the mother such analysis is

impossible, she does not love her child because he is handsome or ugly, because he does or does not resemble her, has or has not her tastes. She loves him because she cannot help it, it is a necessity. Maternal love is an innate sentiment in woman. Paternal love is, in man, the result of circumstances. In her it is an instinct, in him a calculation, of which, it is true, he is unconscious, but in short it is the outcome of several other feelings."

"That is all very fine, go on," I said. "We have neither heart nor bowels, we are fearful savages. What you say is monstrous." And I stirred the logs furiously with the tongs.

Yet my wife was right, I acknowledged to myself. When a child comes into the world the affection of the father is not to be compared to that of the mother. With her it is love already. It seems that she has known him for a long time, her pretty darling. At his first cry it might be said that she recognised him. She seems to say, "It is he." She takes him without the slightest embarrassment, her movements are natural, she shows no awkwardness, and in her two twining arms the baby finds a place to fit him, and falls asleep contentedly in the nest there created for him. It would be thought that woman serves a mysterious apprenticeship to maternity. Man, on the other hand, is greatly troubled by the birth of a child. The first wail of the little creature stirs him, but in this emotion there is more astonishment than love. His affection is not yet born. His heart requires to reflect and to become accustomed to these fondnesses so new to him.

There is an apprenticeship to the business of a papa. There is none to that of a mother.

If the father is clumsy morally in his love for his first-born, it must be acknowledged that he is so physically in the manifestation of his fondness.

It is only tremblingly, and with contortions and efforts, that he lifts this slight burden. He is afraid of smashing the youngster, who knows this, and bawls with all the force of his lungs. He expends more strength, poor man, in lifting his child than he would in bursting a door open. If he kisses him, his beard pricks him ; if he touches him, his big fingers cause him some disaster. He has the air of a bear threading a needle.

And yet it must be won, the affection of this poor father, who, at the outset, meets nothing but misadventures ; he must be captivated, captured, made to have a taste for the business, and not be left too long to play the part of a recruit.

Nature has provided for it, and the father rises to the rank of corporal the day the baby lisps its first syllables.

It is very sweet the first lisping utterance of a child, and admirably chosen to move the "pa-pa" the little creature first murmurs. Is it strange that the first word of a man should express precisely the deepest and tenderest sentiment of all ?

Is it not touching to see the little creature find of himself the word that is sure to touch him of whom he stands most in need ; the word that means, "I am yours, love me, give me a place in your heart, open your arms to me ; you see I do not know much as yet, I have only just arrived, but, already, I think of you, I am one of the family, I shall eat at your table, and bear your name, pa-pa, pa-pa."

He has discovered at once the most delicate of flatteries, the sweetest of caresses. He enters on life by a master stroke.

Ah ! the dear little love ! "Pa-pa, pa-pa," I still hear his faint, hesitating voice, I can still see his two coral lips open and close. We were all in a circle around him, kneeling down to be on a level with him. They kept saying to him,

"Say it again, dear, say it again. Where is papa?" And he, amused by all these people about him, stretched out his arms, and turned his eyes towards me.

I kissed him heartily, and felt that two big tears hindered me from speaking.

From that moment I was a papa in earnest.

I was christened.

VI. BABIES AND PAPAS.



WHEN the baby reaches three or four years of age, when his sex shows itself in his actions, his tastes and his eyes, when he smashes his wooden horses, cuts open his drums, blows trumpets, breaks the castors off the furniture, and evinces a noisy hostility to crockery; in a word, when he is a man, it is then that the affection of a father for his son really becomes love. He feels himself invaded by a need of special fondness, of which the sweetest recollections of his past life can give no idea. A deep sentiment, the countless roots of which envelop the heart, and sink into it in all directions. Defects or qualities they penetrate and feed on it. Thus, we find in paternal love all the weaknesses and all the greatnesses of humanity. Vanity, abnegation, pride, and disinterestedness are united together, and man in his entirety appears in the papa.

It is the day on which the child becomes a mirror in which you recognise your features, that the heart is moved and awakens. Existence becomes duplicated, you are no longer one, but one and a half; you feel your importance increase, and, in the future of the little creature who belongs to you, you reconstruct your own past, you resuscitate, and are born again in him. You say to yourself, "I will spare him such and such a vexation which I suffered, I will clear

from his path such and such a stone over which I stumbled, I will make him happy, and he shall owe all to me ; he shall be, thanks to me, full of talents and attractions." You give him, in advance, all that you did not get yourself, and in his future laurels arrange for a little crown for your own brows.

Human weakness, no doubt, but what matter, provided the sentiment that gives birth to this weakness is the strongest and purest of all, what matter if a limpid stream springs up between two paving stones ? Are we to be blamed for being generous out of egotism, and for devoting ourselves to others for reasons of personal enjoyment ?

Thus, in the papa, vanity is the leading string. Say to any papa, " Good heavens, how like you he is ! " The poor man may hesitate at saying yes, but I defy him not to smile. He will say, " Perhaps. . . . Do you think so ? . . . Well, perhaps so, side face."

And do not you be mistaken ; if he does so, it is that you may reply in astonishment : " Why, the child is your very image."

He is pleased, and that is easily explained ; for is not this likeness a visible tie between him and his work, is it not his signature, his trade mark, his title deed, and, as it were, the sanction of his rights ?

To this physical resemblance there soon succeeds a moral one quite otherwise charming. You are moved to tears when you recognise the first efforts of this little intelligence to grasp your ideas. Without check or examination it accepts and feeds on them. By degrees the child shares your tastes, your habits, your ways. He assumes a deep voice to be like papa, asks for your braces, sighs before your boots, and sits down with admiration on your hat. He protects his mamma when he goes out with her, and scolds the dog, although he is very much afraid of him, to be like

papa. Have you caught him at meals with his large observant eyes fixed on you, studying your face with open mouth and spoon in hand, and imitating his model with an expression of astonishment and respect. Listen to his long gossips, wandering as his little brain, does he not say :—

“ When I am big like papa I shall have a moustache and a stick like him, and I shall not be afraid in the dark, because it is silly to be afraid in the dark when you are big, and I shall say ‘damn it,’ for I shall be grown up.”

“ Baby, what did you say, sir ? ”

“ I said like papa does.”

What would you ? he is a faithful mirror. You are for him an ideal, a model, the type of all that is great and strong, handsome and intelligent.

Often he makes mistakes, the little dear, but his error is all the more delicious in its sincerity, and you feel all the more unworthy of such frank admiration. You console yourself for your own imperfections in reflecting that he is not conscious of them.

The defects of children are almost always borrowed from their father ; they are the consequences of a too literal copy. Provide against them then. Yes, no doubt, but I ask you what strength of mind is not needed by a poor man to undeceive his baby, to destroy, with a word, his innocent confidence, by saying to him : “ My child, I am not perfect, and I have faults to be avoided ? ”

This species of devotion on part of the baby for his father reminds me of the charming remark of one of my little friends. Crossing the road the little man caught sight of a policeman. He examined him with respect, and then turning to me, after a moment’s reflection, said, with an air of conviction : “ Papa is stronger than all the policemen, isn’t he ? ”

If I had answered "No," our intimacy would have been broken short off.

Was it not charming?

One can truly say, "Like baby, like papa." Our life is the threshold of his. It is with our eyes that he has first seen.

Profit, young fathers, by the first moments of candour on the part of your dear baby, seek to enter his heart when this little heart opens, and establish yourself in it so thoroughly, that at the moment when the child is able to judge you, he will love you too well to be severe or to cease loving. Win his affection, it is worth the trouble.

To be loved all your life by a creature you love, that is the problem to be solved, and towards the solution of which all your efforts must be directed. To make yourself loved, is to store up treasures of happiness for the winter. Each year will take away a scrap of your life, contract the circle of interests and pleasures in which you live; your mind by degrees will lose its vigour, and ask for rest, and as you live less and less by the mind, you will live more and more by the heart. The affection of others which was only a pleasant whet will become a necessary food, and whatever you may have been, statesmen or artists, soldiers or bankers, when your heads are white, you will no longer be anything but fathers.

But filial love is not born all at once, and, as it were, necessarily. The voice of nature is a voice rather poetical than truthful. The affection of children is earned and deserved; it is a consequence, not a cause, and gratitude is its commencement. At any cost, therefore, your baby must be made grateful. Do not reckon that he will be grateful to you for your solicitude, your dreams for his future, the cost of his nursing, and the splendid dowry that you are



"No one amuses me so well as papa; it is he who jumps me
into the air."

amassing for him ; such gratitude would require from his little brain too complicated a calculation, and social ideas as yet unknown to him. He will not be thankful to you for the extreme fondness you have for him ; do not be astonished at it, and do not cry out at his ingratitude. You must first make him understand your affection ; he must appreciate and judge it before responding to it ; he must know his notes before playing tunes.

The little man's gratitude will at first be nothing but a simple, egoistical and natural calculation. If you have made him laugh, if you have amused him, he will want you to begin again, he will hold out his little arms to you, crying : " Do it again." And the recollection of the pleasure you have given him becoming impressed upon his mind, he will soon say to himself : " No one amuses me so well as papa ; it is he who jumps me into the air, plays at hide-and-seek with me, and tells me tales." So by degrees gratitude will be born in him, as thanks spring to the lips of him who is made happy.

Therefore, learn the art of amusing your child, imitate the crowing of the cock, and gambol on the carpet, answer his thousand impossible questions, which are the echo of his endless dreams, and let yourself be pulled by the beard to imitate a horse. All this is kindness, but also cleverness, and the good King Henri Quatre did not belie his skilful policy by walking on all fours on his carpet with his children on his back.

In this way, no doubt, your paternal authority will lose something of its austere prestige, but you will gain the deep and lasting influence that affection gives. Your baby will fear you less but will love you more. Where is the harm ?

Do not be afraid of anything, become his comrade in order to have the right of remaining his friend. Hide your

paternal suzerainty as the commissary of police does his sash. Ask with kindness for that which you might roundly insist upon having, and await everything from his heart if you have known how to touch it. Carefully avoid such ugly words as discipline, passive obedience and command ; let his submission be gentle to him, and his obedience resemble kindness. Renounce the stupid pleasure of imposing your fancies upon him, and of giving orders to prove your infallibility.

Children have a keenness of judgment, and a delicacy of impression which would not be imagined, unless one has studied them. Justice and equity are easily born in their minds, for they possess, above all things, positive logic. Profit by all this. There are unjust and harsh words which remain graven on a child's heart, and which he remembers all his life. Reflect that, in your baby, there is a man whose affection will cheer your old age, respect him so that he may respect you, and be sure that there is not a single seed sown in this little heart which will not sooner or later bear fruit.

But there are, you will say, unmanageable children, rebels from the cradle. Are you sure that the first word they heard in their lives has not been the cause of their evil propensities ? When there has been rebellion, there has been clumsy pressure ; for I will not believe in inborn vice. Amongst evil instincts there is always a good one of which an arm can be made to combat the others. This requires, I know, extreme kindness, perfect tact, and unlimited confidence, but the reward is sweet. I think, therefore, in conclusion, that a father's first kiss, his first look, his first caresses, have an immense influence on a child's life.

To love is a great deal. To know how to love is everything.

Even were one not a father, it is impossible to pass by

the dear little ones without feeling touched, and without loving them. Muddy and ragged, or carefully decked out; running in the roadway and rolling in the dust, or playing at skipping rope in the gardens of the Tuileries; dabbling amongst the ducklings, or building hills of sand beside well-dressed mammas—babies are charming. In both classes there is the same grace, the same embarrassed movements, the same comical seriousness, the same carelessness as to the effect created—in short, the same charm; the charm that is called childhood, that one cannot understand without loving it; but that one finds just the same throughout nature, from the opening flower and the dawning day to the child entering upon life.

A baby is not an imperfect being, an unfinished sketch—he is a man. Watch him closely, follow every one of his movements; they will reveal to you a logical sequence of ideas, a marvellous power of imagination, such as will not be found again at any period of life. There is more real poetry in the brain of these dear loves than in twenty epics. They are surprised and unskilled, but nothing equals the vigour of these minds, unexperienced, fresh, simple, sensible of the slightest impressions, and making their way through the midst of the unknown.

What immense labour is gone through by them in a few months! To notice noises, classify them, understand that some of these sounds are words, and that these words are thoughts; to find out of themselves alone the meaning of everything, and distinguish the true from the false, the real from the imaginary; to correct, by observation, the errors of their too ardent imagination; to unravel a chaos, and during this gigantic task to render the tongue supple and strengthen the staggering little legs, to become a man, in short. If ever there was a curious and touching sight it is that of this

little creature setting out for the conquest of the world. As yet he knows neither doubt nor fear, and opens his heart fully. There is something of Don Quixote about a baby. He is as comic as the Knight, but he has also his sublime side.

Do not laugh too much at the hesitations, the countless gropings, the preposterous follies of this virgin mind, which a butterfly lifts to the clouds, and to which grains of sand are mountains, which understands the twittering of birds, ascribes thoughts to flowers, and a soul to dolls, which believes in far-off realms, where the trees are sugar, the fields chocolate, and the rivers syrup, for which Punch and Mother Hubbard are real and powerful individuals, which peoples silence and vivifies night. Do not laugh at his little love, his life is a dream, and his mistakes poetry.

This touching poetry which you find in the infancy of man you also find in the infancy of nations. It is the same. In both cases there is the same necessity of idealisation, the same tendency to personify the unknown. And it may be said that between Punch and Jupiter, Mother Hubbard and Venus, there is only a hair's breadth.

VII. HIS FIRST BREECHES.



THE great desire in a child is to become a man. But the first symptom of virility, the first serious step taken in life, is marked by the assumption of breeches.

This first breeching is an event that papa wishes for, and mamma dreads. It seems to the mother that it is the beginning of her being forsaken. She looks with tearful eyes at the petticoat laid aside for ever, and murmurs to herself, "Infancy is over then? My part will soon become a small one. He will have fresh tastes, new

wishes ; he is no longer only myself, his personality is asserting itself, he is someone—a boy.”

The father, on the contrary, is delighted. He laughs in his moustache to see the little arching calves peeping out below the trousers ; he feels the little body, the outline of which can be clearly made out under the new garment, and says to himself, “How well he is put together, the rascal. He will have broad shoulders and strong loins like myself. How firmly his little feet tread the ground.” He would like to see him in jack-boots ; for a trifle he would buy him spurs. He begins to see himself in this little one sprung from him ; he looks at him in a fresh light, and, for the first time, he finds a great charm in calling him “my boy.”

As to the baby, he is intoxicated, proud, triumphant, although somewhat embarrassed as to his arms and legs, and, be it said, without any wish to offend him, greatly resembling those little poodles we see freshly shaven on the approach of summer. What greatly disturbs the poor little fellow is his past. How many men of position are there who do not experience similar inconvenience. He knows very well that breeches, like nobility, render certain things incumbent on their possessor, that he must now assume new ways, new gestures, a new tone of voice ; he begins to scan out of the corner of his eye the movements of his papa, who is by no means ill pleased at this ; he clumsily essays a masculine gesture or two ; and this struggle between his past and his present gives him for some time the most comical gait in the world. His petticoats haunt him, and really he is wild that it is so.

Dear first pair of breeches, I love you because you are a faithful friend, and I encounter at every step in life you and your train of sweet sensations. Are you not the living image of the latest illusion caressed by our vanity ? You

young officer, who still measure your moustaches in the glass, and who have just assumed for the first time the epaulette and the gold belt, what did you feel when you went downstairs and heard the scabbard of your sabre go clink clank on the steps, when with your cap on one side and your arm akimbo you found yourself in the street, and an irresistible impulse urging you on, you gazed at your figure reflected in the chemist's bottles? Will you dare to say that you did not halt before those bottles? First pair of breeches, lieutenant.

You will find them again, these breeches, when you are promoted to be captain and are decorated. And later on, when, an old veteran with a grey moustache, you take a fair companion to rejuvenate you, you will again put them on; but this time the dear creature will help you to wear them.

And the day when you will no longer have anything more to do with them, alas! that day you will be very low, for one's whole life is wrapped up in this precious garment. Existence is nothing more than putting on our first pair of breeches, taking them off, putting them on again, and dying with eyes fixed on them.

Is it the truth that most of our joys have no more serious origin than those of children? Are we then so simple? Ah! yes, my dear sir, we are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are. We never quite get free from our swaddling clothes; do you see, there is always a little bit sticking out? There is a baby in everyone of us, or, rather, we are only babies grown big.

See that young barrister walking up and down the lobby of the courts. He is freshly shaven; in the folds of his new gown he hides a pile of documents, and on his head, in which a world of thought is stirring, is a fine advocate's coif, which he bought yesterday, and which this morning he coquettishly crushed in with a blow from his fist before

putting it on. This young fellow is happy ; amidst the general din he can distinguish the echo of his own footsteps, and the ring of his boot-heels sounds to him like the great bell of Notre Dame. In a few minutes he will find an excuse for descending the great staircase, and crossing the courtyard in costume. You may be sure that he will not disrobe except to go to dinner. What joy in these five yards of black stuff ; what happiness in this ugly bit of cloth stretched over stiff cardboard !

First pair of breeches—I think I recognise you.

And you, madame, with what happiness do you renew each season the enjoyment caused by new clothes ? Do not say, I beg of you, that such enjoyments are secondary ones, for their influence is positive upon your nature and your character. Why, I ask you, did you find so much captivating logic, so much persuasive eloquence, in the sermon of Father Paul ? Why did you weep on quitting the church, and embrace your husband as soon as you got home ? You know better than I do, madame, that it was because on that day you had put on for the first time that little yellow bonnet, which is a gem, I acknowledge, and which makes you look twice as pretty. These impressions can scarcely be explained, but they are invincible. There may be a trifle of childishness in it all, you will admit, but it is a childishness that cannot be got rid of. As a proof of it, the other day, going again to St. Thomas to hear Father Nicholas, who is one of our shining lights, you experienced totally different sentiments ; a general feeling of discontent and doubts and nervous irritability at every sentence of the preacher. Your soul did not soar heavenwards with the same unreserved confidence ; you left St. Thomas's with your head hot and your feet cold ; and you so far forgot yourself as to say, as you got into your carriage, that Father

Nicholas was a Gallican devoid of eloquence. Your coachman heard it. And finally, on reaching home you thought your drawing-room too small and your husband growing too fat. Why, I again ask you, this string of vexatious impressions? If you remember rightly, dear madame, you wore for the first time the day before yesterday that horrible little violet bonnet, which is such a disgusting failure.

First pair of breeches, dear madame.

Would you like a final example? Observe your husband. Yesterday he went out in a bad temper—he had breakfasted badly—and lo! in the evening, at a quarter to seven, he came home from the Chamber joyful and well pleased, a smile on his lips, and good-humour in his eye. He kissed you on the forehead with a certain unconstraint, threw a number of pamphlets and papers with an easy gesture on to the side-table, sat down to table, found the soup delicious, and ate joyously. “What is the matter with my husband?” you asked yourself...I will explain. Your husband spoke yesterday for the first time in the building, you know. He said,—the sitting was a noisy one, the Left were threshing out some infernal question,—he said, during the height of the uproar, and rapping with his paper-knife on his desk: “But we cannot hear!” And as these words were received on all sides with universal approbation and cries of “Hear, hear!” he gave his thoughts a more parliamentary expression by adding: “The voice of the honourable gentleman addressing us does not reach us.” It was not much certainly, and the amendment may have been carried all the same, but after all it was a step; a triumph, to tell the truth, since your husband has from day to day put off the delivery of his maiden speech. Behold a happy deputy, a deputy who has just—put on his first pair of breeches.

What matter whether the reason be a serious or a futile

one, if your blood flows faster, if you feel happier, if you are proud of yourself? To win a great victory or put on a new bonnet, what matter it if this new bonnet gives you the same joy as a laurel crown?

Therefore do not laugh too much at baby if his first pair of breeches intoxicates him, if, when he wears them, he thinks his shadow longer and the trees less high. He is beginning his career as a man, dear child, nothing more.

How many things have not folk been proud of since the beginning of the world? They were proud of their noses under Francis the First, of their perukes under Louis XIV, and later on of their appetites and their stoutness. A man is proud of his wife, his idleness, his wit, his stupidity, the beard on his chin, the cravat round his neck, the hump on his back.

VIII. COUNTRY CHILDREN—DUCKLINGS AND CHICKENS.



LOVE the baby who runs about under the trees of the Tuileries; I love the pretty little fair-haired girls with nice white stockings and unmanageable crinolines. I like to watch these tiny damsels decked out like reliquaries, and already affecting coquettish and lackadaisical ways. It seems to me that in each of them, I can see thousands of charming faults already peeping forth. But all these miniature men and women exchanging postage stamps, and chattering dress, have something of the effect of adorable monstrosities on me.

I like them as I like a bunch of grapes in February, or a dish of green peas in December.

In the babies' kingdom, my friend, my favourite, is the country baby, running amidst the dust on the highway barefoot and ragged, and searching for blackbirds' and chaf-

finches' nests on the outskirts of the woods. I love his great black wondering eye which watches you fixedly from between two locks of uncombed hair, his firm flesh bronzed by the sun, his swarthy forehead, hidden by his hair, his smudged face and his picturesque breeches kept from falling off by the paternal braces fastened to a large metal button, the gift of a gendarme.

Ah ! what fine breeches ; not very long in the legs, but, then, what room everywhere else ! He could hide away entirely in this immense space which allows a shirt tail, escaping through a slit, to wave like a flag. These breeches preserve a remembrance of all the garments of the family, here is a piece of maternal petticoat, here a fragment of yellow waistcoat, here a scrap of blue handkerchief, the whole sewn with a thread that presents the two-fold advantage of being seen from a distance, and of not breaking.

But under these patched clothes you can make out a sturdy little figure ; and, besides, what matters the clothes ? Country babies are not coquettish ; and when the coach comes down the hill with jingling bells and they rush after it, stumbling over their neighbours, tumbling with them in the dust, and rolling into the ditches, what would all these dear little rascallions do in shorts and silk stockings ?

I love them thus because they are wild, taking alarm, and fleeing away at your approach like the young rabbits you surprise in the morning playing amongst the wild thyme. You must have recourse to a thousand subterfuges in order to triumph over their alarm and gain their confidence. But if at length, thanks to your prudence, you find yourself in their company, at the outset play ceases, shouts and noise die away ; the little group remain motionless, scratching their heads, and all their uneasy eyes look fixedly at you. This is the difficult moment.

A sharp word, a stern gesture, may cause an eternal misunderstanding with them, just as a kind remark, a smile, a caress will soon accomplish their conquest. And this conquest is worth the trouble, believe me.

One of my chief methods of seduction was as follows : I used to take my watch out of my pocket and look at it attentively. Then I would see my little folk stretch their necks, open their eyes, and come a step nearer ; and it would often happen that the chickens, ducklings, and geese, who were loitering close by in the grass, imitated their comrades and drew near too.

I then would put my watch to my ear and smile like a man having a secret whispered to him.

In presence of this prodigy my youngsters could no longer restrain themselves, and would exchange amongst themselves those keen, simple, timid mocking looks, which must have been seen to be understood. They advanced this time in earnest, and if I offered to let the boldest listen, by holding out my watch to him, he would draw back alarmed although smiling, whilst the band would break into an outburst of joy ; the ducklings flapping their wings, the white geese cackling, and the chickens going *clk, clk*. The game was won.

How many times have I not played this little farce seated under a willow on the banks of my little stream, which ripples over the white stones, whilst the reeds bend tremblingly.

The children would crowd round me to hear the watch, and soon questions broke forth in chorus to an accompaniment of laughter. They inspected my gaiters, rummaged in my pockets and leant against my knees, the ducklings glided under my feet, and the big geese tickled my back.

How enjoyable it is not to alarm creatures that tremble at everything.

I would not move for fear of scaring their joy, and was like a child who is building a house of cards and who has got to the third storey. But I marked all these happy little faces standing out against the blue sky, I watched the rays of the sun stealing into the tangles of their fair hair, or spreading in a patch of gold on their little brown necks. I followed their gestures full of awkwardness and grace. I sat down on the grass to be the nearer to them ; and if an unfortunate chicken came to grief, between two daisies, I quickly stretched out my arm and replaced it on its legs.

I assure you that they were all grateful. If one loves these little folk at all, there is one thing that strikes you when you watch them closely.

Ducklings dabbling along the edge of the water or turning head over heels in their feeding trough, young shoots thrusting forth their tender little leaves above ground, little chickens running along before their mother hen, or little men, staggering amongst the grass—all these little creatures resemble one another. They are the babies of the great mother Nature ; they have common laws, a common physiology ; they have something inexplicable about them which is at once comic and graceful, awkward and tender, and which makes them loved at once ; they are relations, friends, comrades, under the same flag. This pink and white flag, let us salute it as it passes, old greybeards that we are. It is blessed and is called childhood.

All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft to the touch as a handful of wadding. Protected by cushions of good rosy flesh or by a coating of soft down, they go rolling, staggering, dragging along their little unaccustomed feet, shaking in the air their plump hands or featherless wings.

See them stretched hap-hazard in the sun without distinction of species, swelling themselves with milk or meal, and dare to say that they are not alike.

Who knows whether all these children of nature have not a common point of departure, if they are not brothers of the same origin?

Who knows but that there is but one source of life? Providence vivifies an oak, a fowl, or a man, but who can assure me that these three vivifying breaths differ? Who can tell me that the same cause has not produced these different effects?

Since men with green spectacles have existed, they have amused themselves with ticketing the creatures of this world. These latter are arranged, divided into categories and classified, as though by a careful apothecary who wants every thing about him in order. It is no slight matter to stow away each one in the drawer that suits him, and I have heard that certain subjects still remain on the counter owing to their belonging to two show-cases at once.

And what proves to me, indeed, that these cases exist? What is there to assure me that the whole world is not one family, the members of which only differ by trifles which we are pleased to regard as everything?

Have you fully established the fact of these drawers and compartments? Have you seen the bars of these imaginary cages in which you imprison kingdoms and species?

Are there not infinite varieties which escape your analysis, and are, as it were, the unknown links, uniting all the particles of the animated world? Why say, "For these eternity, for those annihilation?" Why say, "This is the slave, that is the sovereign?" Strange boldness for men who are ignorant of almost everything!

Man, animal or plant, the creature vibrates, suffers or

enjoys—exists and encloses in itself the trace of the same mystery. What assures me that this mystery, which is everywhere the same, is not the sign of a similar relationship, is not the sign of a great law of which we are ignorant?

I am dreaming, you will say. And what does science do herself when she reaches that supreme point at which magnifying glasses become obscure and compasses powerless? It dreams, too; it supposes.

Let us, too, suppose that the tree is a man, rough skinned, dreamy and silent, who loves, too, after his fashion and vibrates to his very roots when some evening a warm breeze, laden with the scents of the plain, blows through his green locks and overwhelms him with kisses.

No, I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us. Childish pride, which would be ridiculous did not its very simplicity lend it something poetic, alone inspires it.

Man is but one of the links of an immense chain, the two ends of which we are ignorant of.

Is it not consoling to fancy that we are not an isolated power to which the remainder of the world serves as a pedestal, that one is not a licensed destroyer, a poor, fragile tyrant whom arbitrary decrees protect, but a necessary note of an infinite harmony? To fancy that the law of life is the same in the immensity of space and irradiates worlds as it irradiates cities and as it irradiates ant-hills. To fancy that each vibration in ourselves is the echo of another vibration. To fancy a sole principle, a primordial axiom, to think that the universe envelopes us as a mother clasps her child in her two arms; to say to oneself, "I belong to it and it to me; it would cease to be without me. I should not exist without it." To see, in short, only the divine unity of laws, which could not be non-existent, where others have only seen a ruling fancy or an individual caprice.

It is a dream. Perhaps so, but I have often dreamed it when watching the village children rolling on the fresh grass amongst the ducklings.

IX. AUTUMN.

CABBAGE SOUP—HEAVY RAIN.



O you know the autumn, dear reader, autumn away in the country with its squalls, its long gusts, its yellow leaves whirling in the distance, its sodden paths, its fine sunsets, pale as an invalid's smile, its pools of water in the roadway, do you know all these ?

If you have seen all these things they are certainly not indifferent to you. One either detests or else loves them.

I am of the number of those who love them, and I would give two summers for a single autumn. I adore the big blazing fires, I like to take refuge in the chimney corner with my dog between my wet gaiters. I like to watch the tall flames licking the old iron work and lighting up the black depths. You hear the wind whistling in the barn, the great door creak, the dog pull at his chain and howl, and despite the noise of the forest trees which are groaning and bending close by, you can make out the lugubrious cawings of a flock of rooks struggling against the storm. The rain beats against the little panes, and stretching your legs towards the fire you think of those without. You think of the sailors, of the old doctor driving his little cabriolet, the hood of which sways to and fro as the wheels sink into the ruts and Cocotte neighs in the teeth of the wind. You think of the two gendarmes with the rain streaming from their cocked hats ; you see them chilled and soaked

making their way along the path amongst the vineyards, bent almost double in the saddle, their horses almost covered with their long blue cloaks. You think of the belated sportsman hastening across the heath, pursued by the wind like a criminal by justice, and whistling to his dog, poor beast, who is splashing through the marshland. Unfortunate doctor, unfortunate gendarmes, unfortunate sportsman !

And all at once the door opens and Baby rushes in exclaiming : " Papa, dinner is ready."

Poor doctor, poor gendarmes !

" What is there for dinner?"

The cloth was as white as snow in December, the plate glittered in the lamp-light, the steam from the soup rose up under the lamp-shade veiling the flame and spreading an appetising smell of cabbage.

Poor doctor, poor gendarmes !

The doors were well closed, the curtains carefully drawn. Baby hoisted himself on to his tall chair and stretched out his neck for his napkin to be tied round it, exclaiming at the same time with his hands in the air :

" Nice cabbage soup."

And smiling to myself, I said : " The youngster has all my tastes."

Mamma soon came, and cheerfully pulling off her tight gloves :

" There is, I think, sir, something that you are very fond of," she said to me.

It was pheasant day, and instinctively I turned round a little to catch a glimpse on the sideboard of the dusty bottle of my old Chambertin.

Pheasant and Chambertin ! Providence created them for one another and my wife has never separated them.

" Ah ! my children, how comfortable we are here," said I, and everyone burst out laughing.

Poor gendarmes, poor doctor !

Yes, yes, I am very fond of the autumn and my darling boy liked it as well as I did, not only on account of the pleasure there is in gathering round a fine large fire, but also on account of the squalls themselves, the wind and the dead leaves. There is a charm in braving them.

How many times we have both gone out for a walk through the country despite cold and threatening clouds.

We were well wrapped up and shod with thick boots ; I took his hand and we started off at hap-hazard. He was five years old then and trotted along like a little man. Heavens ! it is five-and-twenty years ago.

We went up the narrow lane strewn with damp black leaves ; the tall grey poplars stripped of their foliages allowed a view of the horizon, and we could see in the distance, under a violet sky streaked with cold and yellowish bands, the low thatched roofs and the red chimneys from which issued little bluish clouds blown away by the wind. Baby jumped for joy, holding with his hand his hat which threatened to fly off, and looking at me with eyes glittering through tears brought into them by the breeze. His cheeks were red with cold, and quite at the tip of his nose hung ready to drop a small transparent pearl. But he was happy, and we skirted the wet meadows overflowed by the swollen river. No more reeds, no more water lilies, no more flowers on the banks. Some cows, up to mid-leg in damp herbage, were grazing quietly.

At the bottom of a ditch, near a big willow trunk, two little girls were huddled together under a big cloak wrapped about them. They were watching their cows, their half bare

feet in split wooden shoes and their two little chilled faces under the large hood.

From time to time large puddles of water in which the pale sky was reflected barred the way, and we remained for a moment beside these miniature lakes, rippling beneath the north-wind, to see the leaves float on them. They were the last. We watched them detach themselves from the tops of the tall trees, whirl through the air and settle in the puddles. I took my little man in my arms and we went through them as we could. At the boundaries of the brown and empty fields was an overturned plough or an abandoned harrow. The stripped vines were level with the ground and their damp and knotty stakes were gathered in large piles.

I remember that one day in one of these autumnal walks, as we gained the top of the hill by a broken road which skirts the heath and leads to the old bridge, the wind suddenly began to blow furiously. My darling, suffocated by it, caught hold of my leg and sheltered himself in the skirt of my coat. My dog, for his part, stiffening his four legs with his tail between the hind ones and his ears waving in the wind, looked up at me too.

I turned, the horizon was as gloomy as the interior of a church. Huge black clouds were sweeping towards us, and the trees were bending and groaning on every side under the torrents of rain driven before the squall. I only had time to catch up my little man who was crying with fright and to run and squeeze myself against a hedge which was somewhat protected by the old willows. I opened my umbrella, crouched down behind it, and unbuttoning my big coat, stuffed Baby inside. He clung closely to me. My dog placed himself between my legs, and Baby thus sheltered by his two friends began to smile from the depths of his hiding-place. I looked at him and said :

"Well, little man, are you all right?"

"Yes, dear papa."

I felt his two arms clasp round my waist—I was much thinner than I am now—and I saw that he was grateful to me for acting as a roof to him.

Through the opening he stretched out his little lips and I bent mine down.

"Is it still raining outside, papa?"

"It will soon be over."

"Already, I am so comfortable inside you."

How all this stays in your heart. It is perhaps silly to relate these little joys, but how sweet it is to recall them.

We reached home as muddy as two water-dogs and we were well scolded. But when evening had come and Baby was in bed and I went to kiss him and tickle him a little, as was our custom, he put his two little arms round my neck and whispered:

"When it rains we will go again, eh?"

X. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORTY NOW.



HEN you have seen your child born, have watched his first steps in life, have noted him smile and weep, have heard him call you papa as he stretches out his little arms to you, you think that you have become acquainted with all the joys of paternity, and, as though satiated with these daily joys that are under your hand, you already begin to picture those of the morrow. You rush ahead, and explore the future; you are impatient, and gulp down present happiness in long draughts, instead of tasting it drop by drop. But Baby's illness suffices to restore you to reason.

To realise the strength of the ties that bind you to him,

it is necessary to have feared to see them broken ; to know that a river is deep, you must have been on the point of drowning in it.

Recall that morning when, on drawing aside the curtain of his bed, you saw on the pillow his little face, pale and thin. His sunken eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were half closed. You met his glance, which seemed to come through a veil ; he saw you, without smiling at you. You said, "Good morning," and he did not answer. His face only expressed dejection and weakness, it was no longer that of your child. He gave a kind of sigh, and his heavy eyelids drooped. You took his hands, elongated, transparent, and with colourless nails ; they were warm and moist. You kissed them, those poor little hands, but there was no responsive thrill to the contact of your lips.

Then you turned round, and saw your wife weeping behind you.

It was at that moment that you felt yourself shudder from head to foot, and that the idea of a possible woe seized on you, never more to leave you. Every moment you kept going back to the bed and raising the curtains again, hoping perhaps that you had not seen aright, or that a miracle had taken place ; but you withdrew quickly, with a lump in your throat. And yet you strove to smile, to make him smile himself ; you sought to arouse in him the wish for something, but in vain, he remained motionless, exhausted, not even turning round, indifferent to all you said, to everything, even yourself.

And what is all that is needed to strike down this little creature, to reduce him to this pitch ? Only a few hours. What is all that is needed to put an end to him ? Five minutes. Perhaps—

You know that life hangs on a thread in this frail body, so

little fitted to suffer. You feel that life is only a breath, and say to yourself,

“Suppose this one is his last.”

A little while back he was complaining. Already he does so no longer. It seems as though someone is clasping him, bearing him away, tearing him from your arms. Then you draw near him, and clasp him to you almost involuntarily, as though to give him back some of your own life. His bed is damp with fever sweats, his lips are losing their colour. The nostrils of his little nose, grown sharp and dry, rise and fall. His mouth remains wide open. It is that little rosy mouth which used to laugh so joyfully, those are the two lips that used to press themselves to yours, and . . . all the joys, the bursts of laughter, the follies, the endless chatter, all the bygone happiness, flock to your recollection at the sound of that gasping breathing, whilst big hot tears fall slowly from your eyes.

Poor man. Your hand seeks his little legs, and you dare not touch his chest, which you have kissed so often, for fear of encountering that ghastly leanness which you foresee, but the contact of which would make you break out in

And then, at a certain moment, whilst the sunlight was flooding the room, you heard a deeper moan, resembling a cry. You darted forward ; his face was contracted, and he looked towards you with eyes that no longer saw. And then all was calm, silent and motionless, whilst his hollow cheeks became yellow and transparent as the amber of his necklaces.

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime in the hearts of those who have loved ; and even in old age, when time has softened your grief, when other joys and other sorrows have filled your days, his dying bed still appears to you

when sitting of an evening beside the fire. You see amidst the sparkling flames the room of the lost child, the table with the drinks, the bottles, the arsenal of illness, the little garments, carefully folded, that waited for him so long, his toys abandoned in a corner. You even see the marks of his little fingers on the wall paper, and the zig-zags he made with his pencil on the door; you see the corner scribbled over with lines and dates, in which he was measured every month, you see him playing, running, rushing up in a perspiration to throw himself into your arms, and, at the same time, you also see him fixing his glazing eyes on you, or motionless and cold under a white sheet, wet with holy water.

Does not this recollection recur to you sometimes, grandma, and do not you still shed a big tear as you say to yourself, "He would have been forty now?"

Do we not know, dear old lady, whose heart still bleeds, that at the bottom of your wardrobe, behind your jewels, beside packets of yellow letters, the handwriting of which we will not guess at, there is a little museum of sacred relics—the last shoes in which he played about on the gravel the day he complained of being cold, the remains of some broken toys, a dried sprig of box, a little cap, his last, in a triple wrapper, and a thousand trifles that are a world to you, poor woman, that are the fragments of your broken heart.

The ties that unite children to parents are unloosed. Those which unite parents to children are broken.

In one case, it is the past that is wiped out; in the other, the future that is rent away.

XI. CONVALESCENCE.

BABY GETS ROUND AGAIN.



UT, my dear reader, forget what I have just said. Baby does not want to leave you, he does not want to die, poor little thing, and if you want a proof of it, watch him very closely, there, he smiles.

A very faint smile like those rays of sunlight that steal between two clouds at the close of a wet winter. You rather guess at than see this smile, but it is enough to warm your heart. The cloud begins to disperse, he sees you, he hears you, he knows that papa is there, your child is restored to you. His glance is already clearer. Call him softly.

He wants to turn, but he cannot yet, and for his sole answer his little hand, which is beginning to come to life again, moves and crumples the sheet.

Just wait a little, poor impatient father, and to-morrow, on his awakening, he will say "Papa."

You will see what good it will do you this "Papa" as faint as a mere breath, this first scarcely intelligible sign of a return to life. It will seem to you that your child is born a second time.

He will still suffer, he will have further crises, the storm does not become a calm all at once, but he will be able now to rest his head on your shoulder, nestle in your arms amongst the blankets; he will be able to complain, to ask help and relief of you with eye and voice; you will in short be reunited, and you will be conscious that he suffers less by suffering on your knees.

You will hold his hand in yours, and if you seek to go away he will look at you and grasp your finger. How many things are expressed in this grasp. Dear sir, do you remember it ?

“ Papa, do stay with me, you help me to bear it ; when I am alone I am afraid of the pain. Hold me tightly to you, and I shall not suffer so much.”

The more your protection is necessary to another, the more you enjoy granting it. What is it then when this other is a second self, dearer than the first. With convalescence comes another childhood so to say. Fresh astonishments, fresh joys, fresh desires come one by one as health is restored. But what is most touching and delightful, is that delicate coaxing by the child who still suffers and clings to you, that abandonment of himself to you, that extreme weakness that gives him wholly over to you. At no period of his life has he so enjoyed your presence, has he taken refuge so willingly in your dressing-gown, has he listened more attentively to your stories and smiled more intelligently at your merriment.

Is it true, as it seems to you, that he has never been more charming, or is it simply that the vicinity of danger has caused you to set a higher price on his caresses, and that you count over your treasures with all the more delight because you have been all but ruined ?

But the little man is up again. Beat drums ; sound trumpets ; come out of your hiding-places, broken horses ; stream in, bright sun ; a tune from you, little birds. The little king comes to life again—long live the king !

And you, your majesty, come and kiss your father.

What is singular is that this fearful crisis you have gone through becomes in some way sweet to you ; you incessantly recur to it, you speak of it and caress it in your mind ; and

like the companions of Eneas, you seek by the recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy.

"Do you remember," you say, "the day when he was so bad? Do you remember his dim eyes, his poor, thin, little arm, and his pale lips?"

"And that morning the doctor went away after clasping our hands?"

It is only Baby who does not remember anything. He only feels an overpowering wish to restore his strength, fill out his cheeks and recover his calves.

"Papa, are we going to have dinner soon, eh, papa?"

"Yes, it is getting dusk, wait a bit."

"But, papa, suppose we don't wait?"

"In twenty minutes, you little glutton."

"Twenty, is twenty a great many? If you eat twenty cutlets would it make you ill? But with potatoes, and jam, and soup and—is it still twenty minutes?"

Then again, "Papa, when there is beef with sauce," he has his mouth full of it, "red tomato sauce."

"Yes, dear, well?"

"Well, a bullock is much bigger than what is on the dish, why don't they bring the rest of the bullock? I could eat it all and then some bread and then some haricots, and then—"

He is insatiable when he has his napkin under his chin, and it is a pleasure to see the happiness he feels in working his jaws. His little eyes glisten, his cheeks grow red; what he puts away into his little belly it is impossible to say, and so busy is he that he has scarcely time to laugh between two mouthfuls.

Towards dessert his ardour slackens, his look becomes more and more languid, his fingers relax and his eyes close from time to time.

"Mamma, I should like to go to bed," he says, rubbing them.

Baby is coming round.

XII. FAMILY TIES.



at the outset.

HE intoxication of success, the fever of life's struggle, take a man away from his family, or cause him to live amidst it as a stranger, and soon he no longer finds any attractions in the things which charmed him

But let ill luck come, let the cold wind blow rather strongly, and he falls back upon himself, he seeks near him something to support him in his weakness, a sentiment to replace his vanished dream, and he bends towards his child, he takes his wife's hand and presses it. He seems to invite these two to share his burden. Seeing tears in the eyes of those he loves, his own seem diminished to that extent. It would seem that moral griefs have the same effect as physical pain. The drowning wretch clutches at straws, in the same way the man whose heart is breaking clasps his wife and children to him. He asks in turn for help, protection, and warmth, and it is a touching thing to see the strong shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage in their kiss. Children have the instinct of all this, and the liveliest emotion they are capable of feeling is that which they experience on seeing their father weep.

Recall, dear reader, your most remote recollections, seek in that past which seems to you all the clearer the farther you are removed from it.

Have you ever seen your father come home and sit down by the fire with a tear in his eye? You have not dared draw near him at first, so deeply did you feel his grief. How

unhappy he must be for his eyes to be wet. Then you felt that a tie attached you to this poor man, that his misfortune struck you too, that a part of it was yours and that you were smitten since your father was.

No one understands better than the child this joint responsibility of the family to which he owes everything.

You have felt all this; your heart has swollen as you stood silent in a corner, and sobs have broken forth as, without knowing why, you have held out your arms towards him.

He has turned, he has understood all, he has not been able to restrain his grief any further, and you have remained clasped in one another's arms, father, mother, and child, without saying anything, but gazing at and understanding one another.

Did you, however, know the cause of the poor man's grief? Not at all.

This is why filial love and paternal love have been poetised, why the family is styled holy. It is because one finds therein the very source of that need of loving, helping and sustaining one another, which from time to time spreads over the whole of society, but in the shape of a weakened echo.

It is only from time to time in history that we see a whole nation gather together, retire within itself and experience the same thrill.

A frightful convulsion is needed to make a million men hold out their hands to one another and understand one another at a glance; it needs a superhuman effort for the family to become the nation, and for the boundaries of the hearth to extend to the frontiers.

A complaint, a pang, a tear, is enough to make a man, a woman, and a child, blend their hearts together and feel that they are but one.

Laugh at marriage, the task is easy. All human contracts are tainted with error, and an error is always comical for those who are not the victims of it. There are deceived husbands, it is certain ; and when we see a man tumble down, even if he knocks his brains out, our first impulse is to burst out laughing. Hence the great and eternal mirth that greets Sganarelle.

But search to the bottom and behold that beneath all these trifles, beneath all this dust of little exploded vanities, ridiculous mistakes and comical passions, is hidden the very pivot of society. Verify that in this all is for the best since this family sentiment, which is the basis of society, is also its consolation and joy.

The honour of our flag, the love of country, all that urges a man to devote himself for something or some one not himself, are derived from this sentiment, and it is in it, it may be said, that lies the source whence flow the great streams at which the human heart quenches its thirst.

Egotism for three, you say. What matter, if this egotism engenders devotion ?

Will you reproach the butterfly with having been a caterpillar ?

Do not accuse me in all this of exaggeration, or of poetic exultation.

Yes, family life is very often calm and commonplace, the stock-pot that figures on its escutcheon has not been put there without reason I admit. To the husband who should come and say to me, "Sir, for two days running I have fallen asleep by the fireside," I should reply, "You are too lazy, but after all I understand you."

I also understand that baby's trumpet is noisy, that articles of jewellery are horribly dear, that lace flounces and sable trimmings are equally so, that balls are wearisome,

that madame has her vapours, her follies, her exigencies ; I understand, in short, that a man whose career is prosperous looks upon his wife and child as two stumbling-blocks.

But I am waiting for the happy man, for the moment when his forehead will wrinkle, when disappointment will descend upon his head like a leaden skull-cap, and when picking up the two blocks he has cursed he will make two crutches of them.

I admit that Alexander the Great, Napoleon the First, and all the demi-gods of humanity, have only felt at rare intervals the charm of being fathers and husbands ; but we, other poor little men who are less occupied, must be one or the other.

I do not believe in the happy old bachelor, I do not believe in the happiness of all those who, from stupidity or calculation, have withdrawn themselves from the best of social laws. A great deal has been said on this subject, and I do not wish to add to the voluminous documents in this law suit. Acknowledge frankly all you who have heard the cry of your new-born child and felt your heart tingle like a glass on the point of breaking, unless you are idiots, acknowledge that you said to yourselves, "I am in the right. Here and here alone lies man's part. I am entering on a path, beaten and worn, but straight ; I shall cross the monotonous downs, but each step will bring me nearer the village spire. I am not wandering through life, I am marching on, I stir with my feet the dust in which my father has planted his. My child, on this same road, will find the traces of my footsteps, and, perhaps, on seeing that I have not faltered, will say, 'Let me act like the old man and not lose myself in the ploughed land.'"

If the word holy has still a meaning, despite the uses it

has been put to, I do not see that a better use can be made of it than by placing it beside the word family.

They speak of progress, justice, general well-being, infallible policies, patriotism, devotion. I am for all these good things, but this bright horizon is summed up in these three words, "Love your neighbour," and this is precisely in my opinion, the thing they forget to teach.

To love your neighbour is as simple as possible, but the deuce if you meet with this very natural feeling. There are people who will show you the seed in the hollow of their hand, but even those who deal in this precious grain are the last to show you it in leaf.

Well, my dear reader, this little plant which should spring up like the poppies in the wheat, this plant which has never been seen growing higher than water-cress, but which should overtop the oaks, this undiscoverable plant, I know where it grows.

It grows beside the domestic hearth between the shovel and tongs, it is there that it perpetuates itself, and if it still exists it is to the family that we owe it. I love pretty nearly all the philanthropists and saviours of mankind; but I only believe in those who have learned to love others by embracing their own children.

Mankind cannot be re-modelled to satisfy the wants of humanitarian theories; man is egotistical, and he loves, above all, those who are about him. This is the natural human sentiment, and it is this which must be enlarged, extended and cultivated. In a word, it is in family love that is comprised love of country, and consequently of humanity. It is from fathers that citizens are made.

Man has not twenty prime movers, but only one in his heart; do not argue but profit by it.

Affection is catching. Love between three—father,

mother and child, when it is strong, soon requires space ; it pushes back the walls of the house, and by degrees invites the neighbours. The important thing then is to give birth to this love between three ; for it is madness, I am afraid, to thrust the whole human species all at once on a man's heart. Such large mouthfuls are not to be swallowed at a gulp and without preparation.

This is why I have always thought that with the numerous sous given for the redemption of the little Chinese, we might in France cause the fire to sparkle in hearths where it sparkles no longer, make many eyes grow brighter round a tureen of smoking soup, warm chilled mothers, bring smiles to the pinched faces of children, and give pleasure and happiness to poor discouraged ones on their return home.

What a number of smacking kisses you might have brought about with all those sous, and in consequence what a sprinkling with the watering pot for the little plant you wot of.

“ But then what would have become of the redemption of the little Chinese ? ”

We will think of it later, we must know how to love our own before we are able to love those of others.

This is brutal and egotistical, but you cannot alter it, it is out of small faults that you build up great virtues. And after all, do not grumble, this very egotism is the foundation stone of that great monument—at present still surrounded by scaffolding—which we call society.

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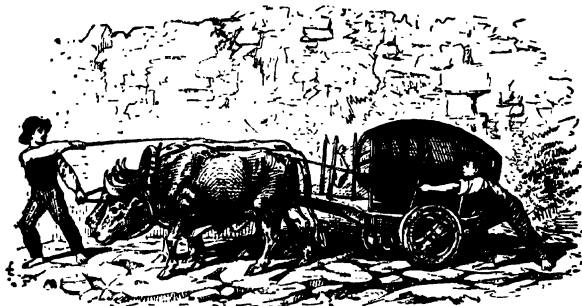
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