

THE RED LILY - V1

ANATOLE FRANCE*

The above mentioned two volumes of poetry were followed by many works in prose, which we shall notice. France's critical writings are collected in four volumes, under the title, 'La Vie Litteraire' (1888-1892); his political articles in 'Opinions Sociales' (2 vols., 1902). He combines in his style traces of Racine, Voltaire, Flaubert, and Renan, and, indeed, some of his novels, especially 'Thais' (1890), 'Jerome Coignard' (1893), and 'Lys Rouge' (1894), which was crowned by the Academy, are romances of the first rank.

Criticism appears to Anatole France the most recent and possibly the ultimate evolution of literary expression, "admirably suited to a highly civilized society, rich in souvenirs and old traditions It proceeds," in his opinion, "from philosophy and history, and demands for its development an absolute intellectual liberty It is the last in date of all literary forms, and it will end by absorbing them all To be perfectly frank the critic should say: 'Gentlemen, I propose to enlarge upon my own thoughts concerning Shakespeare, Racine, Pascal, Goethe, or any other writer.'"

It is hardly necessary to say much concerning a critic with such pronounced ideas as Anatole France. He gives us, indeed, the full flower of critical Renanism, but so individualized as to become perfection in grace, the extreme flowering of the Latin genius. It is not too much to say that the critical writings of Anatole France recall the *Causeries du Lundi*, the golden age of Sainte-Beuve!

As a writer of fiction, Anatole France made his debut in 1879 with 'Jocaste', and 'Le Chat Maigre'. Success in this field was yet decidedly doubtful when 'Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard' appeared in 1881. It at once established his reputation; 'Sylvestre Bonnard', as 'Le Lys Rouge' later, was crowned by the French Academy. These novels are replete with fine irony, benevolent scepticism and piquant turns, and will survive the greater part of romances now read in France. The list of Anatole France's works in fiction is a large one. The titles of nearly all of them, arranged in chronological order, are as follows: 'Les Desirs de Jean Seyvien' (1882); 'Abeille' (1883); 'Le Livre de mon Ami' (1885); 'Nos Enfants' (1886); 'Balthazar' (1889); 'Thais' (1890); 'L'Etui de Naire' (1892); 'Jerome Coignard', and 'La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedanque' (1893); and

*PDF created by pdfbooks.co.za

Histoire Contemporaine (1897-1900), the latter consisting of four separate works: 'L'Orme du Mail, Le Mannequin d'Osier, L'Anneau d'Amethyste, and Monsieur Bergeret a Paris'. All of his writings show his delicately critical analysis of passion, at first playfully tender in its irony, but later, under the influence of his critical antagonism to Brunetiere, growing keener, stronger, and more bitter. In 'Thais' he has undertaken to show the bond of sympathy that unites the pessimistic sceptic to the Christian ascetic, since both despise the world. In 'Lys Rouge', his greatest novel, he traces the perilously narrow line that separates love from hate; in 'Opinions de M. l'Abbe Jerome Coignard' he has given us the most radical breviary of scepticism that has appeared since Montaigne. 'Le Livre de mon Ami' is mostly autobiographical; 'Clio' (1900) contains historical sketches.

To represent Anatole France as one of the undying names in literature would hardly be extravagant. Not that I would endow Ariel with the stature and sinews of a Titan; this were to miss his distinctive qualities: delicacy, elegance, charm. He belongs to a category of writers who are more read and probably will ever exercise greater influence than some of greater name. The latter show us life as a whole; but life as a whole is too vast and too remote to excite in most of us more than a somewhat languid curiosity. France confines himself to themes of the keenest personal interest, the life of the world we live in. It is herein that he excels! His knowledge is wide, his sympathies are many-sided, his power of exposition is unsurpassed. No one has set before us the mind of our time, with its half-lights, its shadowy vistas, its indefiniteness, its haze on the horizon, so vividly as he.

In Octave Mirbeau's notorious novel, a novel which it would be complimentary to describe as naturalistic, the heroine is warned by her director against the works of Anatole France, "Ne lisez jamais du Voltaire. . . C'est un peche mortel . . . ni de Renan . . . ni de l'Anatole France. Voila qui est dangereux." The names are appropriately united; a real, if not precisely an apostolic, succession exists between the three writers.

JULES LEMAITRE
de l'Academie Francais

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

"I NEED LOVE"

She gave a glance at the armchairs placed before the chimney, at the tea-

table, which shone in the shade, and at the tall, pale stems of flowers ascending above Chinese vases. She thrust her hand among the flowery branches of the guelder roses to make their silvery balls quiver. Then she looked at herself in a mirror with serious attention. She held herself sidewise, her neck turned over her shoulder, to follow with her eyes the spring of her fine form in its sheath-like black satin gown, around which floated a light tunic studded with pearls wherein sombre lights scintillated. She went nearer, curious to know her face of that day. The mirror returned her look with tranquillity, as if this amiable woman whom she examined, and who was not displeasing to her, lived without either acute joy or profound sadness.

On the walls of the large drawing-room, empty and silent, the figures of the tapestries, vague as shadows, showed pallid among their antique games and dying graces. Like them, the terra-cotta statuettes on slender columns, the groups of old Saxony, and the paintings of Sevres, spoke of past glories. On a pedestal ornamented with precious bronzes, the marble bust of some princess royal disguised as Diana appeared about to fly out of her turbulent drapery, while on the ceiling a figure of Night, powdered like a marquise and surrounded by cupids, sowed flowers. Everything was asleep, and only the crackling of the logs and the light rattle of Therese's pearls could be heard.

Turning from the mirror, she lifted the corner of a curtain and saw through the window, beyond the dark trees of the quay, the Seine spreading its yellow reflections. Weariness of the sky and of the water was reflected in her fine gray eyes. The boat passed, the 'Hirondelle', emerging from an arch of the Alma Bridge, and carrying humble travellers toward Grenelle and Billancourt. She followed it with her eyes, then let the curtain fall, and, seating herself under the flowers, took a book from the table. On the straw-colored linen cover shone the title in gold: 'Yseult la Blonde', by Vivian Bell. It was a collection of French verses composed by an Englishwoman, and printed in London. She read indifferently, waiting for visitors, and thinking less of the poetry than of the poetess, Miss Bell, who was perhaps her most agreeable friend, and whom she almost never saw; who, at every one of their meetings, which were so rare, kissed her, calling her "darling," and babbled; who, plain yet seductive, almost ridiculous, yet wholly exquisite, lived at Fiesole like a philosopher, while England celebrated her as her most beloved poet. Like Vernon Lee and like Mary Robinson, she had fallen in love with the life and art of Tuscany; and, without even finishing her *Tristan*, the first part of which had inspired in Burne-Jones dreamy aquarelles, she wrote Provencal verses and French poems expressing Italian ideas. She had sent her 'Yseult la Blonde' to "Darling," with a letter inviting her to spend a month with her at Fiesole. She had written: "Come; you will see the most beautiful things in the world, and you will embellish them."

And "darling" was saying to herself that she would not go, that she must remain in Paris. But the idea of seeing Miss Bell in Italy was not

indifferent to her. And turning the leaves of the book, she stopped by chance at this line:

Love and gentle heart are one.

And she asked herself, with gentle irony, whether Miss Bell had ever been in love, and what manner of man could be the ideal of Miss Bell. The poetess had at Fiesole an escort, Prince Albertinelli. He was very handsome, but rather coarse and vulgar; too much so to please an aesthete who blended with the desire for love the mysticism of an Annunciation.

"Good-evening, Therese. I am positively worn out."

The Princess Seniavine had entered, supple in her furs, which almost seemed to form a part of her dark beauty. She seated herself brusquely, and, in a voice at once harsh yet caressing, said:

"This morning I walked through the park with General Lariviere. I met him in an alley and made him go with me to the bridge, where he wished to buy from the guardian a learned magpie which performs the manual of arms with a gun. Oh! I am so tired!"

"But why did you drag the General to the bridge?"

"Because he had gout in his toe."

Therese shrugged her shoulders, smiling:

"You squander your wickedness. You spoil things."

"And you wish me, dear, to save my kindness and my wickedness for a serious investment?"

Therese made her drink some Tokay.

Preceded by the sound of his powerful breathing, General Lariviere approached with heavy state and sat between the two women, looking stubborn and self-satisfied, laughing in every wrinkle of his face.

"How is Monsieur Martin-Belleme? Always busy?"

Therese thought he was at the Chamber, and even that he was making a speech there.

Princess Seniavine, who was eating caviare sandwiches, asked Madame Martin why she had not gone to Madame Meillan's the day before. They had played a comedy there.

"A Scandinavian play? Was it a success?"

"Yes—I don't know. I was in the little green room, under the portrait of the Duc d'Orleans. Monsieur Le Menil came to me and did me one of those good turns that one never forgets. He saved me from Monsieur Garain."

The General, who knew the Annual Register, and stored away all useful information, pricked up his ears.

"Garain," he asked, "the minister who was in the Cabinet when the princes were exiled?"

"Himself. I was excessively agreeable to him. He talked to me of the yearnings of his heart and he looked at me with alarming tenderness. And from time to time he gazed, with sighs, at the portrait of the Duc d'Orleans. I said to him: 'Monsieur Garain, you are making a mistake. It is my sister-in-law who is an Orleanist. I am not.' At this moment Monsieur Le Menil came to escort me to the buffet. He paid great compliments—to my horses! He said, also, there was nothing so beautiful as the forest in winter. He talked about wolves. That refreshed me."

The General, who did not like young men, said he had met Le Menil the day before in the forest, galloping, with vast space between himself and his saddle.

He declared that old cavaliers alone retained the traditions of good horsemanship; that people in society now rode like jockeys.

"It is the same with fencing," he added. "Formerly—"

Princess Seniavine interrupted him:

"General, look and see how charming Madame Martin is. She is always charming, but at this moment she is prettier than ever. It is because she is bored. Nothing becomes her better than to be bored. Since we have been here, we have bored her terribly. Look at her: her forehead clouded, her glance vague, her mouth dolorous. Behold a victim!"

She arose, kissed Therese tumultuously, and fled, leaving the General astonished.

Madame Martin-Belleme prayed him not to listen to what the Princess had said.

He collected himself and asked:

"And how are your poets, Madame?"

It was difficult for him to forgive Madame Martin her preference for people who lived by writing and were not of his circle.

"Yes, your poets. What has become of that Monsieur Choulette, who visits you wrapped in a red muffler?"

"My poets? They forget me, they abandon me. One should not rely on anybody. Men and women—nothing is sure. Life is a continual betrayal. Only that poor Miss Bell does not forget me. She has written to me from Florence and sent her book."

"Miss Bell? Isn't she that young person who looks, with her yellow waving hair, like a little lapdog?"

He reflected, and expressed the opinion that she must be at least thirty.

An old lady, wearing with modest dignity her crown of white hair, and a little vivacious man with shrewd eyes, came in suddenly—Madame Marmet and M. Paul Vence. Then, carrying himself very stiffly, with a square monocle in his eye, appeared M. Daniel Salomon, the arbiter of elegance. The General hurried out.

They talked of the novel of the week. Madame Marmet had dined often with the author, a young and very amiable man. Paul Vence thought the book tiresome.

"Oh," sighed Madame Martin, "all books are tiresome. But men are more tiresome than books, and they are more exacting."

Madame Marmet said that her husband, who had much literary taste, had retained, until the end of his days, a horror of naturalism. She was the widow of a member of the 'Academie des Inscriptions', and plumed herself upon her illustrious widowhood. She was sweet and modest in her black gown and her beautiful white hair.

Madame Martin said to M. Daniel Salomon that she wished to consult him particularly on the picture of a group of beautiful children.

"You will tell me if it pleases you. You may also give me your opinion, Monsieur Vence, unless you disdain such trifles."

M. Daniel Salomon looked at Paul Vence through his monocle with disdain. Paul Vence surveyed the drawing-room.

"You have beautiful things, Madame. That would be nothing. But you have only beautiful things, and all serve to set off your own beauty."

She did not conceal her pleasure at hearing him speak in that way. She regarded Paul Vence as the only really intelligent man she knew. She had appreciated him before his books had made him celebrated. His ill-health, his dark humor, his assiduous labor, separated him from society. The little bilious man was not very pleasing; yet he attracted her. She held in high esteem his profound irony, his great pride, his talent

ripened in solitude, and she admired him, with reason, as an excellent writer, the author of powerful essays on art and on life.

Little by little the room filled with a brilliant crowd. Within the large circle of armchairs were Madame de Wesson, about whom people told frightful stories, and who kept, after twenty years of half-smothered scandal, the eyes of a child and cheeks of virginal smoothness; old Madame de Morlaine, who shouted her witty phrases in piercing cries; Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician; Madame Garain, the wife of the exminister; three other ladies; and, standing easily against the mantelpiece, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, editor of the 'Journal des Debats', a deputy who caressed his white beard while Madame de Morlaine shouted at him:

"Your article on bimetallism is a pearl, a jewel! Especially the end of it."

Standing in the rear of the room, young clubmen, very grave, lisped among themselves:

"What did he do to get the button from the Prince?"

"He, nothing. His wife, everything."

They had their own cynical philosophy. One of them had no faith in promises of men.

"They are types that do not suit me. They wear their hearts on their hands and on their mouths. You present yourself for admission to a club. They say, 'I promise to give you a white ball. It will be an alabaster ball—a snowball! They vote. It's a black ball. Life seems a vile affair when I think of it.'"

"Then don't think of it."

Daniel Salomon, who had joined them, whispered in their ears spicy stories in a lowered voice. And at every strange revelation concerning Madame Raymond, or Madame Berthier, or Princess Seniavine, he added, negligently:

"Everybody knows it."

Then, little by little, the crowd of visitors dispersed. Only Madame Marmet and Paul Vence remained.

The latter went toward Madame Martin, and asked:

"When do you wish me to introduce Dechartre to you?"

It was the second time he had asked this of her. She did not like to see new faces. She replied, unconcernedly:

"Your sculptor? When you wish. I saw at the Champ de Mars medallions made by him which are very good. But he does not work much. He is an amateur, is he not?"

"He is a delicate artist. He does not need to work in order to live. He caresses his figures with loving slowness. But do not be deceived about him, Madame. He knows and he feels. He would be a master if he did not live alone. I have known him since his childhood. People think that he is solitary and morose. He is passionate and timid. What he lacks, what he will lack always to reach the highest point of his art, is simplicity of mind. He is restless, and he spoils his most beautiful impressions. In my opinion he was created less for sculpture than for poetry or philosophy. He knows a great deal, and you will be astonished at the wealth of his mind."

Madame Marmet approved.

She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it. She listened a great deal and talked little. Very affable, she gave value to her affability by not squandering it. Either because she liked Madame Martin, or because she knew how to give discreet marks of preference in every house she went, she warmed herself contentedly, like a relative, in a corner of the Louis XVI chimney, which suited her beauty. She lacked only her dog.

"How is Toby?" asked Madame Martin. "Monsieur Vence, do you know Toby? He has long silky hair and a lovely little black nose."

Madame Marmet was relishing the praise of Toby, when an old man, pink and blond, with curly hair, short-sighted, almost blind under his golden spectacles, rather short, striking against the furniture, bowing to empty armchairs, blundering into the mirrors, pushed his crooked nose before Madame Marmet, who looked at him indignantly.

It was M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions. He smiled and turned a madrigal for the Countess Martin with that hereditary harsh, coarse voice with which the Jews, his fathers, pressed their creditors, the peasants of Alsace, of Poland, and of the Crimea. He dragged his phrases heavily. This great philologist knew all languages except French. And Madame Martin enjoyed his affable phrases, heavy and rusty like the iron-work of brica-brac shops, among which fell dried leaves of anthology. M. Schmoll liked poets and women, and had wit.

Madame Marmet feigned not to know him, and went out without returning his

bow.

When he had exhausted his pretty madrigals, M. Schmoll became sombre and pitiful. He complained piteously. He was not decorated enough, not provided with sinecures enough, nor well fed enough by the State—he, Madame Schmoll, and their five daughters. His lamentations had some grandeur. Something of the soul of Ezekiel and of Jeremiah was in them.

Unfortunately, turning his golden-spectacled eyes toward the table, he discovered Vivian Bell's book.

"Oh, 'Yseult La Blonde'," he exclaimed, bitterly. "You are reading that book, Madame? Well, learn that Mademoiselle Vivian Bell has stolen an inscription from me, and that she has altered it, moreover, by putting it into verse. You will find it on page 109 of her book: 'A shade may weep over a shade.' You hear, Madame? 'A shade may weep over a shade.' Well, those words are translated literally from a funeral inscription which I was the first to publish and to illustrate. Last year, one day, when I was dining at your house, being placed by the side of Mademoiselle Bell, I quoted this phrase to her, and it pleased her a great deal. At her request, the next day I translated into French the entire inscription and sent it to her. And now I find it changed in this volume of verses under this title: 'On the Sacred Way'—the sacred way, that is I."

And he repeated, in his bad humor:

"I, Madame, am the sacred way."

He was annoyed that the poet had not spoken to him about this inscription. He would have liked to see his name at the top of the poem, in the verses, in the rhymes. He wished to see his name everywhere, and always looked for it in the journals with which his pockets were stuffed. But he had no rancor. He was not really angry with Miss Bell. He admitted gracefully that she was a distinguished person, and a poet that did great honor to England.

When he had gone, the Countess Martin asked ingenuously of Paul Vence if he knew why that good Madame Marmet had looked at M. Schmoll with such marked though silent anger. He was surprised that she did not know.

"I never know anything," she said.

"But the quarrel between Schmoll and Marmet is famous. It ceased only at the death of Marmet.

"The day that poor Marmet was buried, snow was falling. We were wet and frozen to the bones. At the grave, in the wind, in the mud, Schmoll read under his umbrella a speech full of jovial cruelty and triumphant pity, which he took afterward to the newspapers in a mourning carriage. An

indiscreet friend let Madame Marmet hear of it, and she fainted. Is it possible, Madame, that you have not heard of this learned and ferocious quarrel?

"The Etruscan language was the cause of it. Marmet made it his unique study. He was surnamed Marmet the Etruscan. Neither he nor any one else knew a word of that language, the last vestige of which is lost. Schmoll said continually to Marmet: 'You do not know Etruscan, my dear colleague; that is the reason why you are an honorable savant and a fair-minded man.' Piqued by his ironic praise, Marmet thought of learning a little Etruscan. He read to his colleague a memoir on the part played by flexions in the idiom of the ancient Tuscans."

Madame Martin asked what a flexion was.

"Oh, Madame, if I explain anything to you, it will mix up everything. Be content with knowing that in that memoir poor Marmet quoted Latin texts and quoted them wrong. Schmoll is a Latinist of great learning, and, after Mommsen, the chief epigraphist of the world.

"He reproached his young colleague—Marmet was not fifty years old—with reading Etruscan too well and Latin not well enough. From that time Marmet had no rest. At every meeting he was mocked unmercifully; and, finally, in spite of his softness, he got angry. Schmoll is without rancor. It is a virtue of his race. He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes. One day, as he went up the stairway of the Institute with Renan and Oppert, he met Marmet, and extended his hand to him. Marmet refused to take it, and said 'I do not know you.'—'Do you take me for a Latin inscription?' Schmoll replied. Marmet died and was buried because of that satire. Now you know the reason why his widow sees his enemy with horror."

"And I have made them dine together, side by side."

"Madame, it was not immoral, but it was cruel."

"My dear sir, I shall shock you, perhaps; but if I had to choose, I should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one."

A young man, tall, thin, dark, with a long moustache, entered, and bowed with brusque suppleness.

"Monsieur Vence, I think that you know Monsieur Le Menil."

They had met before at Madame Martin's, and saw each other often at the Fencing Club. The day before they had met at Madame Meillan's.

"Madame Meillan's—there's a house where one is bored," said Paul Vence.

"Yet Academicians go there," said M. Robert Le Menil. "I do not exaggerate their value, but they are the elite."

Madame Martin smiled.

"We know, Monsieur Le Menil, that at Madame Meillan's you are preoccupied by the women more than by the Academicians. You escorted Princess Seniavine to the buffet and talked to her about wolves."

"What wolves?"

"Wolves, and forests blackened by winter. We thought that with so pretty a woman your conversation was rather savage!"

Paul Vence rose.

"So you permit, Madame, that I should bring my friend Dechartre? He has a great desire to know you, and I hope he will not displease you. There is life in his mind. He is full of ideas."

"Oh, I do not ask for so much," Madame Martin said. "People that are natural and show themselves as they are rarely bore me, and sometimes they amuse me."

When Paul Vence had gone, Le Menil listened until the noise of footsteps had vanished; then, coming nearer:

"To-morrow, at three o'clock? Do you still love me?"

He asked her to reply while they were alone. She answered that it was late, that she expected no more visitors, and that no one except her husband would come.

He entreated. Then she said:

"I shall be free to-morrow all day. Wait for me at three o'clock."

He thanked her with a look. Then, placing himself on at the other side of the chimney, he asked who was that Dechartre whom she wished introduced to her.

"I do not wish him to be introduced to me. He is to be introduced to me. He is a sculptor."

He deplored the fact that she needed to see new faces, adding:

"A sculptor? They are usually brutal."

"Oh, but this one does so little sculpture! But if it annoys you that I should meet him, I will not do so."

"I should be sorry if society took any part of the time you might give to me."

"My friend, you can not complain of that. I did not even go to Madame Meillan's yesterday."

"You are right to show yourself there as little as possible. It is not a house for you."

He explained. All the women that went there had had some spicy adventure which was known and talked about. Besides, Madame Meillan favored intrigue. He gave examples. Madame Martin, however, her hands extended on the arms of the chair in charming restfulness, her head inclined, looked at the dying embers in the grate. Her thoughtful mood had flown. Nothing of it remained on her face, a little saddened, nor in her languid body, more desirable than ever in the quiescence of her mind. She kept for a while a profound immobility, which added to her personal attraction the charm of things that art had created.

He asked her of what she was thinking. Escaping the magic of the blaze in the ashes, she said:

"We will go to-morrow, if you wish, to far distant places, to the odd districts where the poor people live. I like the old streets where misery dwells."

He promised to satisfy her taste, although he let her know that he thought it absurd. The walks that she led him sometimes bored him, and he thought them dangerous. People might see them.

"And since we have been successful until now in not causing gossip—"

She shook her head.

"Do you think that people have not talked about us? Whether they know or do not know, they talk. Not everything is known, but everything is said."

She relapsed into her dream. He thought her discontented, cross, for some reason which she would not tell. He bent upon her beautiful, grave eyes which reflected the light of the grate. But she reassured him.

"I do not know whether any one talks about me. And what do I care? Nothing matters."

He left her. He was going to dine at the club, where a friend was waiting for him. She followed him with her eyes, with peaceful sympathy. Then she began again to read in the ashes.

She saw in them the days of her childhood; the castle wherein she had passed the sweet, sad summers; the dark and humid park; the pond where slept the green water; the marble nymphs under the chestnut-trees, and the bench on which she had wept and desired death. To-day she still ignored the cause of her youthful despair, when the ardent awakening of her imagination threw her into a troubled maze of desires and of fears. When she was a child, life frightened her. And now she knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope; that it is a very ordinary thing. She should have known this. She thought:

"I saw mamma; she was good, very simple, and not very happy. I dreamed of a destiny different from hers. Why? I felt around me the insipid taste of life, and seemed to inhale the future like a salt and pungent aroma. Why? What did I want, and what did I expect? Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?"

She had been born rich, in the brilliancy of a fortune too new. She was a daughter of that Montessuy, who, at first a clerk in a Parisian bank, founded and governed two great establishments, brought to sustain them the resources of a brilliant mind, invincible force of character, a rare alliance of cleverness and honesty, and treated with the Government as if he were a foreign power. She had grown up in the historical castle of Joinville, bought, restored, and magnificently furnished by her father. Montessuy made life give all it could yield. An instinctive and powerful atheist, he wanted all the goods of this world and all the desirable things that earth produces. He accumulated pictures by old masters, and precious sculptures. At fifty he had known all the most beautiful women of the stage, and many in society. He enjoyed everything worldly with the brutality of his temperament and the shrewdness of his mind.

Poor Madame Montessuy, economical and careful, languished at Joinville, delicate and poor, under the frowns of twelve gigantic caryatides which held a ceiling on which Lebrun had painted the Titans struck by Jupiter. There, in the iron cot, placed at the foot of the large bed, she died one night of sadness and exhaustion, never having loved anything on earth except her husband and her little drawing-room in the Rue Maubeuge.

She never had had any intimacy with her daughter, whom she felt instinctively too different from herself, too free, too bold at heart; and she divined in Therese, although she was sweet and good, the strong Montessuy blood, the ardor which had made her suffer so much, and which she forgave in her husband, but not in her daughter.

But Montessuy recognized his daughter and loved her. Like most hearty, full-blooded men, he had hours of charming gayety. Although he lived out of his house a great deal, he breakfasted with her almost every day, and

sometimes took her out walking. He understood gowns and furbelows. He instructed and formed Therese. He amused her. Near her, his instinct for conquest inspired him still. He desired to win always, and he won his daughter. He separated her from her mother. Therese admired him, she adored him.

In her dream she saw him as the unique joy of her childhood. She was persuaded that no man in the world was as amiable as her father.

At her entrance in life, she despaired at once of finding elsewhere so rich a nature, such a plenitude of active and thinking forces. This discouragement had followed her in the choice of a husband, and perhaps later in a secret and freer choice.

She had not really selected her husband. She did not know: she had permitted herself to be married by her father, who, then a widower, embarrassed by the care of a girl, had wished to do things quickly and well. He considered the exterior advantages, estimated the eighty years of imperial nobility which Count Martin brought. The idea never came to him that she might wish to find love in marriage.

He flattered himself that she would find in it the satisfaction of the luxurious desires which he attributed to her, the joy of making a display of grandeur, the vulgar pride, the material domination, which were for him all the value of life, as he had no ideas on the subject of the happiness of a true woman, although he was sure that his daughter would remain virtuous.

While thinking of his absurd yet natural faith in her, which accorded so badly with his own experiences and ideas regarding women, she smiled with melancholy irony. And she admired her father the more.

After all, she was not so badly married. Her husband was as good as any other man. He had become quite bearable. Of all that she read in the ashes, in the veiled softness of the lamps, of all her reminiscences, that of their married life was the most vague. She found a few isolated traits of it, some absurd images, a fleeting and fastidious impression. The time had not seemed long and had left nothing behind. Six years had passed, and she did not even remember how she had regained her liberty, so prompt and easy had been her conquest of that husband, cold, sickly, selfish, and polite; of that man dried up and yellowed by business and politics, laborious, ambitious, and commonplace. He liked women only through vanity, and he never had loved his wife. The separation had been frank and complete. And since then, strangers to each other, they felt a tacit, mutual gratitude for their freedom. She would have had some affection for him if she had not found him hypocritical and too subtle in the art of obtaining her signature when he needed money for enterprises that were more for ostentation than real benefit. The man with whom she dined and talked every day had no significance for her.

With her cheek in her hand, before the grate, as if she questioned a sibyl, she saw again the face of the Marquis de Re. She saw it so precisely that it surprised her. The Marquis de Re had been presented to her by her father, who admired him, and he appeared to her grand and dazzling for his thirty years of intimate triumphs and mundane glories. His adventures followed him like a procession. He had captivated three generations of women, and had left in the heart of all those whom he had loved an imperishable memory. His virile grace, his quiet elegance, and his habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth far beyond the ordinary term of years. He noticed particularly the young Countess Martin. The homage of this expert flattered her. She thought of him now with pleasure. He had a marvellous art of conversation. He amused her. She let him see it, and at once he promised to himself, in his heroic frivolity, to finish worthily his happy life by the subjugation of this young woman whom he appreciated above every one else, and who evidently admired him. He displayed, to capture her, the most learned stratagems. But she escaped him very easily.

She yielded, two years later, to Robert Le Menil, who had desired her ardently, with all the warmth of his youth, with all the simplicity of his mind. She said to herself: "I gave myself to him because he loved me." It was the truth. The truth was, also, that a dumb yet powerful instinct had impelled her, and that she had obeyed the hidden impulse of her being. But even this was not her real self; what awakened her nature at last was the fact that she believed in the sincerity of his sentiment. She had yielded as soon as she had felt that she was loved. She had given herself, quickly, simply. He thought that she had yielded easily. He was mistaken. She had felt the discouragement which the irreparable gives, and that sort of shame which comes of having suddenly something to conceal. Everything that had been whispered before her about other women resounded in her burning ears. But, proud and delicate, she took care to hide the value of the gift she was making. He never suspected her moral uneasiness, which lasted only a few days, and was replaced by perfect tranquillity. After three years she defended her conduct as innocent and natural.

Having done harm to no one, she had no regrets. She was content. She was in love, she was loved. Doubtless she had not felt the intoxication she had expected, but does one ever feel it? She was the friend of the good and honest fellow, much liked by women who passed for disdainful and hard to please, and he had a true affection for her. The pleasure she gave him and the joy of being beautiful for him attached her to this friend. He made life for her not continually delightful, but easy to bear, and at times agreeable.

That which she had not divined in her solitude, notwithstanding vague yearnings and apparently causeless sadness, he had revealed to her. She knew herself when she knew him. It was a happy astonishment. Their sympathies were not in their minds. Her inclination toward him was simple and frank, and at this moment she found pleasure in the idea of

meeting him the next day in the little apartment where they had met for three years. With a shake of the head and a shrug of her shoulders, coarser than one would have expected from this exquisite woman, sitting alone by the dying fire, she said to herself: "There! I need love!"

CHAPTER II

"ONE CAN SEE THAT YOU ARE YOUNG!"

It was no longer daylight when they came out of the little apartment in the Rue Spontini. Robert Le Menil made a sign to a coachman, and entered the carriage with Therese. Close together, they rolled among the vague shadows, cut by sudden lights, through the ghostly city, having in their minds only sweet and vanishing impressions while everything around them seemed confused and fleeting.

The carriage approached the Pont-Neuf. They stepped out. A dry cold made vivid the sombre January weather. Under her veil Therese joyfully inhaled the wind which swept on the hardened soil a dust white as salt. She was glad to wander freely among unknown things. She liked to see the stony landscape which the clearness of the air made distinct; to walk quickly and firmly on the quay where the trees displayed the black tracery of their branches on the horizon reddened by the smoke of the city; to look at the Seine. In the sky the first stars appeared.

"One would think that the wind would put them out," she said.

He observed, too, that they scintillated a great deal. He did not think it was a sign of rain, as the peasants believe. He had observed, on the contrary, that nine times in ten the scintillation of stars was an augury of fine weather.

Near the little bridge they found old iron-shops lighted by smoky lamps. She ran into them. She turned a corner and went into a shop in which queer stuffs were hanging. Behind the dirty panes a lighted candle showed pots, porcelain vases, a clarinet, and a bride's wreath.

He did not understand what pleasure she found in her search.

"These shops are full of vermin. What can you find interesting in them?"

"Everything. I think of the poor bride whose wreath is under that globe. The dinner occurred at Maillot. There was a policeman in the procession. There is one in almost all the bridal processions one sees in the park on Saturdays. Don't they move you, my friend, all these poor, ridiculous, miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past?"

Among cups decorated with flowers she discovered a little knife, the ivory handle of which represented a tall, thin woman with her hair arranged a la Maintenon. She bought it for a few sous. It pleased her, because she already had a fork like it. Le Menil confessed that he had no taste for such things, but said that his aunt knew a great deal about them. At Caen all the merchants knew her. She had restored and furnished her house in proper style. This house was noted as early as 1690. In one of its halls were white cases full of books. His aunt had wished to put them in order. She had found frivolous books in them, ornamented with engravings so unconventional that she had burned them.

"Is she silly, your aunt?" asked Therese.

For a long time his anecdotes about his aunt had made her impatient. Her friend had in the country a mother, sisters, aunts, and numerous relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her. He talked of them with admiration. It annoyed her that he often visited them. When he came back, she imagined that he carried with him the odor of things that had been packed up for years. He was astonished, naively, and he suffered from her antipathy to them.

He said nothing. The sight of a public-house, the panes of which were flaming, recalled to him the poet Choulette, who passed for a drunkard. He asked her if she still saw that Choulette, who called on her wearing a mackintosh and a red muffler.

It annoyed her that he spoke like General Lariviere. She did not say that she had not seen Choulette since autumn, and that he neglected her with the capriciousness of a man not in society.

"He has wit," she said, "fantasy, and an original temperament. He pleases me."

And as he reproached her for having an odd taste, she replied:

"I haven't a taste, I have tastes. You do not disapprove of them all, I suppose."

He replied that he did not criticise her. He was only afraid that she might do herself harm by receiving a Bohemian who was not welcome in respectable houses.

She exclaimed:

"Not welcome in respectable houses—Choulette? Don't you know that he goes every year for a month to the Marquise de Rieu? Yes, to the Marquise de Rieu, the Catholic, the royalist. But since Choulette interests you, listen to his latest adventure. Paul Vence related it to me. I understand it better in this street, where there are shirts and

flowerpots at the windows.

"This winter, one night when it was raining, Choulette went into a public-house in a street the name of which I have forgotten, but which must resemble this one, and met there an unfortunate girl whom the waiters would not have noticed, and whom he liked for her humility. Her name was Maria. The name was not hers. She found it nailed on her door at the top of the stairway where she went to lodge. Choulette was touched by this perfection of poverty and infamy. He called her his sister, and kissed her hands. Since then he has not quitted her a moment. He takes her to the coffee-houses of the Latin Quarter where the rich students read their reviews. He says sweet things to her. He weeps, she weeps. They drink; and when they are drunk, they fight. He loves her. He calls her his chaste one, his cross and his salvation. She was barefooted; he gave her yarn and knitting-needles that she might make stockings. And he made shoes for this unfortunate girl himself, with enormous nails. He teaches her verses that are easy to understand. He is afraid of altering her moral beauty by taking her out of the shame where she lives in perfect simplicity and admirable destitution."

Le Menil shrugged his shoulders.

"But that Choulette is crazy, and Paul Vence has no right to tell you such stories. I am not austere, assuredly; but there are immoralities that disgust me." They were walking at random. She fell into a dream.

"Yes, morality, I know—duty! But duty—it takes the devil to discover it. I can assure you that I do not know where duty is. It's like a young lady's turtle at Joinville. We spent all the evening looking for it under the furniture, and when we had found it, we went to bed."

He thought there was some truth in what she said. He would think about it when alone.

"I regret sometimes that I did not remain in the army. I know what you are going to say—one becomes a brute in that profession. Doubtless, but one knows exactly what one has to do, and that is a great deal in life. I think that my uncle's life is very beautiful and very agreeable. But now that everybody is in the army, there are neither officers nor soldiers. It all looks like a railway station on Sunday. My uncle knew personally all the officers and all the soldiers of his brigade. Nowadays, how can you expect an officer to know his men?"

She had ceased to listen. She was looking at a woman selling fried potatoes. She realized that she was hungry and wished to eat fried potatoes.

He remonstrated:

"Nobody knows how they are cooked."

But he had to buy two sous' worth of fried potatoes, and to see that the woman put salt on them.

While Therese was eating them, he led her into deserted streets far from the gaslights. Soon they found themselves in front of the cathedral. The moon silvered the roofs.

"Notre Dame," she said. "See, it is as heavy as an elephant yet as delicate as an insect. The moon climbs over it and looks at it with a monkey's maliciousness. She does not look like the country moon at Joinville. At Joinville I have a path—a flat path—with the moon at the end of it. She is not there every night; but she returns faithfully, full, red, familiar. She is a country neighbor. I go seriously to meet her. But this moon of Paris I should not like to know. She is not respectable company. Oh, the things that she has seen during the time she has been roaming around the roofs!"

He smiled a tender smile.

"Oh, your little path where you walked alone and that you liked because the sky was at the end of it! I see it as if I were there."

It was at the Joinville castle that he had seen her for the first time, and had at once loved her. It was there, one night, that he had told her of his love, to which she had listened, dumb, with a pained expression on her mouth and a vague look in her eyes.

The reminiscence of this little path where she walked alone moved him, troubled him, made him live again the enchanted hours of his first desires and hopes. He tried to find her hand in her muff and pressed her slim wrist under the fur.

A little girl carrying violets saw that they were lovers, and offered flowers to them. He bought a two-sous' bouquet and offered it to Therese.

She was walking toward the cathedral. She was thinking: "It is like an enormous beast—a beast of the Apocalypse."

At the other end of the bridge a flower-woman, wrinkled, bearded, gray with years and dust, followed them with her basket full of mimosas and roses. Therese, who held her violets and was trying to slip them into her waist, said, joyfully:

"Thank you, I have some."

"One can see that you are young," the old woman shouted with a wicked air, as she went away.

Therese understood at once, and a smile came to her lips and eyes. They were passing near the porch, before the stone figures that wear sceptres and crowns.

"Let us go in," she said.

He did not wish to go in. He declared that the door was closed. She pushed it, and slipped into the immense nave, where the inanimate trees of the columns ascended in darkness. In the rear, candles were moving in front of spectre-like priests, under the last reverberations of the organs. She trembled in the silence, and said:

"The sadness of churches at night moves me; I feel in them the grandeur of nothingness."

He replied:

"We must believe in something. If there were no God, if our souls were not immortal, it would be too sad."

She remained for a while immovable under the curtains of shadow hanging from the arches. Then she said:

"My poor friend, we do not know what to do with this life, which is so short, and yet you desire another life which shall never finish."

In the carriage that took them back he said gayly that he had passed a fine afternoon. He kissed her, satisfied with her and with himself. But his good-humor was not communicated to her. The last moments they passed together were spoiled for her always by the presentiment that he would not say at parting the thing that he should say. Ordinarily, he quitted her brusquely, as if what had happened were not to last. At every one of their partings she had a confused feeling that they were parting forever. She suffered from this in advance and became irritable.

Under the trees he took her hand and kissed her.

"Is it not rare, Therese, to love as we love each other?"

"Rare? I don't know; but I think that you love me."

"And you?"

"I, too, love you."

"And you will love me always?"

"What does one ever know?"

And seeing the face of her lover darken:

"Would you be more content with a woman who would swear to love only you for all time?"

He remained anxious, with a wretched air. She was kind and she reassured him:

"You know very well, my friend, that I am not fickle."

Almost at the end of the lane they said good-by. He kept the carriage to return to the Rue Royale. He was to dine at the club and go to the theatre, and had no time to lose.

Therese returned home on foot. Opposite the Trocadero she remembered what the old flower-woman had said: "One can see that you are young." The words came back to her with a significance not immoral but sad. "One can see that you are young!" Yes, she was young, she was loved, and she was bored to death.

CHAPTER III

A DISCUSSION ON THE LITTLE CORPORAL

In the centre of the table flowers were disposed in a basket of gilded bronze, decorated with eagles, stars, and bees, and handles formed like horns of plenty. On its sides winged Victorys supported the branches of candelabra. This centrepiece of the Empire style had been given by Napoleon, in 1812, to Count Martin de l'Aisne, grandfather of the present Count Martin-Belleme. Martin de l'Aisne, a deputy to the Legislative Corps in 1809, was appointed the following year member of the Committee on Finance, the assiduous and secret works of which suited his laborious temperament. Although a Liberal, he pleased the Emperor by his application and his exact honesty. For two years he was under a rain of favors. In 1813 he formed part of the moderate majority which approved the report in which Laine censured power and misfortune, by giving to the Empire tardy advice. January 1, 1814, he went with his colleagues to the Tuileries. The Emperor received them in a terrifying manner. He charged on their ranks. Violent and sombre, in the horror of his present strength and of his coming fall, he stunned them with his anger and his contempt.

He came and went through their lines, and suddenly took Count Martin by the shoulders, shook him and dragged him, exclaiming: "A throne is four pieces of wood covered with velvet? No! A throne is a man, and that man

is I. You have tried to throw mud at me. Is this the time to remonstrate with me when there are two hundred thousand Cossacks at the frontiers? Your Laine is a wicked man. One should wash one's dirty linen at home." And while in his anger he twisted in his hand the embroidered collar of the deputy, he said: "The people know me. They do not know you. I am the elect of the nation. You are the obscure delegates of a department." He predicted to them the fate of the Girondins. The noise of his spurs accompanied the sound of his voice. Count Martin remained trembling the rest of his life, and tremblingly recalled the Bourbons after the defeat of the Emperor. The two restorations were in vain; the July government and the Second Empire covered his oppressed breast with crosses and cordons. Raised to the highest functions, loaded with honors by three kings and one emperor, he felt forever on his shoulder the hand of the Corsican. He died a senator of Napoleon III, and left a son agitated by the same fear.

This son had married Mademoiselle Belleme, daughter of the first president of the court of Bourges, and with her the political glories of a family which gave three ministers to the moderate monarch. The Bellemes, advocates in the time of Louis XV, elevated the Jacobin origins of the Martins. The second Count Martin was a member of all the Assemblies until his death in 1881. His son took without trouble his seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Having married Mademoiselle Therese Montessuy, whose dowry supported his political fortune, he appeared discreetly among the four or five bourgeois, titled and wealthy, who rallied to democracy, and were received without much bad grace by the republicans, whom aristocracy flattered.

In the dining-room, Count Martin-Belleme was doing the honors of his table with the good grace, the sad politeness, recently prescribed at the Elysee to represent isolated France at a great northern court. From time to time he addressed vapid phrases to Madame Garain at his right; to the Princess Seniavine at his left, who, loaded with diamonds, felt bored. Opposite him, on the other side of the table, Countess Martin, having by her side General Lariviere and M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions, caressed with her fan her smooth white shoulders. At the two semicircles, whereby the dinner-table was prolonged, were M. Montessuy, robust, with blue eyes and ruddy complexion; a young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom, embarrassed by her long, thin arms; the painter Duviquet; M. Daniel Salomon; then Paul Vence and Garain the deputy; Belleme de Saint-Nom; an unknown senator; and Dechartre, who was dining at the house for the first time. The conversation, at first trivial and insignificant, was prolonged into a confused murmur, above which rose Garain's voice:

"Every false idea is dangerous. People think that dreamers do no harm. They are mistaken: dreamers do a great deal of harm. Even apparently inoffensive utopian ideas really exercise a noxious influence. They tend to inspire disgust at reality."

"It is, perhaps, because reality is not beautiful," said Paul Vence.

M. Garain said that he had always been in favor of all possible improvements. He had asked for the suppression of permanent armies in the time of the Empire, for the separation of church and state, and had remained always faithful to democracy. His device, he said, was "Order and Progress." He thought he had discovered that device.

Montessuy said:

"Well, Monsieur Garain, be sincere. Confess that there are no reforms to be made, and that it is as much as one can do to change the color of postage-stamps. Good or bad, things are as they should be. Yes, things are as they should be; but they change incessantly. Since 1870 the industrial and financial situation of the country has gone through four or five revolutions which political economists had not foreseen and which they do not yet understand. In society, as in nature, transformations are accomplished from within."

As to matters of government his ideas were terse and decided. He was strongly attached to the present, heedless of the future, and the socialists troubled him little. Without caring whether the sun and capital should be extinguished some day, he enjoyed them. According to him, one should let himself be carried. None but fools resisted the current or tried to go in front of it.

But Count Martin, naturally sad, had, dark presentiments. In veiled words he announced catastrophes. His timorous phrases came through the flowers, and irritated M. Schmoll, who began to grumble and to prophesy. He explained that Christian nations were incapable, alone and by themselves, of throwing off barbarism, and that without the Jews and the Arabs Europe would be to-day, as in the time of the Crusades, sunk in ignorance, misery, and cruelty.

"The Middle Ages," he said, "are closed only in the historical manuals that are given to pupils to spoil their minds. In reality, barbarians are always barbarians. Israel's mission is to instruct nations. It was Israel which, in the Middle Ages, brought to Europe the wisdom of ages. Socialism frightens you. It is a Christian evil, like priesthood. And anarchy? Do you not recognize in it the plague of the Albigeois and of the Vaudois? The Jews, who instructed and polished Europe, are the only ones who can save it to-day from the evangelical evil by which it is devoured. But they have not fulfilled their duty. They have made Christians of themselves among the Christians. And God punishes them. He permits them to be exiled and to be despoiled. Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere. From Russia my co-religionists are expelled like savage beasts. In France, civil and military employments are closing against Jews. They have no longer access to aristocratic circles. My nephew, young Isaac Coblentz, has had to renounce a diplomatic career, after passing brilliantly his admission examination.

The wives of several of my colleagues, when Madame Schmoll calls on them, display with intention, under her eyes, anti-Semitic newspapers. And would you believe that the Minister of Public Instruction has refused to give me the cross of the Legion of Honor for which I have applied? There's ingratitude! Anti-Semitism is death—it is death, do you hear? to European civilization.”

The little man had a natural manner which surpassed all the art in the world. Grotesque and terrible, he threw the table into consternation by his sincerity. Madame Martin, whom he amused, complimented him on this:

”At least,” she said, ”you defend your co-religionists. You are not, Monsieur Schmoll, like a beautiful Jewish lady of my acquaintance who, having read in a journal that she received the elite of Jewish society, went everywhere shouting that she had been insulted.”

”I am sure, Madame, that you do not know how beautiful and superior to all other moralities is Jewish morality. Do you know the parable of the three rings?”

This question was lost in the murmur of the dialogues wherein were mingled foreign politics, exhibitions of paintings, fashionable scandals, and Academy speeches. They talked of the new novel and of the coming play. This was a comedy. Napoleon was an incidental character in it.

The conversation settled upon Napoleon I, often placed on the stage and newly studied in books—an object of curiosity, a personage in the fashion, no longer a popular hero, a demi-god, wearing boots for his country, as in the days when Norvins and Beranger, Charlet and Raffet were composing his legend; but a curious personage, an amusing type in his living infinity, a figure whose style is pleasant to artists, whose movements attract thoughtless idlers.

Garain, who had founded his political fortune on hatred of the Empire, judged sincerely that this return of national taste was only an absurd infatuation. He saw no danger in it and felt no fear about it. In him fear was sudden and ferocious. For the moment he was very quiet; he talked neither of prohibiting performances nor of seizing books, of imprisoning authors, or of suppressing anything. Calm and severe, he saw in Napoleon only Taine's 'condottiere' who kicked Volney in the stomach. Everybody wished to define the true Napoleon. Count Martin, in the face of the imperial centrepiece and of the winged Victories, talked suitably of Napoleon as an organizer and administrator, and placed him in a high position as president of the state council, where his words threw light upon obscure questions. Garain affirmed that in his sessions, only too famous, Napoleon, under pretext of taking snuff, asked the councillors to pass to him their gold boxes ornamented with miniatures and decked with diamonds, which they never saw again. The anecdote was told to him by the son of Mounier himself.

Montessuy esteemed in Napoleon the genius of order. "He liked," he said, "work well done. That is a taste most persons have lost."

The painter Duviquet, whose ideas were those of an artist, was embarrassed. He did not find on the funeral mask brought from St. Helena the characteristics of that face, beautiful and powerful, which medals and busts have consecrated. One must be convinced of this now that the bronze of that mask was hanging in all the old shops, among eagles and sphinxes made of gilded wood. And, according to him, since the true face of Napoleon was not that of the ideal Napoleon, his real soul may not have been as idealists fancied it. Perhaps it was the soul of a good bourgeois. Somebody had said this, and he was inclined to think that it was true. Anyway, Duviquet, who flattered himself with having made the best portraits of the century, knew that celebrated men seldom resemble the ideas one forms of them.

M. Daniel Salomon observed that the fine mask about which Duviquet talked, the plaster cast taken from the inanimate face of the Emperor, and brought to Europe by Dr. Antommarchi, had been moulded in bronze and sold by subscription for the first time in 1833, under Louis Philippe, and had then inspired surprise and mistrust. People suspected the Italian chemist, who was a sort of buffoon, always talkative and famished, of having tried to make fun of people. Disciples of Dr. Gall, whose system was then in favor, regarded the mask as suspicious. They did not find in it the bumps of genius; and the forehead, examined in accordance with the master's theories, presented nothing remarkable in its formation.

"Precisely," said Princess Seniavine. "Napoleon was remarkable only for having kicked Volney in the stomach and stealing a snuffbox ornamented with diamonds. Monsieur Garain has just taught us."

"And yet," said Madame Martin, "nobody is sure that he kicked Volney."

"Everything becomes known in the end," replied the Princess, gayly. "Napoleon did nothing at all. He did not even kick Volney, and his head was that of an idiot."

General Lariviere felt that he should say something. He hurled this phrase:

"Napoleon—his campaign of 1813 is much discussed."

The General wished to please Garain, and he had no other idea. However, he succeeded, after an effort, in formulating a judgment:

"Napoleon committed faults; in his situation he should not have committed any." And he stopped abruptly, very red.

Madame Martin asked:

"And you, Monsieur Vence, what do you think of Napoleon?"

"Madame, I have not much love for sword-bearers, and conquerors seem to me to be dangerous fools. But in spite of everything, that figure of the Emperor interests me as it interests the public. I find character and life in it. There is no poem or novel that is worth the *Memoirs of Saint Helena*, although it is written in ridiculous fashion. What I think of Napoleon, if you wish to know, is that, made for glory, he had the brilliant simplicity of the hero of an epic poem. A hero must be human. Napoleon was human."

"Oh, oh!" every one exclaimed.

But Paul Vence continued:

"He was violent and frivolous; therefore profoundly human. I mean, similar to everybody. He desired, with singular force, all that most men esteem and desire. He had illusions, which he gave to the people. This was his power and his weakness; it was his beauty. He believed in glory. He had of life and of the world the same opinion as any one of his grenadiers. He retained always the infantile gravity which finds pleasure in playing with swords and drums, and the sort of innocence which makes good military men. He esteemed force sincerely. He was a man among men, the flesh of human flesh. He had not a thought that was not in action, and all his actions were grand yet common. It is this vulgar grandeur which makes heroes. And Napoleon is the perfect hero. His brain never surpassed his hand—that hand, small and beautiful, which grasped the world. He never had, for a moment, the least care for what he could not reach."

"Then," said Garain, "according to you, he was not an intellectual genius. I am of your opinion."

"Surely," continued Paul Vence, "he had enough genius to be brilliant in the civil and military arena of the world. But he had not speculative genius. That genius is another pair of sleeves, as Buffon says. We have a collection of his writings and speeches. His style has movement and imagination. And in this mass of thoughts one can not find a philosophic curiosity, not one expression of anxiety about the unknowable, not an expression of fear of the mystery which surrounds destiny. At *Saint Helena*, when he talks of God and of the soul, he seems to be a little fourteen-year-old school-boy. Thrown upon the world, his mind found itself fit for the world, and embraced it all. Nothing of that mind was lost in the infinite. Himself a poet, he knew only the poetry of action. He limited to the earth his powerful dream of life. In his terrible and touching naivete he believed that a man could be great, and neither time nor misfortune made him lose that idea. His youth, or rather his sublime adolescence, lasted as long as he lived, because life never brought him a

real maturity. Such is the abnormal state of men of action. They live entirely in the present, and their genius concentrates on one point. The hours of their existence are not connected by a chain of grave and disinterested meditations. They succeed themselves in a series of acts. They lack interior life. This defect is particularly visible in Napoleon, who never lived within himself. From this is derived the frivolity of temperament which made him support easily the enormous load of his evils and of his faults. His mind was born anew every day. He had, more than any other person, a capacity for diversion. The first day that he saw the sun rise on his funereal rock at Saint Helena, he jumped from his bed, whistling a romantic air. It was the peace of a mind superior to fortune; it was the frivolity of a mind prompt in resurrection. He lived from the outside."

Garain, who did not like Paul Vence's ingenious turn of wit and language, tried to hasten the conclusion:

"In a word," he said, "there was something of the monster in the man."

"There are no monsters," replied Paul Vence; "and men who pass for monsters inspire horror. Napoleon was loved by an entire people. He had the power to win the love of men. The joy of his soldiers was to die for him."

Countess Martin would have wished Dechartre to give his opinion. But he excused himself with a sort of fright.

"Do you know," said Schmoll again, "the parable of the three rings, sublime inspiration of a Portuguese Jew."

Garain, while complimenting Paul Vence on his brilliant paradox, regretted that wit should be exercised at the expense of morality and justice.

"One great principle," he said, "is that men should be judged by their acts."

"And women?" asked Princess Seniavine, brusquely; "do you judge them by their acts? And how do you know what they do?"

The sound of voices was mingled with the clear tintinabulation of silverware. A warm air bathed the room. The roses shed their leaves on the cloth. More ardent thoughts mounted to the brain.

General Lariviere fell into dreams.

"When public clamor has split my ears," he said to his neighbor, "I shall go to live at Tours. I shall cultivate flowers."

He flattered himself on being a good gardener; his name had been given to a rose. This pleased him highly.

Schmoll asked again if they knew the parable of the three rings.

The Princess rallied the Deputy.

"Then you do not know, Monsieur Garain, that one does the same things for very different reasons?"

Montessuy said she was right.

"It is very true, as you say, Madame, that actions prove nothing. This thought is striking in an episode in the life of Don Juan, which was known neither to Moliere nor to Mozart, but which is revealed in an English legend, a knowledge of which I owe to my friend James Russell Lowell of London. One learns from it that the great seducer lost his time with three women. One was a bourgeoisie: she was in love with her husband; the other was a nun: she would not consent to violate her vows; the third, who had for a long time led a life of debauchery, had become ugly, and was a servant in a den. After what she had done, after what she had seen, love signified nothing to her. These three women behaved alike for very different reasons. An action proves nothing. It is the mass of actions, their weight, their sum total, which makes the value of the human being."

"Some of our actions," said Madame Martin, "have our look, our face: they are our daughters. Others do not resemble us at all."

She rose and took the General's arm.

On the way to the drawing-room the Princess said:

"Therese is right. Some actions do not express our real selves at all. They are like the things we do in nightmares."

The nymphs of the tapestries smiled vainly in their faded beauty at the guests, who did not see them.

Madame Martin served the coffee with her young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom. She complimented Paul Vence on what he had said at the table.

"You talked of Napoleon with a freedom of mind that is rare in the conversations I hear. I have noticed that children, when they are handsome, look, when they pout, like Napoleon at Waterloo. You have made me feel the profound reasons for this similarity."

Then, turning toward Dechartre:

"Do you like Napoleon?"

"Madame, I do not like the Revolution. And Napoleon is the Revolution in boots."

"Monsieur Dechartre, why did you not say this at dinner? But I see you prefer to be witty only in tete-a-tetes."

Count Martin-Belleme escorted the men to the smoking-room. Paul Vence alone remained with the women. Princess Seniavine asked him if he had finished his novel, and what was the subject of it. It was a study in which he tried to reach the truth through a series of plausible conditions.

"Thus," he said, "the novel acquires a moral force which history, in its heavy frivolity, never had."

She inquired whether the book was written for women. He said it was not.

"You are wrong, Monsieur Vence, not to write for women. A superior man can do nothing else for them."

He wished to know what gave her that idea.

"Because I see that all the intelligent women love fools."

"Who bore them?"

"Certainly! But superior men would weary them more. They would have more resources to employ in boring them. But tell me the subject of your novel."

"Do you insist?"

"Oh, I insist upon nothing."

"Well, I will tell you. It is a study of popular manners; the history of a young workman, sober and chaste, as handsome as a girl, with the mind of a virgin, a sensitive soul. He is a carver, and works well. At night, near his mother, whom he loves, he studies, he reads books. In his mind, simple and receptive, ideas lodge themselves like bullets in a wall. He has no desires. He has neither the passions nor the vices that attach us to life. He is solitary and pure. Endowed with strong virtues, he becomes conceited. He lives among miserable people. He sees suffering. He has devotion without humanity. He has that sort of cold charity which is called altruism. He is not human because he is not sensual."

"Oh! One must be sensual to be human?"

"Certainly, Madame. True pity, like tenderness, comes from the heart. He is not intelligent enough to doubt. He believes what he has read. And he has read that to establish universal happiness society must be destroyed. Thirst for martyrdom devours him. One morning, having kissed his mother, he goes out; he watches for the socialist deputy of his district, sees him, throws himself on him, and buries a poniard in his breast. Long live anarchy! He is arrested, measured, photographed, questioned, judged, condemned to death, and guillotined. That is my novel."

"It is not very amusing," said the Princess; "but that is not your fault. Your anarchists are as timid and moderate as other Frenchmen. The Russians have more audacity and more imagination."

Countess Martin asked Paul Vence whether he knew a silent, timid-looking man among the guests. Her husband had invited him. She knew nothing of him, not even his name. Paul Vence could only say that he was a senator. He had seen him one day by chance in the Luxembourg, in the gallery that served as a library.

"I went there to look at the cupola, where Delacroix has painted, in a wood of bluish myrtles, heroes and sages of antiquity. That gentleman was there, with the same wretched and pitiful air. His coat was damp and he was warming himself. He was talking with old colleagues and saying, while rubbing his hands: 'The proof that the Republic is the best of governments is that in 1871 it could kill in a week sixty thousand insurgents without becoming unpopular. After such a repression any other regime would have been impossible.'"

"He is a very wicked man," said Madame Martin. "And to think that I was pitying him!"

Madame Garain, her chin softly dropped on her chest, slept in the peace of her housewifely mind, and dreamed of her vegetable garden on the banks of the Loire, where singing-societies came to serenade her.

Joseph Schmoll and General Lariviere came out of the smoking-room. The General took a seat between Princess Seniavine and Madame Martin.

"I met this morning, in the park, Baronne Warburg, mounted on a magnificent horse. She said, 'General, how do you manage to have such fine horses?' I replied: Madame, to have fine horses, you must be either very wealthy or very clever."

He was so well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice.

Paul Vence came near Countess Martin:

"I know that senator's name: it is Lye. He is the vice-president of a political society, and author of a book entitled, *The Crime of December Second.*"

The General continued:

"The weather was horrible. I went into a hut and found Le Menil there. I was in a bad humor. He was making fun of me, I saw, because I sought shelter. He imagines that because I am a general I must like wind and snow. He said that he liked bad weather, and that he was to go foxhunting with friends next week."

There was a pause; the General continued:

"I wish him much joy, but I don't envy him. Foxhunting is not agreeable."

"But it is useful," said Montessuy.

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"Foxes are dangerous for chicken-coops in the spring when the fowls have to feed their families."

"Foxes are sly poachers, who do less harm to farmers than to hunters. I know something of this."

Therese was not listening to the Princess, who was talking to her. She was thinking:

"He did not tell me that he was going away!"

"Of what are you thinking, dear?" inquired the Princess.

"Of nothing interesting," Therese replied.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF A DREAM

In the little shadowy room, where sound was deadened by curtains, portieres, cushions, bearskins, and carpets from the Orient, the firelight shone on glittering swords hanging among the faded favors of the cotillions of three winters. The rosewood chiffonier was surmounted by a silver cup, a prize from some sporting club. On a porcelain plaque, in the centre of the table, stood a crystal vase which held branches of

white lilacs; and lights palpitated in the warm shadows. Therese and Robert, their eyes accustomed to obscurity, moved easily among these familiar objects. He lighted a cigarette while she arranged her hair, standing before the mirror, in a corner so dim she could hardly see herself. She took pins from the little Bohemian glass cup standing on the table, where she had kept it for three years. He looked at her, passing her light fingers quickly through the gold ripples of her hair, while her face, hardened and bronzed by the shadow, took on a mysterious expression. She did not speak.

He said to her:

"You are not cross now, my dear?"

And, as he insisted upon having an answer, she said:

"What do you wish me to say, my friend? I can only repeat what I said at first. I think it strange that I have to learn of your projects from General Lariviere."

He knew very well that she had not forgiven him; that she had remained cold and reserved toward him. But he affected to think that she only pouted.

"My dear, I have explained it to you. I have told you that when I met Lariviere I had just received a letter from Caumont, recalling my promise to hunt the fox in his woods, and I replied by return post. I meant to tell you about it to-day. I am sorry that General Lariviere told you first, but there was no significance in that."

Her arms were lifted like the handles of a vase. She turned toward him a glance from her tranquil eyes, which he did not understand.

"Then you are going?"

"Next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I shall be away only ten days at most."

She put on her sealskin toque, ornamented with a branch of holly.

"Is it something that you can not postpone?"

"Oh, yes. Fox-skins would not be worth anything in a month. Moreover, Caumont has invited good friends of mine, who would regret my absence."

Fixing her toque on her head with a long pin, she frowned.

"Is fox-hunting interesting?"

"Oh, yes, very. The fox has stratagems that one must fathom. The intelligence of that animal is really marvellous. I have observed at night a fox hunting a rabbit. He had organized a real hunt. I assure you it is not easy to dislodge a fox. Caumont has an excellent cellar. I do not care for it, but it is generally appreciated. I will bring you half a dozen skins."

"What do you wish me to do with them?"

"Oh, you can make rugs of them."

"And you will be hunting eight days?"

"Not all the time. I shall visit my aunt, who expects me. Last year at this time there was a delightful reunion at her house. She had with her her two daughters and her three nieces with their husbands. All five women are pretty, gay, charming, and irreproachable. I shall probably find them at the beginning of next month, assembled for my aunt's birthday, and I shall remain there two days."

"My friend, stay as long as it may please you. I should be inconsolable if you shortened on my account a sojourn which is so agreeable."

"But you, Therese?"

"I, my friend? I can take care of myself."

The fire was languishing. The shadows were deepening between them. She said, in a dreamy tone:

"It is true, however, that it is never prudent to leave a woman alone."

He went near her, trying to see her eyes in the darkness. He took her hand.

"You love me?" he said.

"Oh, I assure you that I do not love another but—"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I am thinking—I am thinking that we are separated all through the summer; that in winter you live with your parents and your friends half the time; and that, if we are to see so little of each other, it is better not to see each other at all."

He lighted the candelabra. His frank, hard face was illuminated. He looked at her with a confidence that came less from the conceit common to all lovers than from his natural lack of dignity. He believed in her

through force of education and simplicity of intelligence.

"Therese, I love you, and you love me, I know. Why do you torment me? Sometimes you are painfully harsh."

She shook her little head brusquely.

"What will you have? I am harsh and obstinate. It is in the blood. I take it from my father. You know Joinville; you have seen the castle, the ceilings, the tapestries, the gardens, the park, the hunting-grounds, you have said that none better were in France; but you have not seen my father's workshop—a white wooden table and a mahogany bureau. Everything about me has its origin there. On that table my father made figures for forty years; at first in a little room, then in the apartment where I was born. We were not very wealthy then. I am a parvenu's daughter, or a conqueror's daughter, it's all the same. We are people of material interests. My father wanted to earn money, to possess what he could buy—that is, everything. I wish to earn and keep—what? I do not know—the happiness that I have—or that I have not. I have my own way of being exacting. I long for dreams and illusions. Oh, I know very well that all this is not worth the trouble that a woman takes in giving herself to a man; but it is a trouble that is worth something, because my trouble is myself, my life. I like to enjoy what I like, or think what I like. I do not wish to lose. I am like papa: I demand what is due to me. And then—"

She lowered her voice:

"And then, I have—impulses! Now, my dear, I bore you. What will you have? You shouldn't have loved me."

This language, to which she had accustomed him, often spoiled his pleasure. But it did not alarm him. He was sensitive to all that she did, but not at all to what she said; and he attached no importance to a woman's words. Talking little himself, he could not imagine that often words are the same as actions.

Although he loved her, or, rather, because he loved her with strength and confidence, he thought it his duty to resist her whims, which he judged absurd. Whenever he played the master, he succeeded with her; and, naively, he always ended by playing it.

"You know very well, Therese, that I wish to do nothing except to be agreeable to you. Don't be capricious with me."

"And why should I not be capricious? If I gave myself to you, it was not because I was logical, nor because I thought I must. It was because I was capricious."

He looked at her, astonished and saddened.

"The word is not pleasant to you, my friend? Well let us say that it was love. Truly it was, with all my heart, and because I felt that you loved me. But love must be a pleasure, and if I do not find in it the satisfaction of what you call my capriciousness, but which is really my desire, my life, my love, I do not want it; I prefer to live alone. You are astonishing! My caprices! Is there anything else in life? Your foxhunt, isn't that capricious?"

He replied, very sincerely:

"If I had not promised, I swear to you, Therese, that I would sacrifice that small pleasure with great joy."

She felt that he spoke the truth. She knew how exact he was in filling the most trifling engagements, yet realized that if she insisted he would not go. But it was too late: she did not wish to win. She would seek hereafter only the violent pleasure of losing. She pretended to take his reason seriously, and said:

"Ah, you have promised!"

And she affected to yield.

Surprised at first, he congratulated himself at last on having made her listen to reason. He was grateful to her for not having been stubborn. He put his arm around her waist and kissed her on the neck and eyelids as a reward. He said:

"We may meet three or four times before I go, and more, if you wish. I will wait for you as often as you wish to come. Will you meet me here to-morrow?"

She gave herself the satisfaction of saying that she could not come the next day nor any other day.

Softly she mentioned the things that prevented her.

The obstacles seemed light; calls, a gown to be tried on, a charity fair, exhibitions. As she dilated upon the difficulties they seemed to increase. The calls could not be postponed; there were three fairs; the exhibitions would soon close. In fine, it was impossible for her to see him again before his departure.

As he was well accustomed to making excuses of that sort, he failed to observe that it was not natural for Therese to offer them. Embarrassed by this tissue of social obligations, he did not persist, but remained silent and unhappy.

With her left arm she raised the portiere, placed her right hand on the key of the door; and, standing against the rich background of the sapphire and ruby-colored folds of the Oriental draperies, she turned her head toward the friend she was leaving, and said, a little mockingly, yet with a touch of tragic emotion:

"Good-by, Robert. Enjoy yourself. My calls, my errands, your little visits are nothing. Life is made up of just such trifles. Good-by!"

She went out. He would have liked to accompany her, but he made it a point not to show himself with her in the street, unless she absolutely forced him to do so.

In the street, Therese felt suddenly that she was alone in the world, without joy and without pain. She returned to her house on foot, as was her habit. It was night; the air was frozen, clear, and tranquil. But the avenues through which she walked, in shadows studded with lights, enveloped her with that mild atmosphere of the queen of cities, so agreeable to its inhabitants, which makes itself felt even in the cold of winter. She walked between the lines of huts and old houses, remains of the field-days of Auteuil, which tall houses interrupted here and there. These small shops, these monotonous windows, were nothing to her. Yet she felt that she was under the mysterious spell of the friendship of inanimate things; and it seemed to her that the stones, the doors of houses, the lights behind the windowpanes, looked kindly upon her. She was alone, and she wished to be alone. The steps she was taking between the two houses wherein her habits were almost equal, the steps she had taken so often, to-day seemed to her irrevocable. Why? What had that day brought? Not exactly a quarrel. And yet the words spoken that day had left a subtle, strange, persistent sting, which would never leave her. What had happened? Nothing. And that nothing had effaced everything. She had a sort of obscure certainty that she would never return to that room which had so recently enclosed the most secret and dearest phases of her life. She had loved Robert with the seriousness of a necessary joy. Made to be loved, and very reasonable, she had not lost in the abandonment of herself that instinct of reflection, that necessity for security, which was so strong in her. She had not chosen: one seldom chooses. She had not allowed herself to be taken at random and by surprise. She had done what she had wished to do, as much as one ever does what one wishes to do in such cases. She had nothing to regret. He had been to her what it was his duty to be. She felt, in spite of everything, that all was at an end. She thought, with dry sadness, that three years of her life had been given to an honest man who had loved her and whom she had loved. "For I loved him. I must have loved him in order to give myself to him." But she could not feel again the sentiments of early days, the movements of her mind when she had yielded. She recalled small and insignificant circumstances: the flowers on the wall-paper and the pictures in the room. She recalled the words, a little ridiculous and almost touching, that he had said to her. But it seemed to her that the adventure had occurred to another woman,

to a stranger whom she did not like and whom she hardly understood. And what had happened only a moment ago seemed far distant now. The room, the lilacs in the crystal vase, the little cup of Bohemian glass where she found her pins—she saw all these things as if through a window that one passes in the street. She was without bitterness, and even without sadness. She had nothing to forgive, alas! This absence for a week was not a betrayal, it was not a fault against her; it was nothing, yet it was everything. It was the end. She knew it. She wished to cease. It was the consent of all the forces of her being. She said to herself: "I have no reason to love him less. Do I love him no more? Did I ever love him?" She did not know and she did not care to know. Three years, during which there had been months when they had seen each other every day—was all this nothing? Life is not a great thing. And what one puts in it, how little that is!

In fine, she had nothing of which to complain. But it was better to end it all. All these reflections brought her back to that point. It was not a resolution; resolutions may be changed. It was graver: it was a state of the body and of the mind.

When she arrived at the square, in the centre of which is a fountain, and on one side of which stands a church of rustic style, showing its bell in an open belfry, she recalled the little bouquet of violets that he had given to her one night on the bridge near Notre Dame. They had loved each other that day—perhaps more than usual. Her heart softened at that reminiscence. But the little bouquet remained alone, a poor little flower skeleton, in her memory.

While she was thinking, passers-by, deceived by the simplicity of her dress, followed her. One of them made propositions to her: a dinner and the theatre. It amused her. She was not at all disturbed; this was not a crisis. She thought: "How do other women manage such things? And I, who promised myself not to spoil my life. What is life worth?"

Opposite the Greek lantern of the Musee des Religions she found the soil disturbed by workmen. There were paving-stones crossed by a bridge made of a narrow flexible plank. She had stepped on it, when she saw at the other end, in front of her, a man who was waiting for her. He recognized her and bowed. It was Dechartre. She saw that he was happy to meet her; she thanked him with a smile. He asked her permission to walk a few steps with her, and they entered into the large and airy space. In this place the tall houses, set somewhat back, efface themselves, and reveal a glimpse of the sky.

He told her that he had recognized her from a distance by the rhythm of her figure and her movements, which were hers exclusively.

"Graceful movements," he added, "are like music for the eyes."

She replied that she liked to walk; it was her pleasure, and the cause of

her good health.

He, too, liked to walk in populous towns and beautiful fields. The mystery of highways tempted him. He liked to travel. Although voyages had become common and easy, they retained for him their powerful charm. He had seen golden days and crystalline nights, Greece, Egypt, and the Bosphorus; but it was to Italy that he returned always, as to the mother country of his mind.

"I shall go there next week," he said. "I long to see again Ravenna asleep among the black pines of its sterile shore. Have you seen Ravenna, Madame? It is an enchanted tomb where sparkling phantoms appear. The magic of death lies there. The mosaic works of Saint Vitale, with their barbarous angels and their aureolated empresses, make one feel the monstrous delights of the Orient. Despoiled to-day of its silver lamels, the grave of Galla Placidia is frightful under its crypt, luminous yet gloomy. When one looks through an opening in the sarcophagus, it seems as if one saw the daughter of Theodosius, seated on her golden chair, erect in her gown studded with stones and embroidered with scenes from the Old Testament; her beautiful, cruel face preserved hard and black with aromatic plants, and her ebony hands immovable on her knees. For thirteen centuries she retained this funereal majesty, until one day a child passed a candle through the opening of the grave and burned the body."

Madame Martin-Belleme asked what that dead woman, so obstinate in her conceit, had done during her life.

"Twice a slave," said Dechartre, "she became twice an empress."

"She must have been beautiful," said Madame Martin. "You have made me see her too vividly in her tomb. She frightens me. Shall you go to Venice, Monsieur Dechartre? Or are you tired of gondolas, of canals bordered by palaces, and of the pigeons of Saint Mark? I confess that I still like Venice, after being there three times."

He said she was right. He, too, liked Venice.

Whenever he went there, from a sculptor he became a painter, and made studies. He would like to paint its atmosphere.

"Elsewhere," he said, "even in Florence, the sky is too high. At Venice it is everywhere; it caresses the earth and the water. It envelops lovingly the leaden domes and the marble facades, and throws into the iridescent atmosphere its pearls and its crystals. The beauty of Venice is in its sky and its women. What pretty creatures the Venetian women are! Their forms are so slender and supple under their black shawls. If nothing remained of these women except a bone, one would find in that bone the charm of their exquisite structure. Sundays, at church, they form laughing groups, agitated, with hips a little pointed, elegant

necks, flowery smiles, and inflaming glances. And all bend, with the suppleness of young animals, at the passage of a priest whose head resembles that of Vitellius, and who carries the chalice, preceded by two choir-boys."

He walked with unequal step, following the rhythm of his ideas, sometimes quick, sometimes slow. She walked more regularly, and almost outstripped him. He looked at her sidewise, and liked her firm and supple carriage. He observed the little shake which at moments her obstinate head gave to the holly on her toque.

Without expecting it, he felt a charm in that meeting, almost intimate, with a young woman almost unknown.

They had reached the place where the large avenue unfolds its four rows of trees. They were following the stone parapet surmounted by a hedge of boxwood, which entirely hides the ugliness of the buildings on the quay. One felt the presence of the river by the milky atmosphere which in misty days seems to rest on the water. The sky was clear. The lights of the city were mingled with the stars. At the south shone the three golden nails of the Orion belt. Dechartre continued:

"Last year, at Venice, every morning as I went out of my house, I saw at her door, raised by three steps above the canal, a charming girl, with small head, neck round and strong, and graceful hips. She was there, in the sun and surrounded by vermin, as pure as an amphora, fragrant as a flower. She smiled. What a mouth! The richest jewel in the most beautiful light. I realized in time that this smile was addressed to a butcher standing behind me with his basket on his head."

At the corner of the short street which goes to the quay, between two lines of small gardens, Madame Martin walked more slowly.

"It is true that at Venice," she said, "all women are pretty."

"They are almost all pretty, Madame. I speak of the common girls—the cigar-girls, the girls among the glass-workers. The others are commonplace enough."

"By others you mean society women; and you don't like these?"

"Society women? Oh, some of them are charming. As for loving them, that's a different affair."

"Do you think so?"

She extended her hand to him, and suddenly turned the corner.

CHAPTER V

A DINNER 'EN FAMILLE'

She dined that night alone with her husband. The narrow table had not the basket with golden eagles and winged Victories. The candelabra did not light Oudry's paintings. While he talked of the events of the day, she fell into a sad reverie. It seemed to her that she floated in a mist. It was a peaceful and almost sweet suffering. She saw vaguely through the clouds the little room of the Rue Spontini transported by angels to one of the summits of the Himalaya Mountains, and Robert Le Menil—in the quaking of a sort of world's end—had disappeared while putting on his gloves. She felt her pulse to see whether she were feverish. A rattle of silverware on the table awoke her. She heard her husband saying:

"My dear friend Gavaut delivered to-day, in the Chamber, an excellent speech on the question of the reserve funds. It's extraordinary how his ideas have become healthy and just. Oh, he has improved a great deal."

She could not refrain from smiling.

"But Gavaut, my friend, is a poor devil who never thought of anything except escaping from the crowd of those who are dying of hunger. Gavaut never had any ideas except at his elbows. Does anybody take him seriously in the political world? You may be sure that he never gave an illusion to any woman, not even his wife. And yet to produce that sort of illusion a man does not need much." She added, brusquely:

"You know Miss Bell has invited me to spend a month with her at Fiesole. I have accepted; I am going."

Less astonished than discontented, he asked her with whom she was going.

At once she answered:

"With Madame Marmet."

There was no objection to make. Madame Marmet was a proper companion, and it was appropriate for her to visit Italy, where her husband had made some excavations. He asked only:

"Have you invited her? When are you going?"

"Next week."

He had the wisdom not to make any objection, judging that opposition would only make her capriciousness firmer, and fearing to give impetus to

that foolish idea. He said:

"Surely, to travel is an agreeable pastime. I thought that we might in the spring visit the Caucasus and Turkestan. There is an interesting country. General Annenkoff will place at our disposal carriages, trains, and everything else on his railway. He is a friend of mine; he is quite charmed with you. He will provide us with an escort of Cossacks."

He persisted in trying to flatter her vanity, unable to realize that her mind was not worldly. She replied, negligently, that it might be a pleasant trip. Then he praised the mountains, the ancient cities, the bazaars, the costumes, the armor.

He added:

"We shall take some friends with us—Princess Seniavine, General Lariviere, perhaps Vence or Le Menil."

She replied, with a little dry laugh, that they had time to select their guests.

He became attentive to her wants.

"You are not eating. You will injure your health."

Without yet believing in this prompt departure, he felt some anxiety about it. Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone. He felt that he was himself only when his wife was there. And then, he had decided to give two or three political dinners during the session. He saw his party growing. This was the moment to assert himself, to make a dazzling show. He said, mysteriously:

"Something might happen requiring the aid of all our friends. You have not followed the march of events, Therese?"

"No, my dear."

"I am sorry. You have judgment, liberality of mind. If you had followed the march of events you would have been struck by the current that is leading the country back to moderate opinions. The country is tired of exaggerations. It rejects the men compromised by radical politics and religious persecution. Some day or other it will be necessary to make over a Casimir-Perier ministry with other men, and that day—"

He stopped: really she listened too inattentively.

She was thinking, sad and disenchanted. It seemed to her that the pretty woman, who, among the warm shadows of a closed room, placed her bare feet in the fur of the brown bear rug, and to whom her lover gave kisses while she twisted her hair in front of a glass, was not herself, was not even a

woman that she knew well, or that she desired to know, but a person whose affairs were of no interest to her. A pin badly set in her hair, one of the pins from the Bohemian glass cup, fell on her neck. She shivered.

"Yet we really must give three or four dinners to our good political friends," said M. Martin-Belleme. "We shall invite some of the ancient radicals to meet the people of our circle. It will be well to find some pretty women. We might invite Madame Berard de la Malle; there has been no gossip about her for two years. What do you think of it?"

"But, my dear, since I am to go next week—"

This filled him with consternation.

They went, both silent and moody, into the drawing-room, where Paul Vence was waiting. He often came in the evening.

She extended her hand to him.

"I am very glad to see you. I am going out of town. Paris is cold and bleak. This weather tires and saddens me. I am going to Florence, for six weeks, to visit Miss Bell."

M. Martin-Belleme then lifted his eyes to heaven.

Vence asked whether she had been in Italy often.

"Three times; but I saw nothing. This time I wish to see, to throw myself into things. From Florence I shall take walks into Tuscany, into Umbria. And, finally, I shall go to Venice."

"You will do well. Venice suggests the peace of the Sabbath-day in the grand week of creative and divine Italy."

"Your friend Dechartre talked very prettily to me of Venice, of the atmosphere of Venice, which sows pearls."

"Yes, at Venice the sky is a colorist. Florence inspires the mind. An old author has said: 'The sky of Florence is light and subtle, and feeds the beautiful ideas of men.' I have lived delicious days in Tuscany. I wish I could live them again."

"Come and see me there."

He sighed.

The newspaper, books, and his daily work prevented him.

M. Martin-Belleme said everyone should bow before such reasons, and that one was too happy to read the articles and the fine books written by M.

Paul Vence to have any wish to take him from his work.

"Oh, my books! One never says in a book what one wishes to say. It is impossible to express one's self. I know how to talk with my pen as well as any other person; but, after all, to talk or to write, what futile occupations! How wretchedly inadequate are the little signs which form syllables, words, and phrases. What becomes of the idea, the beautiful idea, which these miserable hieroglyphics hide? What does the reader make of my writing? A series of false sense, of counter sense, and of nonsense. To read, to hear, is to translate. There are beautiful translations, perhaps. There are no faithful translations. Why should I care for the admiration which they give to my books, since it is what they themselves see in them that they admire? Every reader substitutes his visions in the place of ours. We furnish him with the means to quicken his imagination. It is a horrible thing to be a cause of such exercises. It is an infamous profession."

"You are jesting," said M. Martin-Belleme.

"I do not think so," said Therese. "He recognizes that one mind is impenetrable to another mind, and he suffers from this. He feels that he is alone when he is thinking, alone when he is writing. Whatever one may do, one is always alone in the world. That is what he wishes to say. He is right. You may always explain: you never are understood."

"There are signs—" said Paul Vence.

"Don't you think, Monsieur Vence, that signs also are a form of hieroglyphics? Give me news of Monsieur Choulette. I do not see him any more."

Vence replied that Choulette was very busy in forming the Third Order of Saint Francis.

"The idea, Madame, came to him in a marvellous fashion one day when he had gone to call on his Maria in the street where she lives, behind the public hospital—a street always damp, the houses on which are tottering. You must know that he considers Maria the saint and martyr who is responsible for the sins of the people.

"He pulled the bell-rope, made greasy by two centuries of visitors. Either because the martyr was at the wine-shop, where she is familiarly known, or because she was busy in her room, she did not open the door. Choulette rang for a long time, and so violently that the bellrope remained in his hand. Skilful at understanding symbols and the hidden meaning of things, he understood at once that this rope had not been detached without the permission of spiritual powers. He made of it a belt, and realized that he had been chosen to lead back into its primitive purity the Third Order of Saint Francis. He renounced the beauty of women, the delights of poetry, the brightness of glory, and

studied the life and the doctrine of Saint Francis. However, he has sold to his editor a book entitled 'Les Blandices', which contains, he says, the description of all sorts of loves. He flatters himself that in it he has shown himself a criminal with some elegance. But far from harming his mystic undertakings, this book favors them in this sense, that, corrected by his later work, he will become honest and exemplary; and the gold that he has received in payment, which would not have been paid to him for a more chaste volume, will serve for a pilgrimage to Assisi."

Madame Martin asked how much of this story was really true. Vence replied that she must not try to learn.

He confessed that he was the idealist historian of the poet, and that the adventures which he related of him were not to be taken in the literal and Judaic sense.

He affirmed that at least Choulette was publishing Les Blandices, and desired to visit the cell and the grave of St. Francis.

"Then," exclaimed Madame Martin, "I will take him to Italy with me. Find him, Monsieur Vence, and bring him to me. I am going next week."

M. Martin then excused himself, not being able to remain longer. He had to finish a report which was to be laid before the Chamber the next day.

Madame Martin said that nobody interested her so much as Choulette. Paul Vence said that he was a singular specimen of humanity.

"He is not very different from the saints of whose extraordinary lives we read. He is as sincere as they. He has an exquisite delicacy of sentiment and a terrible violence of mind. If he shocks one by many of his acts, the reason is that he is weaker, less supported, or perhaps less closely observed. And then there are unworthy saints, just as there are bad angels: Choulette is a worldly saint, that is all. But his poems are true poems, and much finer than those written by the bishops of the seventeenth century."

She interrupted him:

"While I think of it, I wish to congratulate you on your friend Dechartre. He has a charming mind."

She added:

"Perhaps he is a little too timid."

Vence reminded her that he had told her she would find Dechartre interesting.

"I know him by heart; he has been my friend since our childhood."

"You knew his parents?"

"Yes. He is the only son of Philippe Dechartre."

"The architect?"

"The architect who, under Napoleon III, restored so many castles and churches in Touraine and the Orleanais. He had taste and knowledge. Solitary and quiet in his life, he had the imprudence to attack Viollet-le-Duc, then all-powerful. He reproached him with trying to reestablish buildings in their primitive plan, as they had been, or as they might have been, at the beginning. Philippe Dechartre, on the contrary, wished that everything which the lapse of centuries had added to a church, an abbey, or a castle should be respected. To abolish anachronisms and restore a building to its primitive unity, seemed to him to be a scientific barbarity as culpable as that of ignorance. He said: 'It is a crime to efface the successive imprints made in stone by the hands of our ancestors. New stones cut in old style are false witnesses.' He wished to limit the task of the archaeological architect to that of supporting and consolidating walls. He was right. Everybody said that he was wrong. He achieved his ruin by dying young, while his rival triumphed. He bequeathed an honest fortune to his widow and his son. Jacques Dechartre was brought up by his mother, who adored him. I do not think that maternal tenderness ever was more impetuous. Jacques is a charming fellow; but he is a spoiled child."

"Yet he appears so indifferent, so easy to understand, so distant from everything."

"Do not rely on this. He has a tormented and tormenting imagination."

"Does he like women?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it isn't with any idea of match-making."

"Yes, he likes them. I told you that he was an egoist. Only selfish men really love women. After the death of his mother, he had a long liaison with a well-known actress, Jeanne Tancrede."

Madame Martin remembered Jeanne Tancrede; not very pretty, but graceful with a certain slowness of action in playing romantic roles.

"They lived almost together in a little house at Auteuil," Paul Vence continued. "I often called on them. I found him lost in his dreams, forgetting to model a figure drying under its cloths, alone with himself, pursuing his idea, absolutely incapable of listening to anybody; she,

studying her roles, her complexion burned by rouge, her eyes tender, pretty because of her intelligence and her activity. She complained to me that he was inattentive, cross, and unreasonable. She loved him and deceived him only to obtain roles. And when she deceived him, it was done on the spur of the moment. Afterward she never thought of it. A typical woman! But she was imprudent; she smiled upon Joseph Springer in the hope that he would make her a member of the Comedie Francaise. Dechartre left her. Now she finds it more practical to live with her managers, and Jacques finds it more agreeable to travel."

"Does he regret her?"

"How can one know the things that agitate a mind anxious and mobile, selfish and passionate, desirous to surrender itself, prompt in disengaging itself, liking itself most of all among the beautiful things that it finds in the world?"

Brusquely she changed the subject.

"And your novel, Monsieur Vence?"

"I have reached the last chapter, Madame. My little workingman has been guillotined. He died with that indifference of virgins without desire, who never have felt on their lips the warm taste of life. The journals and the public approve the act of justice which has just been accomplished. But in another garret, another workingman, sober, sad, and a chemist, swears to himself that he will commit an expiatory murder."

He rose and said good-night.

She called him back.

"Monsieur Vence, you know that I was serious. Bring Choulette to me."

When she went up to her room, her husband was waiting for her, in his red-brown plush robe, with a sort of doge's cap framing his pale and hollow face. He had an air of gravity. Behind him, by the open door of his workroom, appeared under the lamp a mass of documents bound in blue, a collection of the annual budgets. Before she could reach her room he motioned that he wished to speak to her.

"My dear, I can not understand you. You are very inconsequential. It does you a great deal of harm. You intend to leave your home without any reason, without even a pretext. And you wish to run through Europe with whom? With a Bohemian, a drunkard—that man Choulette."

She replied that she should travel with Madame Marmet, in which there could be nothing objectionable.

"But you announce your going to everybody, yet you do not even know whether Madame Marmet can accompany you."

"Oh, Madame Marmet will soon pack her boxes. Nothing keeps her in Paris except her dog. She will leave it to you; you may take care of it."

"Does your father know of your project?"

It was his last resource to invoke the authority of Montessuy. He knew that his wife feared to displease her father. He insisted:

"Your father is full of sense and tact. I have been happy to find him agreeing with me several times in the advices which I have permitted myself to give you. He thinks as I do, that Madame Meillan's house is not a fit place for you to visit. The company that meets there is mixed, and the mistress of the house favors intrigue. You are wrong, I must say, not to take account of what people think. I am mistaken if your father does not think it singular that you should go away with so much frivolity, and the absence will be the more remarked, my dear, since circumstances have made me eminent in the course of this legislature. My merit has nothing to do with the case, surely. But if you had consented to listen to me at dinner I should have demonstrated to you that the group of politicians to which I belong has almost reached power. In such a moment you should not renounce your duties as mistress of the house. You must understand this yourself."

She replied "You annoy me." And, turning her back to him, she shut the door of her room between them. That night in her bed she opened a book, as she always did before going to sleep. It was a novel. She was turning the leaves with indifference, when her eyes fell on these lines:

"Love is like devotion: it comes late. A woman is hardly in love or devout at twenty, unless she has a special disposition to be either, a sort of native sanctity. Women who are predestined to love, themselves struggle a long time against that grace of love which is more terrible than the thunderbolt that fell on the road to Damascus. A woman oftenest yields to the passion of love only when age or solitude does not frighten her. Passion is an arid and burning desert. Passion is profane asceticism, as harsh as religious asceticism. Great woman lovers are as rare as great penitent women. Those who know life well know that women do not easily bind themselves in the chains of real love. They know that nothing is less common than sacrifice among them. And consider how much a worldly woman must sacrifice when she is in love—liberty, quietness, the charming play of a free mind, coquetry, amusement, pleasure—she loses everything.

"Coquetry is permissible. One may conciliate that with all the exigencies of fashionable life. Not so love. Love is the least mundane of passions, the most anti-social, the most savage, the most barbarous. So the world judges it more severely than mere gallantry or looseness of

manners. In one sense the world is right. A woman in love betrays her nature and fails in her function, which is to be admired by all men, like a work of art. A woman is a work of art, the most marvellous that man's industry ever has produced. A woman is a wonderful artifice, due to the concurrence of all the arts mechanical and of all the arts liberal. She is the work of everybody, she belongs to the world."

Therese closed the book and thought that these ideas were only the dreams of novelists who did not know life. She knew very well that there was in reality neither a Carmel of passion nor a chain of love, nor a beautiful and terrible vocation against which the predestined one resisted in vain; she knew very well that love was only a brief intoxication from which one recovered a little sadder. And yet, perhaps, she did not know everything; perhaps there were loves in which one was deliciously lost. She put out her lamp. The dreams of her first youth came back to her.

CHAPTER VI

A DISTINGUISHED RELICT

It was raining. Madame Martin-Belleme saw confusedly through the glass of her coupe the multitude of passing umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies. She was thinking. Her thoughts were gray and indistinct, like the aspect of the streets and the squares.

She no longer knew why the idea had come to her to spend a month with Miss Bell. Truly, she never had known. The idea had been like a spring, at first hidden by leaves, and now forming the current of a deep and rapid stream. She remembered that Tuesday night at dinner she had said suddenly that she wished to go, but she could not remember the first flush of that desire. It was not the wish to act toward Robert Le Menil as he was acting toward her. Doubtless she thought it excellent to go travelling in Italy while he went fox-hunting. This seemed to her a fair arrangement. Robert, who was always pleased to see her when he came back, would not find her on his return. She thought this would be right. She had not thought of it at first. And since then she had thought little of it, and really she was not going for the pleasure of making him grieve. She had against him a thought less piquant, and more harsh. She did not wish to see him soon. He had become to her almost a stranger. He seemed to her a man like others—better than most others—good-looking, estimable, and who did not displease her; but he did not preoccupy her. Suddenly he had gone out of her life. She could not remember how he had become mingled with it. The idea of belonging to him shocked her. The thought that they might meet again in the small apartment of the Rue Spontini was so painful to her that she discarded it at once. She preferred to think that an unforeseen event would prevent

their meeting again—the end of the world, for example. M. Lagrange, member of the Academie des Sciences, had told her the day before of a comet which some day might meet the earth, envelop it with its flaming hair, imbue animals and plants with unknown poisons, and make all men die in a frenzy of laughter. She expected that this, or something else, would happen next month. It was not inexplicable that she wished to go. But that her desire to go should contain a vague joy, that she should feel the charm of what she was to find, was inexplicable to her.

Her carriage left her at the corner of a street.

There, under the roof of a tall house, behind five windows, in a small, neat apartment, Madame Marmet had lived since the death of her husband.

Countess Martin found her in her modest drawing-room, opposite M. Lagrange, half asleep in a deep armchair. This worldly old savant had remained ever faithful to her. He it was who, the day after M. Marmet's funeral, had conveyed to the unfortunate widow the poisoned speech delivered by Schmoll. She had fainted in his arms. Madame Marmet thought that he lacked judgment, but he was her best friend. They dined together often with rich friends.

Madame Martin, slender and erect in her zibeline corsage opening on a flood of lace, awakened with the charming brightness of her gray eyes the good man, who was susceptible to the graces of women. He had told her the day before how the world would come to an end. He asked her whether she had not been frightened at night by pictures of the earth devoured by flames or frozen to a mass of ice. While he talked to her with affected gallantry, she looked at the mahogany bookcase. There were not many books in it, but on one of the shelves was a skeleton in armor. It amazed one to see in this good lady's house that Etruscan warrior wearing a green bronze helmet and a cuirass. He slept among boxes of bonbons, vases of gilded porcelain, and carved images of the Virgin, picked up at Lucerne and on the Righi. Madame Marmet, in her widowhood, had sold the books which her husband had left. Of all the ancient objects collected by the archaeologist, she had retained nothing except the Etruscan. Many persons had tried to sell it for her. Paul Vence had obtained from the administration a promise to buy it for the Louvre, but the good widow would not part with it. It seemed to her that if she lost that warrior with his green bronze helmet she would lose the name that she wore worthily, and would cease to be the widow of Louis Marmet of the Academie des Inscriptions.

"Do not be afraid, Madame; a comet will not soon strike the earth. Such a phenomenon is very improbable."

Madame Martin replied that she knew no serious reason why the earth and humanity should not be annihilated at once.

Old Lagrange exclaimed with profound sincerity that he hoped the

cataclysm would come as late as possible.

She looked at him. His bald head could boast only a few hairs dyed black. His eyelids fell like rags over eyes still smiling; his cheeks hung in loose folds, and one divined that his body was equally withered. She thought, "And even he likes life!"

Madame Marmet hoped, too, that the end of the world was not near at hand.

"Monsieur Lagrange," said Madame Martin, "you live, do you not, in a pretty little house, the windows of which overlook the Botanical Gardens? It seems to me it must be a joy to live in that garden, which makes me think of the Noah's Ark of my infancy, and of the terrestrial paradises in the old Bibles."

But he was not at all charmed with his house. It was small, unimproved, infested with rats.

She acknowledged that one seldom felt at home anywhere, and that rats were found everywhere, either real or symbolical, legions of pests that torment us. Yet she liked the Botanical Gardens; she had always wished to go there, yet never had gone. There was also the museum, which she was curious to visit.

Smiling, happy, he offered to escort her there. He considered it his house. He would show her rare specimens, some of which were superb.

She did not know what a bolide was. She recalled that some one had said to her that at the museum were bones carved by primitive men, and plaques of ivory on which were engraved pictures of animals, which were long ago extinct. She asked whether that were true. Lagrange ceased to smile. He replied indifferently that such objects concerned one of his colleagues.

"Ah!" said Madame Martin, "then they are not in your showcase."

She observed that learned men were not curious, and that it is indiscreet to question them on things that are not in their own showcases. It is true that Lagrange had made a scientific fortune in studying meteors. This had led him to study comets. But he was wise. For twenty years he had been preoccupied by nothing except dining out.

When he had left, Countess Martin told Madame Marmet what she expected of her.

"I am going next week to Fiesole, to visit Miss Bell, and you are coming with me."

The good Madame Marmet, with placid brow yet searching eyes, was silent for a moment; then she refused gently, but finally consented.

CHAPTER VII

MADAME HAS HER WAY

The Marseilles express was ready on the quay, where the postmen ran, and the carriages rolled amid smoke and noise, under the light that fell from the windows. Through the open doors travellers in long cloaks came and went. At the end of the station, blinding with soot and dust, a small rainbow could be discerned, not larger than one's hand. Countess Martin and the good Madame Marnet were already in their carriage, under the rack loaded with bags, among newspapers thrown on the cushions. Choulette had not appeared, and Madame Martin expected him no longer. Yet he had promised to be at the station. He had made his arrangements to go, and had received from his publisher the price of *Les Blandices*. Paul Vence had brought him one evening to Madame Martin's house. He had been sweet, polished, full of witty gayety and naive joy. She had promised herself much pleasure in travelling with a man of genius, original, picturesquely ugly, with an amusing simplicity; like a child prematurely old and abandoned, full of vices, yet with a certain degree of innocence. The doors closed. She expected him no longer. She should not have counted on his impulsive and vagabondish mind. At the moment when the engine began to breathe hoarsely, Madame Marmet, who was looking out of the window, said, quietly:

"I think that Monsieur Choulette is coming."

He was walking along the quay, limping, with his hat on the back of his head, his beard unkempt, and dragging an old carpet-bag. He was almost repulsive; yet, in spite of his fifty years of age, he looked young, so clear and lustrous were his eyes, so much ingenuous audacity had been retained in his yellow, hollow face, so vividly did this old man express the eternal adolescence of the poet and artist. When she saw him, Therese regretted having invited so strange a companion. He walked along, throwing a hasty glance into every carriage—a glance which, little by little, became sullen and distrustful. But when he recognized Madame Martin, he smiled so sweetly and said good-morning to her in so caressing a voice that nothing was left of the ferocious old vagabond walking on the quay, nothing except the old carpet-bag, the handles of which were half broken.

He placed it in the rack with great care, among the elegant bags enveloped with gray cloth, beside which it looked conspicuously sordid. It was studded with yellow flowers on a blood-colored background.

He was soon perfectly at ease, and complimented Madame Martin on the elegance of her travelling attire.

"Excuse me, ladies," he added, "I was afraid I should be late. I went to six o'clock mass at Saint Severin, my parish, in the Virgin Chapel, under those pretty, but absurd columns that point toward heaven though frail as reeds-like us, poor sinners that we are."

"Ah," said Madame Martin, "you are pious to-day."

And she asked him whether he wore the cordon of the order which he was founding. He assumed a grave and penitent air.

"I am afraid, Madame, that Monsieur Paul Vence has told you many absurd stories about me. I have heard that he goes about circulating rumors that my ribbon is a bell-rope—and of what a bell! I should be pained if anybody believed so wretched a story. My ribbon, Madame, is a symbolical ribbon. It is represented by a simple thread, which one wears under one's clothes after a pauper has touched it, as a sign that poverty is holy, and that it will save the world. There is nothing good except in poverty; and since I have received the price of Les Blandices, I feel that I am unjust and harsh. It is a good thing that I have placed in my bag several of these mystic ribbons."

And, pointing to the horrible carpet-bag:

"I have also placed in it a host which a bad priest gave to me, the works of Monsieur de Maistre, shirts, and several other things:"

Madame Martin lifted her eyebrows, a little ill at ease. But the good Madame Marmet retained her habitual placidity.

As the train rolled through the homely scenes of the outskirts, that black fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city, Choulette took from his pocket an old book which he began to fumble. The writer, hidden under the vagabond, revealed himself. Choulette, without wishing to appear to be careful of his papers, was very orderly about them. He assured himself that he had not lost the pieces of paper on which he noted at the coffeehouse his ideas for poems, nor the dozen of flattering letters which, soiled and spotted, he carried with him continually, to read them to his newly-made companions at night. After assuring himself that nothing was missing, he took from the book a letter folded in an open envelope. He waved it for a while, with an air of mysterious impudence, then handed it to the Countess Martin. It was a letter of introduction from the Marquise de Rieu to a princess of the House of France, a near relative of the Comte de Chambord, who, old and a widow, lived in retirement near the gates of Florence. Having enjoyed the effect which he expected to produce, he said that he should perhaps visit the Princess; that she was a good person, and pious.

"A truly great lady," he added, "who does not show her magnificence in gowns and hats. She wears her chemises for six weeks, and sometimes longer. The gentlemen of her train have seen her wear very dirty white stockings, which fell around her heels. The virtues of the great queens of Spain are revived in her. Oh, those soiled stockings, what real glory there is in them!"

He took the letter and put it back in his book. Then, arming himself with a horn-handled knife, he began, with its point, to finish a figure sketched in the handle of his stick. He complimented himself on it:

"I am skilful in all the arts of beggars and vagabonds. I know how to open locks with a nail, and how to carve wood with a bad knife."

The head began to appear. It was the head of a thin woman, weeping.

Choulette wished to express in it human misery, not simple and touching, such as men of other times may have felt it in a world of mingled harshness and kindness; but hideous, and reflecting the state of ugliness created by the free-thinking bourgeois and the military patriots of the French Revolution. According to him the present regime embodied only hypocrisy and brutality.

"Their barracks are a hideous invention of modern times. They date from the seventeenth century. Before that time there were only guard-houses where the soldiers played cards and told tales. Louis XIV was a precursor of Bonaparte. But the evil has attained its plenitude since the monstrous institution of the obligatory enlistment. The shame of emperors and of republics is to have made it an obligation for men to kill. In the ages called barbarous, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries, who fought prudently. In a great battle only five or six men were killed. And when knights went to the wars, at least they were not forced to do it; they died for their pleasure. They were good for nothing else. Nobody in the time of Saint Louis would have thought of sending to battle a man of learning. And the laborer was not torn from the soil to be killed. Nowadays it is a duty for a poor peasant to be a soldier. He is exiled from his house, the roof of which smokes in the silence of night; from the fat prairies where the oxen graze; from the fields and the paternal woods. He is taught how to kill men; he is threatened, insulted, put in prison and told that it is an honor; and, if he does not care for that sort of honor, he is fusilladed. He obeys because he is terrorized, and is of all domestic animals the gentlest and most docile. We are warlike in France, and we are citizens. Another reason to be proud, this being a citizen! For the poor it consists in sustaining and preserving the wealthy in their power and their laziness. The poor must work for this, in presence of the majestic quality of the law which prohibits the wealthy as well as the poor from sleeping under the bridges, from begging in the streets, and from stealing bread. That is one of the good effects of the Revolution.

As this Revolution was made by fools and idiots for the benefit of those who acquired national lands, and resulted in nothing but making the fortune of crafty peasants and financiering bourgeois, the Revolution only made stronger, under the pretence of making all men equal, the empire of wealth. It has betrayed France into the hands of the men of wealth. They are masters and lords. The apparent government, composed of poor devils, is in the pay of the financiers. For one hundred years, in this poisoned country, whoever has loved the poor has been considered a traitor to society. A man is called dangerous when he says that there are wretched people. There are laws against indignation and pity, and what I say here could not go into print."

Choulette became excited and waved his knife, while under the wintry sunlight passed fields of brown earth, trees despoiled by winter, and curtains of poplars beside silvery rivers.

He looked with tenderness at the figure carved on his stick.

"Here you are," he said, "poor humanity, thin and weeping, stupid with shame and misery, as you were made by your masters—soldiers and men of wealth."

The good Madame Marmet, whose nephew was a captain in the artillery, was shocked at the violence with which Choulette attacked the army. Madame Martin saw in this only an amusing fantasy. Choulette's ideas did not frighten her. She was afraid of nothing. But she thought they were a little absurd. She did not think that the past had ever been better than the present.

"I believe, Monsieur Choulette, that men were always as they are to-day, selfish, avaricious, and pitiless. I believe that laws and manners were always harsh and cruel to the unfortunate."

Between La Roche and Dijon they took breakfast in the dining-car, and left Choulette in it, alone with his pipe, his glass of benedictine, and his irritation.

In the carriage, Madame Marmet talked with peaceful tenderness of the husband she had lost. He had married her for love; he had written admirable verses to her, which she had kept, and never shown to any one. He was lively and very gay. One would not have thought it who had seen him later, tired by work and weakened by illness. He studied until the last moment. Two hours before he died he was trying to read again. He was affectionate and kind. Even in suffering he retained all his sweetness. Madame Martin said to her:

"You have had long years of happiness; you have kept the reminiscence of them; that is a share of happiness in this world."

But good Madame Marmet sighed; a cloud passed over her quiet brow.

"Yes," she said, "Louis was the best of men and the best of husbands. Yet he made me very miserable. He had only one fault, but I suffered from it cruelly. He was jealous. Good, kind, tender, and generous as he was, this horrible passion made him unjust, ironical, and violent. I can assure you that my behavior gave not the least cause for suspicion. I was not a coquette. But I was young, fresh; I passed for beautiful. That was enough. He would not let me go out alone, and would not let me receive calls in his absence. Whenever we went to a reception, I trembled in advance with the fear of the scene which he would make later in the carriage."

And the good Madame Marmet added, with a sigh:

"It is true that I liked to dance. But I had to renounce going to balls; it made him suffer too much."

Countess Martin expressed astonishment. She had always imagined Marmet as an old man, timid, and absorbed by his thoughts; a little ridiculous, between his wife, plump, white, and amiable, and the skeleton wearing a helmet of bronze and gold. But the excellent widow confided to her that, at fifty-five years of age, when she was fifty-three, Louis was just as jealous as on the first day of their marriage.

And Therese thought that Robert had never tormented her with jealousy. Was it on his part a proof of tact and good taste, a mark of confidence, or was it that he did not love her enough to make her suffer? She did not know, and she did not have the heart to try to know. She would have to look through recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open.

She murmured carelessly:

"We long to be loved, and when we are loved we are tormented or worried."

The day was finished in reading and thinking. Choulette did not reappear. Night covered little by little with its gray clouds the mulberry-trees of the Dauphine. Madame Marmet went to sleep peacefully, resting on herself as on a mass of pillows. Therese looked at her and thought:

"She is happy, since she likes to remember."

The sadness of night penetrated her heart. And when the moon rose on the fields of olive-trees, seeing the soft lines of plains and of hills pass, Therese, in this landscape wherein everything spoke of peace and oblivion, and nothing spoke of her, regretted the Seine, the Arc de Triomphe with its radiating avenues, and the alleys of the park where, at least, the trees and the stones knew her.

Suddenly Choulette threw himself into the carriage. Armed with his knotty stick, his face and head enveloped in red wool and a fur cap, he almost frightened her. It was what he wished to do. His violent attitudes and his savage dress were studied. Always seeking to produce effects, it pleased him to seem frightful.

He was a coward himself, and was glad to inspire the fears he often felt. A moment before, as he was smoking his pipe, he had felt, while seeing the moon swallowed up by the clouds, one of those childish frights that tormented his light mind. He had come near the Countess to be reassured.

"Arles," he said. "Do you know Arles? It is a place of pure beauty. I have seen, in the cloister, doves resting on the shoulders of statues, and I have seen the little gray lizards warming themselves in the sun on the tombs. The tombs are now in two rows on the road that leads to the church. They are formed like cisterns, and serve as beds for the poor at night. One night, when I was walking among them, I met a good old woman who was placing dried herbs in the tomb of an old maid who had died on her wedding-day. We said goodnight to her. She replied: 'May God hear-you! but fate wills that this tomb should open on the side of the northwest wind. If only it were open on the other side, I should be lying as comfortably as Queen Jeanne.'"

Therese made no answer. She was dozing. And Choulette shivered in the cold of the night, in the fear of death.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LADY OF THE BELLS

In her English cart, which she drove herself, Miss Bell had brought over the hills, from the railway station at Florence, the Countess Martin-Belleme and Madame Marmet to her pink-tinted house at Fiesole, which, crowned with a long balustrade, overlooked the incomparable city. The maid followed with the luggage. Choulette, lodged, by Miss Bell's attention, in the house of a sacristan's widow, in the shadow of the cathedral of Fiesole, was not expected until dinner. Plain and gentle, wearing short hair, a waistcoat, a man's shirt on a chest like a boy's, almost graceful, with small hips, the poetess was doing for her French friends the honors of the house, which reflected the ardent delicacy of her taste. On the walls of the drawing-room were pale Virgins, with long hands, reigning peacefully among angels, patriarchs, and saints in beautiful gilded frames. On a pedestal stood a Magdalena, clothed only with her hair, frightful with thinness and old age, some beggar of the road to Pistoia, burned by the suns and the snows, whom some unknown precursor of Donatello had moulded. And everywhere were Miss Bell's

chosen arms-bells and cymbals. The largest lifted their bronze clappers at the angles of the room; others formed a chain at the foot of the walls. Smaller ones ran along the cornices. There were bells over the hearth, on the cabinets, and on the chairs. The shelves were full of silver and golden bells. There were big bronze bells marked with the Florentine lily; bells of the Renaissance, representing a lady wearing a white gown; bells of the dead, decorated with tears and bones; bells covered with symbolical animals and leaves, which had rung in the churches in the time of St. Louis; table-bells of the seventeenth century, having a statuette for a handle; the flat, clear cow-bells of the Ruth Valley; Hindu bells; Chinese bells formed like cylinders—they had come from all countries and all times, at the magic call of little Miss Bell.

"You look at my speaking arms," she said to Madame Martin. "I think that all these Misses Bell are pleased to be here, and I should not be astonished if some day they all began to sing together. But you must not admire them all equally. Reserve your purest and most fervent praise for this one."

And striking with her finger a dark, bare bell which gave a faint sound:

"This one," she said, "is a holy village-bell of the fifth century. She is a spiritual daughter of Saint Paulin de Nole, who was the first to make the sky sing over our heads. The metal is rare. Soon I will show to you a gentle Florentine, the queen of bells. She is coming. But I bore you, darling, with my babble. And I bore, too, the good Madame Marmet. It is wrong."

She escorted them to their rooms.

An hour later, Madame Martin, rested, fresh, in a gown of foulard and lace, went on the terrace where Miss Bell was waiting for her. The humid air, warmed by the sun, exhaled the restless sweetness of spring. Therese, resting on the balustrade, bathed her eyes in the light. At her feet, the cypress-trees raised their black distaffs, and the olive-trees looked like sheep on the hills. In the valley, Florence extended its domes, its towers, and the multitudes of its red roofs, through which the Arno showed its undulating line. Beyond were the soft blue hills.

She tried to recognize the Boboli Gardens, where she had walked at her first visit; the Cascine, which she did not like; the Pitti Palace. Then the charming infinity of the sky attracted her. She looked at the forms in the clouds.

After a long silence, Vivian Bell extended her hand toward the horizon.

"Darling, I do not know how to say what I wish. But look, darling, look again. What you see there is unique in the world. Nature is nowhere else so subtle, elegant, and fine. The god who made the hills of

Florence was an artist. Oh, he was a jeweller, an engraver, a sculptor, a bronze-founder, and a painter; he was a Florentine. He did nothing else in the world, darling. The rest was made by a hand less delicate, whose work was less perfect. How can you think that that violet hill of San Miniato, so firm and so pure in relief, was made by the author of Mont Blanc? It is not possible. This landscape has the beauty of an antique medal and of a precious painting. It is a perfect and measured work of art. And here is another thing that I do not know how to say, that I can not even understand, but which is a real thing. In this country I feel—and you will feel as I do, darling—half alive and half dead; in a condition which is sad, noble, and very sweet. Look, look again; you will realize the melancholy of those hills that surround Florence, and see a delicious sadness ascend from the land of the dead.”

The sun was low over the horizon. The bright points of the mountain-peaks faded one by one, while the clouds inflamed the sky. Madame Marmet sneezed.

Miss Bell sent for some shawls, and warned the French women that the evenings were fresh and that the night-air was dangerous.

Then suddenly she said:

”Darling, you know Monsieur Jacques Dechartre? Well, he wrote to me that he would be at Florence next week. I am glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre is to meet you in our city. He will accompany us to the churches and to the museums, and he will be a good guide. He understands beautiful things, because he loves them. And he has an exquisite talent as a sculptor. His figures in medallions are admired more in England than in France. Oh, I am so glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre and you are to meet at Florence, darling!”

CHAPTER IX

CHOULETTE FINDS A NEW FRIEND

She next day, as they were traversing the square where are planted, in imitation of antique amphitheatres, two marble pillars, Madame Marmet said to the Countess Martin:

”I think I see Monsieur Choulette.”

Seated in a shoemaker’s shop, his pipe in his hand, Choulette was making rhythmic gestures, and appeared to be reciting verses. The Florentine cobbler listened with a kind smile. He was a little, bald man, and represented one of the types familiar to Flemish painters. On a table,

among wooden lasts, nails, leather, and wax, a basilic plant displayed its round green head. A sparrow, lacking a leg, which had been replaced by a match, hopped on the old man's shoulder and head.

Madame Martin, amused by this spectacle, called Choulette from the threshold. He was softly humming a tune, and she asked him why he had not gone with her to visit the Spanish chapel.

He arose and replied:

"Madame, you are preoccupied by vain images; but I live in life and in truth."

He shook the cobbler's hand and followed the two ladies.

"While going to church," he said, "I saw this old man, who, bending over his work, and pressing a last between his knees as in a vise, was sewing coarse shoes. I felt that he was simple and kind. I said to him, in Italian: 'My father, will you drink with me a glass of Chianti?' He consented. He went for a flagon and some glasses, and I kept the shop."

And Choulette pointed to two glasses and a flagon placed on a stove.

"When he came back we drank together; I said vague but kind things to him, and I charmed him by the sweetness of sounds. I will go again to his shop; I will learn from him how to make shoes, and how to live without desire. After which, I shall not be sad again. For desire and idleness alone make us sad."

The Countess Martin smiled.

"Monsieur Choulette, I desire nothing, and, nevertheless, I am not joyful. Must I make shoes, too?"

Choulette replied, gravely:

"It is not yet time for that."

When they reached the gardens of the Oricellari, Madame Marmet sank on a bench. She had examined at Santa Maria-Novella the frescoes of Ghirlandajo, the stalls of the choir, the Virgin of Cimabue, the paintings in the cloister. She had done this carefully, in memory of her husband, who had greatly liked Italian art. She was tired. Choulette sat by her and said:

"Madame, could you tell me whether it is true that the Pope's gowns are made by Worth?"

Madame Marmet thought not. Nevertheless, Choulette had heard people say

this in cafes. Madame Marmet was astonished that Choulette, a Catholic and a socialist, should speak so disrespectfully of a pope friendly to the republic. But he did not like Leo XIII.

"The wisdom of princes is shortsighted," he said; "the salvation of the Church must come from the Italian republic, as Leo XIII believes and wishes; but the Church will not be saved in the manner which this pious Machiavelli thinks. The revolution will make the Pope lose his last sou, with the rest of his patrimony. And it will be salvation. The Pope, destitute and poor, will then become powerful. He will agitate the world. We shall see again Peter, Lin, Clet, Anaclet, and Clement; the humble, the ignorant; men like the early saints will change the face of the earth. If to-morrow, in the chair of Peter, came to sit a real bishop, a real Christian, I would go to him, and say: 'Do not be an old man buried alive in a golden tomb; quit your noble guards and your cardinals; quit your court and its simulacrum of power. Take my arm and come with me to beg for your bread among the nations. Covered with rags, poor, ill, dying, go on the highways, showing in yourself the image of Jesus. Say, "I am begging my bread for the condemnation of the wealthy." Go into the cities, and shout from door to door, with a sublime stupidity, "Be humble, be gentle, be poor!" Announce peace and charity to the cities, to the dens, and to the barracks. You will be disdained; the mob will throw stones at you. Policemen will drag you into prison. You shall be for the humble as for the powerful, for the poor as for the rich, a subject of laughter, an object of disgust and of pity. Your priests will dethrone you, and elevate against you an anti-pope, or will say that you are crazy. And it is necessary that they should tell the truth; it is necessary that you should be crazy; the lunatics have saved the world. Men will give to you the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre, and they will spit in your face, and it is by that sign that you will appear as Christ and true king; and it is by such means that you will establish Christian socialism, which is the kingdom of God on earth.'"

Having spoken in this way, Choulette lighted one of those long and tortuous Italian cigars, which are pierced with a straw. He drew from it several puffs of infectious vapor, then he continued, tranquilly:

"And it would be practical. You may refuse to acknowledge any quality in me except my clear view of situations. Ah, Madame Marmet, you will never know how true it is that the great works of this world were always achieved by madmen. Do you think, Madame Martin, that if Saint Francis of Assisi had been reasonable, he would have poured upon the earth, for the refreshment of peoples, the living water of charity and all the perfumes of love?"

"I do not know," replied Madame Martin; "but reasonable people have always seemed to me to be bores. I can say this to you, Monsieur Choulette."

They returned to Fiesole by the steam tramway which goes up the hill. The rain fell. Madame Marmet went to sleep and Choulette complained. All his ills came to attack him at once: the humidity in the air gave him a pain in the knee, and he could not bend his leg; his carpet-bag, lost the day before in the trip from the station to Fiesole, had not been found, and it was an irreparable disaster; a Paris review had just published one of his poems, with typographical errors as glaring as Aphrodite's shell.

He accused men and things of being hostile to him. He became puerile, absurd, odious. Madame Martin, whom Choulette and the rain saddened, thought the trip would never end. When she reached the house she found Miss Bell in the drawing-room, copying with gold ink on a leaf of parchment, in a handwriting formed after the Aldine italics, verses which she had composed in the night. At her friend's coming she raised her little face, plain but illuminated by splendid eyes.

"Darling, permit me to introduce to you the Prince Albertinelli."

The Prince possessed a certain youthful, godlike beauty, that his black beard intensified. He bowed.

"Madame, you would make one love France, if that sentiment were not already in our hearts."

The Countess and Choulette asked Miss Bell to read to them the verses she was writing. She excused herself from reciting her uncertain cadence to the French poet, whom she liked best after Francois Villon. Then she recited in her pretty, hissing, birdlike voice.

"That is very pretty," said Choulette, "and bears the mark of Italy softly veiled by the mists of Thule."

"Yes," said the Countess Martin, "that is pretty. But why, dear Vivian, did your two beautiful innocents wish to die?"

"Oh, darling, because they felt as happy as possible, and desired nothing more. It was discouraging, darling, discouraging. How is it that you do not understand that?"

"And do you think that if we live the reason is that we hope?"

"Oh, yes. We live in the hope of what to-morrow, tomorrow, king of the land of fairies, will bring in his black mantle studded with stars, flowers, and tears. Oh, bright king, To-morrow!"