

GERFAUT - V1

CHARLES DE BERNARD*

The latter induced him to take up his domicile in Paris and initiated him into the art of novel-writing. Bernard had published a volume of odes: 'Plus Deuil que Joie' (1838), which was not much noticed, but a series of stories in the same year gained him the reputation of a genial 'conteur'. They were collected under the title 'Le Noeud Gordien', and one of the tales, 'Une Aventure du Magistrat', was adapted by Sardou for his comedy 'Pommes du voisin'. 'Gerfaut', his greatest work, crowned by the Academy, appeared also in 1838, then followed 'Le Paravent', another collection of novels (1839); 'Les Ailes d'Icare' (1840); 'La Peau du Lion' and 'La Chasse aux Amants' (1841); 'L'Ecueil' (1842); 'Un Beau-pere' (1845); and finally 'Le Gentilhomme campagnard,' in 1847. Bernard died, only forty-eight years old, March 6, 1850.

Charles de Bernard was a realist, a pupil of Balzac. He surpasses his master, nevertheless, in energy and limpidity of composition. His style is elegant and cultured. His genius is most fully represented in a score or so of delightful tales rarely exceeding some sixty or seventy pages in length, but perfect in proportion, full of invention and originality, and saturated with the purest and pleasantest essence of the spirit which for six centuries in tableaux, farces, tales in prose and verse, comedies and correspondence, made French literature the delight and recreation of Europe. 'Gerfaut' is considered De Bernard's greatest work. The plot turns on an attachment between a married woman and the hero of the story. The book has nothing that can justly offend, the incomparable sketches of Marillac and Mademoiselle de Corandeuil are admirable; Gerfaut and Bergenheim possess pronounced originality, and the author is, so to speak, incarnated with the hero of his romance.

The most uncritical reader can not fail to notice the success with which Charles de Bernard introduces people of rank and breeding into his stories. Whether or not he drew from nature, his portraits of this kind are exquisitely natural and easy. It is sufficient to say that he is the literary Sir Joshua Reynolds of the post-revolution vicomtes and marquises. We can see that his portraits are faithful; we must feel that they are at the same time charming. Bernard is an amiable and spirited 'conteur' who excels in producing an animated spectacle for a refined and selected public, whether he paints the ridiculousness or the misery of humanity.

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The works of Charles de Bernard in wit and urbanity, and in the peculiar charm that wit and urbanity give, are of the best French type. To any elevation save a lofty place in fiction they have no claim; but in that phase of literature their worth is undisputed, and from many testimonies it would seem that those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing.

These novels, well enough as they are known to professed students of French literature, have, by the mere fact of their age, rather slipped out of the list of books known to the general reader. The general reader who reads for amusement can not possibly do better than proceed to transform his ignorance of them into knowledge.

JULES CLARETIE
de l'Academie Francaise.

GERFAUT

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELLER

During the first days of the month of September, 1832, a young man about thirty years of age was walking through one of the valleys in Lorraine originating in the Vosges mountains. A little river which, after a few leagues of its course, flows into the Moselle, watered this wild basin shut in between two parallel lines of mountains. The hills in the south became gradually lower and finally dwindled away into the plain. Alongside the plateau, arranged in amphitheatres, large square fields stripped of their harvest lay here and there in the primitive forest; in other places, innumerable oaks and elms had been dethroned to give place to plantations of cherry-trees, whose symmetrical rows promised an abundant harvest.

This contest of nature with industry is everywhere, but is more pronounced in hilly countries. The scene changed, however, as one penetrated farther, and little by little the influence of the soil gained ascendancy. As the hills grew nearer together, enclosing the valley in a closer embrace, the clearings gave way to the natural obduracy of the soil. A little farther on they disappeared entirely. At the foot of one of the bluffs which bordered with its granite bands the highest plateau of the mountain, the forest rolled victoriously down to the banks of the river.

Now came patches of forest, like solid battalions of infantry; sometimes solitary trees appeared, as if distributed by chance upon the grassy slopes, or scaling the summit of the steepest rocks like a body of bold sharpshooters. A little, unfrequented road, if one can judge from the scarcity of tracks, ran alongside the banks of the stream, climbing up and down hills; overcoming every obstacle, it stretched out in almost a straight line. One might compare it to those strong characters who mark out a course in life and imperturbably follow it. The river, on the contrary, like those docile and compliant minds that bend to agreeable emergencies, described graceful curves, obeying thus the caprices of the soil which served as its bed.

At a first glance, the young man who was walking alone in the midst of this picturesque country seemed to have nothing remarkable in his dress; a straw hat, a blue blouse and linen trousers composed his costume. It would have been very natural to take him for an Alsatian peasant returning to his village through the Vosges's rough pathways; but a more attentive glance quickly dispelled this conjecture. There is something in the way in which a person wears the plainest costume which betrays the real man, no matter how he may be clothed. Thus, nothing could be more modest than this traveller's blouse, but the absence on collar and sleeves of the arabesques in white or red thread, the pride of all village dandies, was sufficient for one to realize that this was not a fancy costume.

His expressive, but not handsome face was dark, it is true, but it did not look as if wind or sun had contributed to its complexion; it seemed rather to have lost by a sedentary life something of the southern carnation, which had ended by blending these warmer tints into a dead uniform pallor. Finally, if, as one may suppose after different diagnoses, this person had the slightest desire to play the role of Tyrcis or Amintas, his white hand, as carefully cared for as a pretty woman's, would have been sufficient to betray him. It was evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing! The lion's ears pierced the ass's skin this time.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the sky, which had been overcast all the morning, had assumed, within a few moments, a more sombre aspect; large clouds were rapidly moving from south to north, rolled one over another by an ominous wind. So the traveller, who had just entered the wildest part of the valley, seemed very little disposed to admire its fine vegetation and romantic sites. Impatient to reach the end of his journey, or fearing the approaching storm, he quickened his steps; but this pace was not kept long. At the end of a few moments, having crossed a small clearing, he found himself at the entrance of a lawn where the road divided in two directions, one continuing to skirt the river banks, the other, broader and better built, turning to the left into a winding ravine.

Which of these two roads should he follow? He did not know. The

profound solitude of the place made him fear that he might not meet any one who could direct him, when the sound of a psalm vigorously chanted reached his ears from the distance. Soon it became more distinct, and he recognized the words, 'In exitu Israel de Egypto', sung at the top of the lungs by a voice so shrill that it would have irritated the larynx of any of the sopranos at the Opera. Its vibrating but sharp tones resounded so clearly in the dead silence of the forest that a number of stanzas were finished before the pious musician came in sight. At last a drove of cattle appeared through the trees which bordered the road on the left, walking with a slow, grave step; they were driven by a little shepherd about nine or ten years of age, who interrupted his song from time to time to reassemble the members of his flock with heavy blows from his whip, thus uniting temporal cares with those of a spiritual nature with a coolness which the most important personages might have envied him.

"Which of these roads leads to Bergenheim?" called out the traveller when they were near enough to speak to each other.

"Bergenheim!" repeated the child, taking off his cotton cap, which was striped like a rainbow, and adding a few words in an unintelligible Gallo-Germanic patois.

"You are not French, then?" asked the stranger, in a disappointed tone.

The shepherd raised his head proudly and replied:

"I am Alsatian, not French!"

The young man smiled at this trait of local patriotism so common then in the beautiful province by the Rhine; then he thought that pantomime might be necessary, so he pointed with his finger first at one road, then at the other:

"There or there, Bergenheim?" asked he.

The child, in his turn, pointed silently with the tip of his whip to the banks of the river, designating, at some distance on the other side, a thicket of woods behind which a slight column of smoke was rising.

"The deuce!" murmured the stranger, "it seems that I have gone astray; if the chateau is on the other side, where can I establish my ambuscade?"

The shepherd seemed to understand the traveller's embarrassment. Gazing at him with his intelligent blue eyes, he traced, with the tip of his toe in the middle of the road, a furrow across which he rounded his whip like the arch of a bridge; then he pointed a second time up the river.

"You are an honor to your country, young fellow," exclaimed the stranger; "there is the material in you to make one of Cooper's redskins." As he said these words he threw a piece of money into the child's cap and

walked rapidly away in the direction indicated.

The Alsatian stood motionless for a few moments with one hand in his blond hair and his eyes fastened upon the piece of silver which shone like a star in the bottom of his cap; when the one whom he considered as a model of extraordinary generosity had disappeared behind the trees, he gave vent to his joy by heavy blows from his whip upon the backs of the cattle, then he resumed his way, singing in a still more triumphant tone: 'Mantes exultaverunt ut arites', and jumping higher himself than all the hills and rams in the Bible.

The young man had not walked more than five minutes before he recognized the correctness of the directions he had received. The ground which he had passed over was a field covered with clumps of low trees; it was easy to see by its disc-like shape that it had been formed by successive alluvia, at the expense of the other shore, which had been incessantly worn away by the stream. This sort of flat, level peninsula was crossed in a straight line by the road, which deviated from the river at the point where the two roads came together again, like the cross and string of a bow at its extremity. The trees, becoming thinner, revealed a perspective all the more wonderful as it was unexpected. While the eye followed the widening stream, which disappeared in the depths of a mountainous gorge, a new prospect suddenly presented itself on the right upon the other shore.

A second valley, smaller than the first and in measure its vassal, formed an amphitheatre the crest of which was bordered by a fringe of perpendicular rocks as white as dried bones. Under this crown, which rendered it almost inaccessible, the little valley was resplendent in its wealth of evergreen trees, oaks with their knotty branches, and its fresh green turf.

Taken as a whole, it was a foundation worthy of the picturesque edifice which met one's eye in the foreground, and at which the traveller gazed with extreme interest.

At the junction of the two valleys stood an enormous building, half manorial, half monastic in appearance. The shore formed, at this point, for an extent of several hundred feet, a bluff whose edge plunged vertically into the river. The chateau and its outbuildings rested upon this solid base. The principal house was a large parallelogram of very old construction, but which had evidently been almost entirely rebuilt at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The stones, of grayish granite which abounds in the Vosges, were streaked with blue and violet veins, and gave the facade a sombre aspect, increased by the scarcity of windows, some of which were 'a la Palladio', others almost as narrow as loop-holes. An immense roof of red tile, darkened by rain, projected several feet over the whole front, as is still to be seen in old cities in the North. Thanks to this projecting weather-board, the apartments upon the upper floor were shaded from the sun's rays, like those persons

who have weak eyes and who protect them from a strong light by wearing a green shade.

The view which this melancholy dwelling presented from the place where the traveller had first seen it, was one which made it appear to the best advantage; it seemed, from this point, to come immediately out of the river, built as it was upon the very curb of the bluffs, at this place at least thirty feet high. This elevation, added to that of the building, effaced the lack of proportion of the roof and gave to the whole a most imposing appearance; it seemed as if the rocks were a part of the building to which it served as foundation, for the stones had ended by assuming the same color, and it would have been difficult to discover the junction of man's work and that of nature, had it not been outlined by a massive iron balcony running across the entire length of the first story, whence one could enjoy the pleasure of line-fishing. Two round towers with pointed roofs stood at each corner of the facade and seemed to gaze with proud satisfaction at their own reflection in the water.

A long line of sycamore-trees skirted the banks of the river, beginning from the foot of the chateau, and forming the edge of a park which extended to the back of the double valley. A little wooden bridge connected this sort of avenue with the road the traveller had just passed over; but the latter did not seem disposed to profit by this silent invitation to which large raindrops gave more emphasis. He was so absorbed in his meditation that, to arouse him, it needed the sound of a gruff voice behind him uttering these words:

"That is what I call an ugly castle! It is hardly as good as our common country houses around Marseilles."

The stranger turned quickly around and found himself face to face with a man wearing a gray cap and carrying his coat upon his shoulder, as workmen do in the South. He held in his hand a knotty stick which had been recently cut. The newcomer had a swarthy complexion, harsh features, and deep-set eyes which gave his face an ugly, false expression.

"I said an ugly castle," continued he. "However, the cage is made for the bird."

"It seems, then, that you do not like its master?" said the traveller.

"The master!" repeated the workman, seizing hold of his stick with a threatening air, "Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim, as they say! He is rich and a nobleman, and I am only a poor carpenter. Well, then, if you stay here a few days, you will witness a comical ceremony; I shall make this brigand repent."

"Brigand!" exclaimed the stranger, in a surprised tone. "What has he done to you?"

"Yes, brigand! you may tell him so from me. But, by the way," continued the workman, surveying his companion from head to foot with a searching, defiant air, "do you happen to be the carpenter who is coming from Strasbourg? In that case, I have a few words to say to you. Lambernier does not allow any one to take the bread out of his mouth in that way; do you understand?"

The young man seemed very little moved by this declaration.

"I am not a carpenter," said he, smiling, "and I have no wish for your work."

"Truly, you do not look as if you had pushed a plane very often. It seems that in your business one does not spoil one's hands. You are a workman about as much as I am pope."

This remark made the one to whom it was addressed feel in as bad a humor as an author does when he finds a grammatical error in one of his books.

"So you work at the chateau, then," said he, finally, to change the conversation.

"For six months I have worked in that shanty," replied the workman; "I am the one who carved the new woodwork, and I will say it is well done. Well, this great wild boar of a Bergenheim turned me out of the house yesterday as if I had been one of his dogs."

"He doubtless had his reasons."

"I tell you, I will crush him—reasons! Damn it! They told him I talked too often with his wife's maid and quarrelled with the servants, a pack of idlers! Did he not forbid my putting my foot upon his land? I am upon his land now; let him come and chase me off; let him come, he will see how I shall receive him. Do you see this stick? I have just cut it in his own woods to use it on himself!"

The young man no longer listened to the workman; his eyes were turned toward the castle, whose slightest details he studied, as if he hoped that in the end the stone would turn into glass and let him see the interior. If this curiosity had any other object than the architecture and form of the building it was not gratified. No human figure came to enliven this sad, lonely dwelling. All the windows were closed, as if the house were uninhabited. The baying of dogs, probably imprisoned in their kennel, was the only sound which came to break the strange silence, and the distant thunder, with its dull rumbling, repeated by the echoes, responded plaintively, and gave a lugubrious character to the scene.

"When one speaks of the devil he appears," said the workman, suddenly, with an emotion which gave the lie to his recent bravado; "if you wish to

see this devil incarnate of a Bergenheim, just turn your head. Good-by.”

At these words he leaped a ditch at the left of the road and disappeared in the bushes. The stranger also seemed to feel an impression very like that of Lambernier’s as he saw a man on horseback advancing on a gallop. Instead of waiting for him, he darted into the field which descended to the river, and hid behind a group of trees.

The Baron, who was not more than thirty-three years of age, had one of those energetic, handsome faces whose type seems to belong particularly to old military families. His bright, blond hair and clear, blue eyes contrasted strongly with his ruddy complexion; his aspect was severe, but noble and imposing, in spite of his negligent dress, which showed that indifference to matters of personal attire which becomes habitual with country lords. His tall figure was beginning to grow stout, and that increased his athletic appearance. He sat very erect in his saddle, and from the way in which he straightened out his long legs against the sides of his beast, one suspected that he could, if necessary, repeat the Marshal de Saxe’s feats of skill. He stopped his horse suddenly at the very spot which the two men had just vacated and called out in a voice which would startle a regiment of cuirassiers:

”Here, Lambernier!”

The carpenter hesitated a moment, at this imperative call, between the fear which he could not overcome and shame at fleeing from a single man in the presence of a witness; finally this last feeling triumphed. He returned to the edge of the road without saying a word, and stationed himself in an insolent way face to face with the Baron, with his hat drawn down over his ears, and grasped through precaution the knotty stick which served him as a weapon.

”Lambernier,” said the master of the castle, in a severe tone, ”your account was settled yesterday; was it not paid in full? Is anything due you?”

”I ask nothing of you,” replied the workman, brusquely.

”In that case, why are you wandering about my place when I forbade you?”

”I am upon the highway, nobody can prevent me from passing there.”

”You are upon my land, and you came out of my woods,” replied the Baron, emphasizing his words with the firmness of a man who would permit no violation of his rights as a landowner.

”The ground upon which I walk is mine,” said the workman, in his turn, as he struck the end of his stick upon the ground as if to take possession. This gesture attracted Bergenheim’s attention, and his eyes flashed with a sudden light at the sight of the stick which Lambernier held.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "you probably regard my trees also as your own. Where did you cut that stick?"

"Go and find out," said the workman, accompanying his reply with a flourish of the stick.

The Baron coolly dismounted, threw the bridle over his horse's neck, walked up to the workman, who had taken the position of a practised pugilist to receive him, and, without giving him time to strike, he disarmed him with one hand by a blow which would have been sufficient to uproot the beech rod before it was metamorphosed into a club; with the other hand he seized the man by the collar and gave him a shaking that it was as impossible to struggle against as if it had been caused by a steam-engine. Obeying this irresistible force, in spite of his kicking, Lambernier described a dozen circles around his adversary, while the latter set these off with some of the hardest blows from green wood that ever chastised an insolent fellow. This gymnastic exercise ended by a sleight-of-hand trick, which, after making the carpenter pirouette for the last time, sent him rolling head-first into a ditch, the bottom of which, fortunately for him, was provided with a bed of soft mud. When the punishment was over, Bergenheim remounted his horse as tranquilly as he had dismounted it, and continued his way toward the chateau.

The young man, in the midst of the thicket where he was concealed, had lost no detail of this rural scene. He could not help having a feeling of admiration for this energetic representative of the feudal ages who, with no fear of any court of justice or other bourgeois inventions, had thus exerted over his own domains the summary justice in force in Eastern countries.

"France has thrashed Gaul," said he, smiling to himself; "if all our men had this Bergenheim's iron fist many things determined upon to-day might be called in question. If I ever have the slightest difficulty with this Milo de Crotona, he may be sure I shall not choose pugilism as my mode of discussion."

The storm now burst forth in all its fury. A dark curtain covered the whole valley, and the rain fell in torrents. The Baron put spurs to his horse, crossed the bridge and, entering the sycamore avenue, was soon out of sight. Without paying any attention to Lambernier, who was uttering imprecations at the bottom of the ditch, into which he was sinking deeper and deeper, the stranger went to seek a less illusive shelter than the trees under which he had taken his position; but at this moment his attention was attracted to one side of the castle. A window, or rather a glass door, just then opened upon the balcony, and a young woman in a rose-colored negligee appeared upon the dark facade. It would be impossible to imagine anything more fresh or charming than this apparition at such a moment. Leaning upon the balustrade, the young woman rested her face upon a hand which was as white as a lily, and her

finger smoothed with a mechanical caress the ringlets of chestnut hair that lay upon her forehead, while her large brown eyes gazed into the depths of the clouds from which the lightning was flashing, and with which they vied in brilliancy. A poet would have said it was Miranda evoked by the tempest.

The stranger parted the branches before him to get a better view; at the same instant he was blinded by a terrible flash which lighted the whole valley and was immediately followed by a terrific crash. When he opened his eyes the chateau which he believed to be at the bottom of the river stood still upright, solemn, and firm as before; but the lady in the rose-colored gown had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THE CASTLE OF BERGENHEIM

The appearance of the room into which the lady had precipitately entered, when startled by the thunder, corresponded with the edifice to which it belonged. It was a very large room, longer than it was wide, and lighted by three windows, the middle one of which opened from top to bottom like a door and led out upon the balcony. The woodwork and ceiling were in chestnut, which time had polished and a skilful hand had ornamented with a profusion of allegorical figures. The beauty of this work of art was almost entirely concealed by a very remarkable decoration which covered every side of the room, consisting of one of the most glorious collections of family portraits which a country chateau of the nineteenth century could offer.

The first of these portraits hung opposite the windows at the right of the entrance door and was that of a chevalier in full armor, whose teeth gleamed from under his long moustache like those of an untamed tiger. Beginning with this formidable figure, which bore the date 1247, forty others of about the same dimensions were placed in order according to their dates. It seemed as if each period had left its mark upon those of the personages it had seen live and die, and had left something of its own character there.

There were more gallant cavaliers cut after the same pattern as the first. Their stern, harsh faces, red beards, and broad, square military shoulders told that by swordthrusts and broken lances they had founded the nobility of their race. An heroic preface to this family biography! A rough and warlike page of the Middle Ages! After these proud men-of-arms came several figures of a less ferocious aspect, but not so imposing. In these portraits of the fifteenth century beards had disappeared with the sword. In those wearing caps and velvet toques,

silk robes and heavy gold chains supporting a badge of the same metal, one recognized lords in full and tranquil possession of the fiefs won by their fathers, landowners who had degenerated a little and preferred mountain life in a manor to the chances of a more hazardous existence. These pacific gentlemen were, for the most part, painted with the left hand gloved and resting upon the hip; the right one was bare, a sort of token of disarmament which one might take for a painter's epigram. Some of them had allowed their favorite dogs to share the honors of the picture. All in this group indicated that this branch of the family had many points of resemblance with the more illustrious faces. It was the period of idle kings.

A half dozen solemn personages with gold-braided hats and long red robes bordered with ermine, and wearing starched ruffles, occupied one corner of the parlor near the windows. These worthy advisers of the Dukes of Lorraine explained the way in which the masters of the chateau had awakened from the torpor in which they had been plunged for several generations, in order to participate in the affairs of their country and enter a more active sphere.

Here the portraits assumed the proportions of history. Did not this branch, descended from warlike stock, seem like a fragment taken from the European annals? Was it not a symbolical image of the progress of civilization, of regular legislation struggling against barbaric customs? Thanks to these respectable counsellors and judges, one might reverse the motto: 'Non solum toga', in favor of their race. But it did not seem as if these bearded ancestors looked with much gratitude upon this parliamentary flower added to their feudal crest. They appeared to look down from the height of their worm-eaten frames upon their enrobed descendants with that disdainful smile with which the peers of France used to greet men of law the first time they were called to sit by their side, after being for so long a time at their feet.

In the space between the windows and upon the remaining woodwork was a crowd of military men, with here and there an Abbe with cross and mitre, a Commander of Malta, and a solemn Canon, sterile branches of this genealogical tree. Several among the military ones wore sashes and plumes of the colors of Lorraine; others, even before the union of this province to France, had served the latter country; there were lieutenant-colonels of infantry and cavalry; some dressed in blue coats lined with buff serge and little round patches of black plush, which served as the uniform for the dragoons of the Lorraine legion.

Last of all was a young man with an agreeable face, who smiled superciliously from under a vast wig of powdered hair; a rose was in the buttonhole of his green cloth pelisse with orange facings, a red sabrecache hung against his boots a little lower than the hilt of his sabre. The costume represented a sprightly officer of the Royal Nassau hussars. The portrait was hung on the left of the entrance door and only separated by it from his great-grandfather of 1247, whom he might have

assisted, had these venerable portraits taken some night a fancy to descend from their frames to execute a dance such as Hoffmann dreamed.

These two persons were the alpha and the omega of this genealogical tree, the two extreme links of the chain—one, the root buried in the sands of time; the other, the branch which had blossomed at the top. Fate had created a tragical resemblance between these two lives, separated by more than five centuries. The chevalier in coat-of-mail had been killed in the battle of the Mansourah during the first crusade of St. Louis. The young man with the supercilious smile had mounted the scaffold during the Reign of Terror, holding between his lips a rose, his usual decoration for his coat. The history of the French nobility was embodied in these two men, born in blood, who had died in blood.

Large gilded frames of Gothic style surrounded all these portraits. At the right, on the bottom of each picture was painted a little escutcheon having for its crest a baronial coronet and for supports two wild men armed with clubs. The field was red; with its three bulls' heads in silver, it announced to people well versed in heraldic art that they had before them the lineaments of noble and powerful lords, squires of Reinsach-Bergenheim, lords of Reinsach in Suabia, barons of the Holy Empire, lords of Sapois, Labresse, Gerbamont, etc., counts of Bergenheim, the latter title granted them by Louis XV, chevaliers of Lorraine, etc., etc., etc.

This ostentatious enumeration was not needed in order to recognize the kindred of all these noble personages. Had they been mingled with other portraits, a careful observer would have promptly distinguished and reunited them, so pronounced were the family features common to them all. The furniture of the room was not unworthy of these proud defunct ones. High-backed chairs and enormous armchairs, dating from the time of Louis XIII; more modern sofas, which had been made to harmonize with the older furniture, filled the room. They were covered with flowered tapestry in thousands of shades, which must have busied the white hands of the ladies of the house for two or three generations past.

The row of portraits was interrupted on one side by a large fireplace of grayish granite, which was too high for one to hang a mirror above or to place ornaments upon its mantel. Opposite was an ebony console inlaid with ivory, upon which was placed one of those elegant clocks whose delicate and original chased work has not been eclipsed by any modern workmanship. Two large Japanese vases accompanied it; the whole was reflected in an antique mirror which hung above the console; its edges were bevelled, doubtless in order to cause one to admire the thickness of the glass.

It would be impossible to imagine a stronger contrast than that of this Gothic room with the lady in the rose-colored gown who had just entered it so precipitately. The fire upon the hearth threw a warm light over the old portraits, and it was heightened by the heavy, red damask

curtains which hung by the windows. The light sometimes softened, sometimes revived by some sudden flash of the flames, glanced over the scowling faces and red beards, enlivening the eyes and giving a supernatural animation to those lifeless canvases. One would have said that the cold, grave faces looked with curiosity at the young woman with graceful movements and cool garments, whom Aladdin's genii seemed to have transported from the most elegant boudoir on the Chaussee d'Antin, and thrown, still frightened, into the midst of this strange assembly.

"You are crazy, Clemence, to leave that window open!" said at this moment an old voice issuing from an armchair placed in a corner near the fireplace.

The person who broke the charm of this silent scene was a woman of sixty or seventy years of age, according to the gallantry of the calculator. It was easy to judge that she was tall and thin as she lay, rather than sat, in her chair with its back lowered down. She was dressed in a yellowish-brown gown. A false front as black as jet, surmounted by a cap with poppy-colored ribbons, framed her face. She had sharp, withered features, and the brilliancy of her primitive freshness had been converted into a blotched and pimpled complexion which affected above all her nose and cheek-bones, but whose ardor had been dimmed only a trifle by age. There was something about the whole face as crabbed, sour, and unkind as if she had daily bathed it in vinegar. One could read old maid in every feature! Besides, a slight observation of her ways would have destroyed all lingering doubt in this respect.

A large, coffee-colored pug-dog was lying before the fire. This interesting animal served as a footstool for his mistress, stretched in her easy-chair, and recalled to mind the lions which sleep at the foot of chevaliers in their Gothic tombs. As a pug-dog and an old maid pertain to each other, it was only necessary, in order to divine this venerable lady's state, to read the name upon the golden circlet which served as a collar for the dog: "Constance belongs to Mademoiselle de Corandeuil."

Before the younger lady, who was leaning upon the back of a chair, seeming to breathe with difficulty, had time to reply, she received a second injunction.

"But, aunt," said she, at last, "it was a horrible crash! Did you not hear it?"

"I am not so deaf as that yet," replied the old maid. "Shut that window; do you not know that currents of air attract lightning?"

Clemence obeyed, dropping the curtain to shut out the flashes of lightning which continued to dart through the heavens; she then approached the fireplace.

"Since you are so afraid of lightning," said her aunt; "which, by the

way, is perfectly ridiculous in a Corandeuil, what induced you to go out upon the balcony? The sleeve of your gown is wet. That is the way one gets cold; afterward, there is nothing but an endless array of syrups and drugs. You ought to change your gown and put on something warmer. Who would ever think of dressing like that in such weather as this?"

"I assure you, aunt, it is not cold. It is because you have a habit of always being near the fire—"

"Ah! habit! when you are my age you will not hint at such a thing. Now, everything goes wonderfully well; you never listen to my advice—you go out in the wind and rain with that flighty Aline and your husband, who has no more sense than his sister; you will pay for it later. Open the curtains, I pray; the storm is over, and I wish to read the Gazette."

The young woman obeyed a second time and stood with her forehead pressed against the glass. The distant rumbling of the thunder announced the end of the storm; but a few flashes still traversed the horizon.

"Aunt," said she, after a moment's silence, "come and look at the Montigny rocks; when the lightning strikes them they look like a file of silver columns or a procession of ghosts."

"What a romantic speech," growled the old lady, never taking her eyes from her paper.

"I assure you I am not romantic the least in the world," replied Clemence. "I simply find the storm a distraction, and here, you know, there is no great choice of pleasures."

"Then you find it dull?"

"Oh, aunt, horribly so!" At these words, pronounced with a heartfelt accent, the young woman dropped into an armchair.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took off her eye-glasses, put the paper upon the table and gazed for several moments at her pretty niece's face, which was tinged with a look of deep melancholy. She then straightened herself up in her chair, and, leaning forward, asked in a low tone:

"Have you had any trouble with your husband?"

"If so, I should not be so bored," replied Clemence, in a gay tone, which she repented immediately, for she continued more calmly:

"No, aunt; Christian is kind, very kind; he is very much attached to me, and full of good-humor and attentions. You have seen how he has allowed me to arrange my apartments to suit myself, even taking down the partition and enlarging the windows; and yet, you know how much he clings to everything that is old about the house. He tries to do everything for

my pleasure. Did he not go to Strasbourg the other day to buy a pony for me, because I thought Titania was too skittish? It would be impossible to show greater kindness.”

”Your husband,” suddenly interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, for she held the praise of others in sovereign displeasure, ”is a Bergenheim like all the Bergenheims present, past, and future, including your little sister-in-law, who appears more as if she had been brought up with boys than at the ‘Sacred Heart.’ He is a worthy son of his father there,” said she, pointing to one of the portraits near the young Royal-Nassau officer; ”and he was the most brutal, unbearable, and detestable of all the dragoons in Lorraine; so much so that he got into three quarrels at Nancy in one month, and at Metz, over a game of checkers, he killed the poor Vicomte de Megrigny, who was worth a hundred of him and danced so well! Some one described Bergenheim as being ‘proud as a peacock, as stubborn as a mule, and as furious as a lion!’ Ugly race! ugly race! What I say to you now, Clemence, is to excuse your husband’s faults, for it would be time lost to try to correct them. However, all men are alike; and since you are Madame de Bergenheim, you must accept your fate and bear it as well as possible. And then, if you have your troubles, you still have your good aunt to whom you can confide them and who will not allow you to be tyrannized over. I will speak to your husband.”

Clemence saw, from the first words of this tirade, that she must arm herself with resignation; for anything which concerned the Bergenheims aroused one of the hobbies which the old maid rode with a most complacent spite; so she settled herself back in her chair like a person who would at least be comfortable while she listened to a tiresome discourse, and busied herself during this lecture caressing with the tip of a very shapely foot the top of one of the andirons.

”But, aunt,” said she at last, when the tirade was over, and she gave a rather drawling expression to her voice, ”I can not understand why you have taken this idea into your head that Christian renders me unhappy. I repeat it, it is impossible that one should be kinder to me than he, and, on my side, I have the greatest respect and friendship for him.”

”Very well, if he is such a pearl of husbands, if you live so much like turtle-doves-and, to tell the truth, I do not believe a word of it—what causes this ennui of which you complain and which has been perfectly noticeable for some time? When I say ennui, it is more than that; it is sadness, it is grief? You grow thinner every day; you are as pale as a ghost; just at this moment, your complexion is gone; you will end by being a regular fright. They say that it is the fashion to be pale nowadays; a silly notion, indeed, but it will not last, for complexion makes the woman.”

The old lady said this like a person who had her reasons for not liking pale complexions, and who gladly took pimples for roses.

Madame de Bergenheim bowed her head as if to acquiesce in this decision, and then resumed in her drawling voice:

"I know that I am very unreasonable, and I am often vexed with myself for having so little control over my feelings, but it is beyond my strength. I have a tired sensation, a disgust for everything, something which I can not overcome. It is an inexplicable physical and moral languor, for which, for this reason, I see no remedy. I am weary and I suffer; I am sure it will end in my being ill. Sometimes I wish I were dead. However, I have really no reason to be unhappy. I suppose I am happy—I ought to be happy."

"Truly, I can not understand in the least the women of today. Formerly, upon exciting occasions, we had a good nervous attack and all was over; the crisis passed, we became amiable again, put on rouge and went to a ball. Now it is languor, ennui, stomach troubles—all imagination and humbug! The men are just as bad, and they call it spleen! Spleen! a new discovery, an English importation! Fine things come to us from England; to begin with, the constitutional government! All this is perfectly ridiculous. As for you, Clemence, you ought to put an end to such childishness. Two months ago, in Paris, you did not have any of the rest that you enjoy here. I had serious reasons for wishing to delay my departure; my apartment to refurnish, my neuralgia which still troubles me—and Constance, who had just been in the hands of the doctor, was hardly in a condition to travel, poor creature! You would listen to nothing; we had to submit to your caprices, and now—"

"But, aunt, you admitted yourself that it was the proper thing for me to do, to join my husband. Was it not enough, and too much, to have left him to pass the entire winter alone here while I was dancing in Paris?"

"It was very proper, of course, and I do not blame you. But why does the very thing you so much desired two months ago bore you so terribly now? In Paris you talked all the time of Bergenheim, longed only for Bergenheim, you had duties to fulfil, you wished to be with your husband; you bothered and wore me out with your conjugal love. When back at Bergenheim, you dream and sigh for Paris. Do not shake your head; I am an old aunt to whom you pay no heed, but who sees clearly yet. Will you do me the favor to tell me what it is that you regret in Paris at this time of the year, when there are no balls or parties, and not one human being worth visiting, for all the people you know are in the country? Is it because—"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil did not finish her sentence, but she put a severity into these three words which seemed to condense all the quintessence of prudery that a celibacy of sixty years could coagulate in an old maid's heart.

Clemence raised her eyes to her aunt's face as if to demand an explanation.

It was such a calm, steady glance that the latter could not help being impressed by it.

"Well," said she, softening her voice, "there is no necessity for putting on such queenly airs; we are here alone, and you know that I am a kind aunt to you. Now, then, speak freely—have you left anything or any person in Paris, the remembrance of which makes your sojourn here more tiresome than it really is? Any of your adorers of the winter?"

"What an idea, aunt! Did I have any adorers?" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, quickly, as if trying to conceal by a smile the rosy flush that mounted to her cheeks.

"And what if you should have some, child?" continued the old maid, to whom curiosity lent an unaccustomed coaxing accent to her voice, "where would be the harm? Is it forbidden to please? When one is of good birth, must one not live in society and hold one's position there? One need not bury one's self in a desert at twenty-three years of age, and you really are charming enough to inspire love; you understand, I do not say, to experience it; but when one is young and pretty conquests are made almost unwittingly. You are not the first of the family to whom that has happened; you are a Corandeuil. Now, then, my good Clemence, what troubled heart is pining for you in Paris? Is it Monsieur de Mauleon?"

"Monsieur de Mauleon!" exclaimed the young woman, bursting into laughter; "he, a heart! and a troubled one, too! Oh, aunt, you do him honor! Monsieur de Mauleon, who is past forty-five years old and wears stays! an audacious man who squeezes his partners' hands in the dance and looks at them with passionate glances! Oh! Monsieur de Mauleon!"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil sanctioned by a slight grimace of her thin lips her niece's burst of gayety, when, with one hand upon her heart, she rolled her sparkling eyes in imitation of the languishing air of her unfortunate adorer.

"Perhaps it is Monsieur d'Arzenac?"

"Monsieur d'Arzenac is certainly very nice; he has perfect manners; it may be that he did not disdain to chat with me; on my side, I found his conversation very entertaining; but you may rest assured that he did not think of me nor I of him. Besides, you know that he is engaged to marry Mademoiselle de la Neuville."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut?" continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, with the persistency with which aged people follow an idea, and as if determined to pass in review all the young men of their acquaintance until she had discovered her niece's secret.

The latter was silent a moment before replying.

"How can you think of such a thing, aunt?" said she at last, "a man with such a bad reputation, who writes books that one hardly dares read, and plays that it's almost a sin to witness! Did you not hear Madame de Pontivers say that a young woman who cared for her reputation would permit his visits very rarely?"

"Madame de Pontivers is a prude, whom I can not endure, with her show of little, grimaces and her pretentious, outrageous mock-modesty. Did she not take it into her head this winter to constitute me her chaperon? I gave her to understand that a widow forty years old was quite old enough to go about alone! She has a mania for fearing that she may be compromised. The idea of turning up her nose at Monsieur de Gerfaut! What presumption! He certainly is too clever ever to solicit the honor of being bored to death in her house; for he is clever, very clever. I never could understand your dislike for him, nor your haughty manner of treating him; especially, during the latter part of our stay in Paris."

"One is not mistress of one's dislikes or affections, aunt. But to reply to your questions, I will say that you may rest assured that none of these gentlemen, nor any of those whom you might name, has the slightest effect upon my state of mind. I am bored because it probably is my nature to need distractions, and there are none in this deserted place. It is an involuntary disagreeableness, for which I reproach myself and which I hope will pass away. Rest assured, that the root of the evil does not lie in my heart."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil understood by the cold and rather dry tone in which these words were spoken that her niece wished to keep her secret, if she had one; she could not prevent a gesture of anger as she saw her advances thus repelled, but felt that she was no wiser than when she began the conversation. She manifested her disappointment by pushing the dog aside with her foot—the poor thing was perfectly innocent!—and in a cross tone, which was much more familiar than her former coaxing one, she continued:

"Very well, since I am wrong, since your husband adores you and you him, since, to sum it all up, your heart is perfectly tranquil and free, your conduct is devoid of common-sense, and I advise you to change it. I warn you that all this hypochondria, paleness, and languor are caprices which are very disagreeable to others. There is a Provence proverb which says: Vaillance de Blacas, prudence de Pontevez, caprice de Corandeuil. If there was not such a saying, it should be created for you, for you have something incomprehensible enough in your character to make a saint swear. If anybody should know you, it is I, who brought you up. I do not wish to reproach you, but you gave me trouble enough; you were a most wayward, capricious, and fantastic creature, a spoiled child—"

"Aunt," interrupted Clemence, with heightened color in her pale cheeks,

"you have told me of my faults often enough for me to know them, and, if they were not corrected, it was not your fault, for you never spared me scoldings. If I had not been so unfortunate as to lose my mother when I was a baby, I should not have given you so much trouble."

Tears came into the young woman's eyes, but she had enough control over herself to keep them from streaming down her burning cheeks. Taking a journal from the table, she opened it, in order to conceal her emotion and to put an end to this conversation, which had become painful to her. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, on her side, carefully replaced her eye-glasses upon her nose, and, solemnly stretching herself upon her chair, she turned over the leaves of the 'Gazette de France,' which she had neglected so long.

Silence reigned for some moments in the room. The aunt apparently read the paper very attentively. Her niece sat motionless, with her eyes fastened upon the yellow cover of the last number of 'La Mode,' which had chanced to fall into her hands. She aroused herself at last from her reverie and carelessly turned over the leaves of the review in a manner which showed how little interest she felt in it. As she turned the first page a surprised cry escaped her, and her eyes were fastened upon the pamphlet with eager curiosity. Upon the frontispiece, where the Duchesse de Berry's coat-of-arms is engraved, and in the middle of the shield, which was left empty at this time by the absence of the usual fleurs de lys, was sketched with a pencil a bird whose head was surmounted by a baron's coronet.

Curious to know what could have caused her niece so much surprise, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stretched out her neck and gazed for an instant upon the page without seeing, at first, anything extraordinary, but finally her glance rested upon the armorial bearings, and she discovered the new feature added to the royal Bourbon coat-of-arms.

"A cock!" exclaimed she, after a moment's reflection; "a cock upon Madame's shield! What can that mean, 'bon Dieu'! and it is not engraved nor lithographed; it is drawn with a pencil."

"It is not a cock, it is a crowned gerfaut," said Madame de Bergenheim.

"A gerfaut! How do you know what a gerfaut is? At Corandeuil, in your grandfather's time, there was a falconry, and I have seen gerfauts there, but you—I tell you it is a cock, an old French cock; ugly thing! What you take for a coronet—and it really does resemble one—is a badly drawn cock's comb. How did this horrid creature come to be there? I should like to know if such pretty tricks are permitted at the postoffice. People protest against the 'cabinet noir', but it is a hundred times worse if one is permitted to outrage with impunity peaceable families in their own homes. I mean to find out who has played this trick. Will you be so kind as to ring the bell?"

"It really is very strange!" said Madame de Bergenheim, pulling the bell-rope with a vivacity which showed that she shared, if not the indignation, at least the curiosity of her aunt.

A servant in green livery appeared.

"Who went to Remiremont yesterday for the newspapers?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"It was Pere Rousselet, Mademoiselle," replied the servant.

"Where is Monsieur de Bergenheim?"

"Monsieur le Baron is playing billiards with Mademoiselle Aline."

"Send Leonard Rousselet here."

And Mademoiselle de Corandeuil settled herself back in her chair with the dignity of a chancellor about to hold court.

CHAPTER III

A DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD

The servants in the castle of Bergenheim formed a family whose members were far from living in harmony. The Baron managed his household himself, and employed a large number of day-laborers, farm servants, and kitchen-girls, whom the liveried servants treated with great disdain. The rustics, on their side, resisted these privileged lackeys and called them "coxcombs" and "Parisians," sometimes accompanying these remarks with the most expressive blows. Between these tribes of sworn enemies a third class, much less numerous, found them selves in a critical position; these were the two servants brought by Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. It was fortunate for them that their mistress liked large, vigorous men, and had chosen them for their broad, military shoulders; but for that it would have been impossible for them to come out of their daily quarrels safe and sound.

The question of superiority between the two households had been the first apple of discord; a number of personal quarrels followed to inflame them. They fought for their colors the whole time; the Bergenheim livery was red, the Corandeuil green. There were two flags; each exalted his own while throwing that of his adversaries in the mud. Greenhorn and crab were jokes; cucumber and lobster were insults.

Such were the gracious terms exchanged every day between the two parties.

In the midst of this civil war, which was carefully concealed from their masters' eyes, whose severity they feared, lived one rather singular personage. Leonard Rousselet, Pere Rousselet, as he was generally called, was an old peasant who, disheartened with life, had made various efforts to get out of his sphere, but had never succeeded in doing so. Having been successively hairdresser, sexton, school-teacher, nurse, and gardener, he had ended, when sixty years old, by falling back to the very point whence he started. He had no particular employment in M. de Bergenheim's house; he went on errands, cared for the gardens, and doctored the mules and horses; he was a tall man, about as much at ease in his clothing as a dry almond in its shell. A long, dark, yellow coat usually hung about the calves of his legs, which were covered with long, blue woollen stockings, and looked more like vine-poles than human legs; a conformation which furnished daily jokes for the other servants, to which the old man deigned no response save a disdainful smile, grumbling through his teeth, "Menials, peasants without education." This latter speech expressed the late gardener's scorn, for it had been his greatest grief to pass for an uneducated man; and he had gathered from his various conditions a singularly dignified and pretentious way of speaking.

In spite of his self-confidence, it was not without some emotion that Leonard Rousselet responded to this call to appear in the drawing-room before the person he most feared in the chateau. His bearing showed this feeling when he presented himself at the drawing-room door, where he stood as grave and silent as Banquo's ghost. Constance arose at sight of this fantastic figure, barked furiously and darted toward a pair of legs for which she seemed to share the irreverence of the liveried servants; but the texture of the blue stocking and the flesh which covered the tibia were rather too hard morsels for the dowager's teeth; she was obliged to give up the attack and content herself with impotent barks, while the old man, who would gladly have given a month's wages to break her jaw with the tip of his, boot, caressed her with his hand, saying, "Softly, pretty dear! softly, pretty little creature!" in a hypocritical tone.

This courtier-like conduct touched the old lady's heart and softened the severe look upon her face.

"Stop your noise, Constance," said she, "lie down beside your mistress. Rousselet, come nearer."

The old man obeyed, walking across the floor with reverential bows, and taking a position like a soldier presenting arms.

"You were the one," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, "who was sent to Remiremont yesterday? Did you perform all the commissions that were given you?"

"It is not among the impossibilities, Mademoiselle, that I may have neglected some of them," replied the old man, fearing to compromise

himself by a positive affirmative.

"Tell us, then, what you did."

Leonard wiped his nose behind his hat, like a well-bred orator, and, balancing himself upon his legs in a way not at all Bourbonic, he said:

"I went to the city that morning myself because Monsieur le Baron had said the night before that he should hunt to-day, and that the groom was to help Monsieur le Baron drive a wild boar out of the Corne woods. I reached Remiremont; I went to the butcher's; I purchased five kilogrammes of dressed goods—"

"Of dressed goods at the butcher's!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim.

"I would say ten pounds of what uneducated people call pork," said Rousselet, pronouncing this last word in a strangled voice.

"Pass over these details," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. "You went to the post-office."

"I went to the post-office, where I put in letters for Mademoiselle, Madame, Monsieur le Baron, and one from Mademoiselle Aline for Monsieur d'Artigues."

"Aline writing to her cousin! Did you know that?" said the old aunt, turning quickly toward her niece.

"Certainly; they correspond regularly," replied Clemence with a smile which seemed to say that she saw no harm in it.

The old maid shook her head and protruded her under lip, as much as to say: We will attend to this another time.

Madame de Bergenheim, who was out of patience at this questioning, began to speak in a quick tone which was a contrast to her aunt's solemn slowness.

"Rousselet," said she, "when you took the newspapers out of the office, did you notice whether the wrappers were intact, or whether they had been opened?"

The good man half concealed his face in his cravat at this precise questioning, and it was with embarrassment that he replied, after a moment's hesitation:

"Certainly, Madame—as to the wrappers—I do not accuse the postmaster—"

"If the journals were sealed when you received them, you are the only one who could have opened them."

Rousselet straightened himself up to his full height, and, giving to his nut-cracker face the most dignified look possible, he said in a solemn tone:

"With due deference to you, Madame, Leonard Rousselet is well known. Fifty-seven years old on Saint-Hubert's day, I am incapable of opening newspapers. When they have been read at the chateau and they send me with them to the cure, I do not say—perhaps on my way—it is a recreation—and then the cure is Jean Bartou, son of Joseph Bartou, the tilemaker. But to read the newspaper before my masters have done so! Never! Leonard Rousselet is an old man incapable of such baseness. Baptized when a child; fifty-seven years on Saint-Hubert's day."

"When you speak of your pastor, do so in a more becoming manner," interrupted Mademoiselle de Colrandeuil, although she herself in private did not speak of the plebeian priest in very respectful terms. But if Joseph Bartou's son was always the son of Joseph Bartou to her, she meant that he should be Monsieur le Cure to the peasants.

Madame de Bergenheim had not been much affected by Pere Rousselet's harangue, and shook her head impatiently, saying in an imperative tone:

"I am certain that the newspapers have been opened by you, or by some person to whom you have given them, and I wish to know at once by whom."

Rousselet dropped his pose of a Roman senator; passing his hand behind his ears, a familiar gesture with people when in embarrassing positions, he continued less emphatically:

"I stopped on my way back at La Fauconnerie, at the 'Femme-sans-Tete Inn'."

"And what were you doing in a tavern?" interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil severely. "You know it is not intended that the servants in this house should frequent taverns and such low places, which are not respectable and corrupt the morals of the lower classes."

"Servants! lower classes! Old aristocrat!" growled Rousselet secretly; but, not daring to show his ill humor, he replied in a bland voice:

"If Mademoiselle had gone the same road that I did, with the same conveyance, she would know that it is a rather thirsty stretch. I stopped at the 'Femme-sans-Tete' to wash the dust down my parched throat. Whereupon Mademoiselle Reine—the daughter of Madame Gobillot, the landlady of the inn—Mademoiselle Reine asked me to allow her to look at the yellow-journal in which there are fashions for ladies; I asked her why; she said it was so that she might see how they made their bonnets, gowns, and other finery in Paris. The frivolity of women!"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil threw herself back in her chair and gave way to an access of hilarity in which she rarely indulged.

"Mademoiselle Gobillot reading La Mode! Mademoiselle Gobillot talking of gowns, shawls, and cashmeres! Clemence, what do you say to that? You will see, she will be ordering her bonnets from Herbault! Ha! ha! This is what is called the progress of civilization, the age of light!"

"Mademoiselle Gobillot," said Clemence, fixing a penetrating glance upon the old man, "was not the only one who looked at La Mode. Was there no other person in the tavern who saw it?"

"Madame," replied Rousselet, forced from his last refuge, "there were two young men taking their refectation, and one of them wore a beard no longer than a goat's. Madame will pardon me if I allow myself to use this vulgar expression, but Madame wished to know all."

"And the other young man?"

"The other had his facial epidermis shaved as close as a lady's or mine. He was the one who held the journal while his comrade was smoking outside the door."

Madame de Bergenheim made no further inquiries, but fell into a profound reverie. With eyes fixed upon the last number of La Mode, she seemed to study the slightest lines of the sketch that had been made thereon, as if she hoped to find a solution to the mystery. Her irregular breathing, and the bright flush which tinged her usually pale cheeks, would have denoted to an eye-witness one of those tempests of the heart, the physical manifestations of which are like those of a fever. The pale winter flower dying under the snow had suddenly raised its drooping head and recovered its color; the melancholy against which the young woman had so vainly struggled had disappeared as if by enchantment. A little bird surmounted by a coronet, the whole rather badly sketched, was the strange talisman that had produced this change.

"They were commercial travellers," said the old aunt; "they always pretend to know everything. One of them, doubtless, when reading the well-known name of Monsieur de Bergenheim upon the wrapper, sketched the animal in question. These gentlemen of industry usually have a rather good education! But this is giving the affair more importance than it merits. Leonard Rousselet," said she, raising her voice as a judge does in court when pronouncing his charge, "you were wrong to let anything addressed to your master leave your hands. We will excuse you this time, but I warn you to be more careful in future; when you go to Madame Gobillot's, you may say to Mademoiselle Reine, from me, that if she wishes to read La Mode I shall be delighted to procure a subscriber to one of our journals. You may retire now."

Without waiting for this invitation to be repeated, Rousselet backed out

of the room like an ambassador leaving the royal presence, escorted by Constance acting as master of ceremonies. Not having calculated the distance, he had just bumped against the door, when it suddenly opened and a person of extreme vivacity bounded into the middle of the room.

It was a very young and petite lady, whose perfectly developed form predicted an inclination to stoutness in the future. She belonged to the Bergenheim family, if one could credit the resemblance between her characteristic features and several of the old portraits in the room; she wore a dark-brown riding-habit, a gray hat perched on one side, showing on the left a mass of very curly, bright blond hair. This coiffure and the long green veil, floating at each movement like the plume in a helmet, gave a singularly easy air to the fresh face of this pretty amazon, who brandished, in guise of a lance, a billiard cue.

"Clemence," she exclaimed, "I have just beaten Christian; I made the red ball, I made the white, and then the double stroke; I made all! Mademoiselle, I have just beaten Christian two games; is it not glorious? He made only eighteen points in a single game. Pere Rousselet, I have just beaten Christian! Do you know how to play billiards?"

"Mademoiselle Aline, I am absolutely ignorant of the game," replied the old man, with as gracious a smile as was possible, while he tried to recover his equilibrium.

"You are needed no longer, Rousselet," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil; "close the door as you go out."

When she had been obeyed, the old maid turned gravely toward Aline, who was still dancing about the room, having seized her sister-in-law's hands in order to force her to share her childish joy.

"Mademoiselle," said she in a severe tone, "is it the custom at the 'Sacred Heart' to enter a room without greeting the persons who are in it, and to jump about like a crazy person? a thing that is never permitted even in a peasant's house."

Aline stopped short in the midst of her dance and blushed a trifle; she caressed the pug dog, instead of replying, for she knew as well as Rousselet that it was the surest way of softening the old maid's heart. The cajolery was lost this time.

"Do not touch Constance, I beg of you," exclaimed the aunt, as if a dagger had been raised against the object of her love, "do not soil this poor beast with your hands. What dreadful thing have you on your fingers? Have you just come out of an indigo bag?"

The young girl blushed still deeper and gazed at her pretty hands, which were really a little daubed, and began to wipe them with an embroidered handkerchief which she took from her pocket.

"It was the billiards," she said, in a low voice, "it is the blue chalk they rub the cue with in order to make good shots and caroms."

"Make good shots! Caroms! Will you be so good as to spare us your slang speeches," continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who seemed to become more crabbed as the young girl's confusion increased. "What a fine education for a young lady! and one who has just come from the 'Sacred Heart'! One that has taken five prizes not fifteen days ago! I really do not know what to think of those ladies, your teachers! And now I suppose you are going to ride. Billiards and horses, horses and billiards! It is fine! It is admirable!"

"But, Mademoiselle," said Aline, raising her large blue eyes, which were on the verge of tears, "it is vacation now, and there is no wrong in my playing a game of billiards with my brother; we have no billiards at the 'Sacred Heart,' and it is such fun! It is like riding; the doctor said that it would be very healthful for me, and Christian hoped that it might make me grow a little."

As she said these words, the young girl glanced into the mirror in order to see whether her brother's hopes had been realized; for her small stature was her sole anxiety. But this glance was as quick as a flash, for she feared that the severe old maid would make this act of coquetry serve as the text for another sermon.

"You are not my niece, and I am thankful for it," continued the old lady. "I am too old to begin another education; thank goodness, one is quite enough! I have no authority over you, and your conduct is your brother's concern. The advice which I give you is entirely disinterested; your amusements are not such as seem to me proper for a young girl of good birth. It may be possible that it is the fashion today, so I will say no more about it; but there is one thing more serious, upon which I should advise you to reflect. In my youth, a young lady never was allowed to write letters except to her father and mother. Your letters to your cousin d'Artigues are inconsiderate—do not interrupt me—they are inconsiderate, and I should advise you to mend your ways."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil arose, and, as she had found an opportunity to read three sermons in one forenoon, she could not say, like Titus, "I have wasted my morning." She left the room with a majestic step, escorted by her dog and satisfied with herself, bestowing an ironical curtsy on the young girl, which the latter did not think it necessary to return.

"How hateful your aunt is!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Bergenheim to her sister-in-law, when they were alone. "Christian says that I must pay no attention to her, because all women become like her if they never marry. As for myself, I know very well that if I am an old maid I shall try not to hurt others' feelings—I, inconsiderate! When she can think of

nothing more to say, she scolds me about my cousin. It is hardly worth while, for what we write about! Alphonse wrote of nothing, in his last letter, but of the partridge he had shot and his hunting costume; he is such a boy! But why do you not say something? You sit there speechless; are you angry with me, too?"

She approached Clemence and was about to seat herself in her lap, when the latter arose to avoid this loving familiarity.

"So you really have beaten Christian," said she, in a listless tone; "are you going for a ride now? Your habit is very becoming."

"Truly? oh! I am so glad!" replied the young girl, planting herself before the glass to look at her pretty figure. She pulled down her waist, adjusted the folds of the skirt of her dress and arranged her veil, placed her hat on her head with a little more jaunty air, turned three quarters around to get a better view of her costume; in one word, she went through the coquettish movements that all pretty women learn upon entering society. On the whole, she seemed very well pleased with her examination, for she smiled and showed a row of small teeth which were as white as milk.

"I am sorry now," said she, "that I did not send for a black hat; my hair is so light that gray makes me look ugly. Do you not think so? Why do you not reply, Clemence? One can not get a word out of you to-day; is it because you have your neuralgia?"

"I have a trifle of it," said Madame de Bergenheim, in order to give some pretext for her preoccupation.

"Now, then, you ought to come with us for a ride; the fresh air will do you good. Look how fine the weather is now; we will have a good gallop. Will you? I will help you put on your habit, and in five minutes you will be ready. Listen, I hear them in the yard now. I am going to tell Christian to have your horse saddled; come."

Aline took her sister-in-law by the hand, led her into the next room and opened the window to see what was going on outside, where the cracking of whips and several voices were to be heard. A servant was walking up and down the yard leading a large horse which he had just brought from the stable; the Baron was holding a smaller one, which bore a lady's saddle, while he carefully examined all the buckles. As he heard the window open above his head, he turned and bowed to Clemence with much chivalrous gallantry.

"You still refuse to go with us?" he asked.

"Is Aline going to ride Titania," replied Madame de Bergenheim, making an effort to speak; "I am sure the mare will end by playing her some trick."

The young girl, who had a fancy for Titania because the skittish creature had the attraction of forbidden fruit, nudged her sister with her elbow, and made a little grimace.

"Aline is afraid of nothing," said the Baron; "we will enlist her with the hussars as soon as she leaves the 'Sacred Heart.' Come, Aline."

The young girl kissed the Baroness, gathered up her skirt, and in a few moments was in the yard patting the neck of her dear brown mare.

"Up with you!" said Christian, taking his sister's foot in one hand while he raised her with the other, placing her in the saddle as easily as he would a six-year-old child. Then he mounted his large horse, saluted his wife, and the couple, starting at a trot, soon disappeared down the avenue, which began at the gate of the courtyard.

As soon as they were out of sight, Clemence went to her room, took a shawl from her bed, and went rapidly down a secret stairway which led into the gardens.

CHAPTER IV

THE GALLANT IN THE GARDEN

Madame de Bergenheim's apartments occupied the first floor of the wing on the left side of the house. On the ground floor were the library, a bathroom, and several guest-chambers. The large windows had a modern look, but they were made to harmonize with the rest of the house by means of grayish paint. At the foot of this facade was a lawn surrounded by a wall and orange-trees planted in tubs, forming a sort of English garden, a sanctuary reserved for the mistress of the castle, and which brought her, as a morning tribute, the perfume of its flowers and the coolness of its shade.

Through the tops of the fir-trees and the tuliptrees, which rose above the group of smaller shrubs, the eye could follow the winding river until it finally disappeared at the extremity of the valley. It was this picturesque view and a more extensive horizon which had induced the Baroness to choose this part of the Gothic manor for her own private apartments.

After crossing the lawn, the young woman opened a gate concealed by shrubs and entered the avenue by the banks of the river. This avenue described a curve around the garden, and led to the principal entrance of the chateau. Night was approaching, the countryside, which had been momentarily disturbed by the storm, had resumed its customary serenity.

The leaves of the trees, as often happens after a rain, looked as fresh as a newly varnished picture. The setting sun cast long shadows through the trees, and their interlaced branches looked like a forest of boa-constrictors.

Clemence advanced slowly under this leafy dome, which became darker and more mysterious every moment, with head bent and enveloped in a large cashmere shawl which fell in irregular folds to the ground. Madame de Bergenheim had one of those faces which other women would call not at all remarkable, but which intelligent men ardently admire. At the first glance she seemed hardly pretty; at the second, she attracted involuntary admiration; afterward, it was difficult to keep her out of one's thoughts. Her features, which taken separately might seem irregular, were singularly harmonious, and, like a thin veil which tempers a too dazzling light, softened the whole expression. Her light chestnut hair was arranged about the temples in ingenious waves; while her still darker eyebrows gave, at times, an imposing gravity to her face. The same contrast was to be found in the mouth; the short distance which separated it from the nose would indicate, according to Lavater, unusual energy; but the prominent underlip impregnated her smile with enchanting voluptuousness. Her rather clearcut features, the exceeding brilliancy of her brown eyes, which seemed like diamonds set in jet, would, perhaps, have given to the whole rather too strong a character had not these eyes when veiled given to their dazzling rays a glamour of indescribable softness.

The effect produced by this face might be compared to that of a prism, every facet of which reflects a different color. The ardor burning under this changeable surface, which, through some sudden cause, betrayed its presence, was so deeply hidden, however, that it seemed impossible to fathom it completely. Was she a coquette, or simply a fashionable lady, or a devotee? In one word, was she imbued with the most egotistical pride or the most exalted love? One might suppose anything, but know nothing; one remained undecided and thoughtful, but fascinated, the mind plunged into ecstatic contemplation such as the portrait of Monna Lisa inspires. An observer might have perceived that she had one of those hearts, so finely strung, from which a clever hand might make incomparable harmonies of passion gush; but perhaps he would be mistaken. So many women have their souls only in their eyes!

Madame de Bergenheim's reverie rendered the mysterious and impenetrable veil which usually enveloped her countenance more unfathomable yet. What sentiment made her bend her head and walk slowly as she meditated? Was it the ennui of which she had just complained to her aunt? Was it pure melancholy? The monotonous ripple of the stream, the singing of the birds in the woods, the long golden reflections under the trees, all seemed to unite in filling the soul with sadness; but neither the murmuring water, the singing birds, nor the sun's splendor was paid any attention to by Madame de Bergenheim; she gave them neither a glance nor a sigh. Her meditation was not reverie, but thought; not thoughts of the

past, but of the present. There was something precise and positive in the rapid, intelligent glance which flashed from her eyes when she raised them; it was as if she had a lucid foresight of an approaching drama.

A moment after she had passed over the wooden bridge which led from the avenue, a man wearing a blouse crossed it and followed her. Hearing the sound of hurried steps behind her, she turned and saw, not two steps from her, the stranger who, during the storm, had vainly tried to attract her attention. There was a moment's silence. The young man stood motionless, trying to catch his breath, which had been hurried, either by emotion or rapid walking. Madame de Bergenheim, with head thrown back and widely opened eyes, looked at him with a more agitated than surprised look.

"It is you," exclaimed he, impulsively, "you whom I had lost and now find again!"

"What madness, Monsieur!" she replied, in a low voice, putting out her hand as if to stop him.

"I beg of you, do not look at me so! Let me gaze at you and assure myself that it is really you—I have dreamed of this moment for so long! Have I not paid dear enough for it? Two months passed away from you—from heaven! Two months of sadness, grief, and unhappiness! But you are pale! Do you suffer, too?"

"Much, at this moment."

"Clemence!"

"Call me Madame, Monsieur de Gerfaut," she interrupted, severely.

"Why should I disobey you? Are you not my lady, my queen?"

He bent his knee as a sign of bondage, and tried to seize her hand, which she immediately withdrew. Madame de Bergenheim seemed to pay very little attention to the words addressed her; her uneasy glances wandered in every direction, into the depths of the bushes and the slightest undulations of the ground. Gerfaut understood this pantomime. He glanced, in his turn, over the place, and soon discovered at some distance a more propitious place for such a conversation as theirs. It was a semicircular recess in one of the thickets in the park. A rustic seat under a large oak seemed to have been placed there expressly for those who came to seek solitude and speak of love. From there, one could see the approach of danger, and, in case of alarm, the wood offered a secure retreat. The young man had had enough experience in gallant strategies to seize the advantage of this position, and wended his steps in that direction while continuing to converse. It may be that instinct which, in a critical situation, makes us follow mechanically an unknown impulse; it may be that the same idea of prudence

had also struck her, for Madame de Bergenheim walked beside him.

"If you could understand what I suffered," said he, "when I found that you had left Paris! I could not discover at first where you had gone; some spoke of Corandeuil, others of Italy. I thought, from this hasty departure and the care you took to conceal your abiding-place, that you were fleeing from me. Oh! tell me that I was mistaken; or, if it is true that you wished to separate yourself from me, say that this cruel resolve had left your mind, and that you will pardon me for following you! You will pardon me, will you not? If I trouble or annoy you, lay the blame entirely upon my love, which I can not restrain, and which drives me at times to do the most extravagant things; call it reckless, insane love, if you will; but believe it to be true and devoted!"

Clemence replied to this passionate tirade by simply shaking her head as a child does who hears the buzzing of a wasp and fears its sting; then, as they reached the bench, she said with affected surprise:

"You have made a mistake, this is not your road; you should have gone over the bridge."

There was a little palpable insincerity in these words; for if the road which they had taken did not lead to the bridge, neither did it lead to the chateau, and the mistake, if there was one, was mutual.

"Listen to me, I beg of you," replied the lover, with 'a supplicating glance, "I have so many things to say to you! I beg of you, grant me one moment."

"Afterward, will you obey me?"

"Only a few words, and I will then do all that you wish."

She hesitated a moment; then, her conscience doubtless lulled by this promise, she seated herself and made a gesture for M. de Gerfaut to do likewise. The young man did not make her repeat this invitation, but hypocritically seated himself on the farther end of the seat.

"Now, talk reasonably," she said, in a calm tone. "I suppose that you are on your way to Germany or Switzerland, and as you passed near me you wished to favor me with a call. I ought to be proud of this mark of respect from a man so celebrated as you are, although you are rather hiding your light under this garb. We are not very strict as to dress in the country, but, really, yours is quite unceremonious. Tell me, where did you find that headdress?"

These last words were spoken with the careless, mocking gayety of a young girl.

Gerfaut smiled, but he took off his cap. Knowing the importance that

women attach to little things, and what an irreparable impression an ugly cravat or unblacked boots might produce in the most affecting moments, he did not wish to compromise himself by a ridiculous head-gear. He passed his hand through his hair, pushing it back from his large, broad forehead, and said softly:

"You know very well that I am not going to Germany or Switzerland, and that Bergenheim is the end of my journey, as it has been its aim."

"Then will you be so good as to tell me what your intention was in taking such a step, and whether you have realized how strange, inconsiderate, and in every way extravagant your conduct is?"

"I have realized it; I know it. You were here, I came because there is a loadstone within you, that is my heart's sole attraction, and I must follow my heart. I came because I wanted to see your beautiful eyes again, to be intoxicated by your sweet voice, because to live away from you is impossible for me; because your presence is as necessary to my happiness as air to my life; because I love you. That is why I came. Is it possible that you do not understand me, that you will not pardon me?"

"I do not wish to believe that you are speaking seriously," said Clemence, with increased severity. "What sort of an idea can you have of me, if you think I will allow such conduct? And then, even if I were foolish enough for that—which I never shall be—to what would it lead? You know perfectly well that it is impossible for you to come to the castle, as you are not acquainted with Monsieur de Bergenheim, and I certainly shall not introduce you to him. My aunt is here, and she would persecute me the whole day long with questions! Mon Dieu! how you disturb me! how unhappy you make me!"

"Your aunt never goes out, so she will not see me, unless I am officially received at the chateau, and then there could be no danger."

"But the servants she brought with her, and mine, who have seen you in her house! I tell you, the whole thing is as perilous as it is crazy, and you will make me die of fright and chagrin."

"If one of those servants should chance to meet me, how could he ever recognize me in this costume? Do not fear, I shall be prudent! I would live in a log cabin, if necessary, for the joy of seeing you occasionally."

Madame de Bergenheim smiled disdainfully.

"That would be quite pastoral," she replied; "but I believe that such disguises are seldom seen now except upon the stage. If this is a scene out of a play, which you wish to rehearse in order to judge its effect, I warn you that it is entirely lost upon me, and that I consider the play

itself very ill-timed, improper, and ridiculous. Besides, for a man of talent and a romantic poet you have not exhibited any very great imagination. It is a classical imitation, nothing better. There is something like it in mythology, I believe. Did not Apollo disguise himself as a shepherd?"

Nothing more is to be feared by a lover than a witty woman who does not love or loves but half; he is obliged to wear velvet gloves in all such sentimental controversies; he owes it to himself out of propriety first, out of prudence afterward. For it is not a question of taking part in a conversation for the simple pleasure of brilliant repartee; and while he applies himself carefully to play his part well, he feels that he has been dexterously cut to pieces with a well-sharpened knife.

Gerfaut indulged in these unpleasant reflections while gazing at Madame de Bergenheim. Seated up on the bench as proudly as a queen upon her throne, with shining eyes, scornful lips, and arms tightly folded under her cashmere shawl, with that haughty gesture familiar to her, the young woman looked as invulnerable under this light wrap as if she had been covered with Ajax's shield, formed, if we can credit Homer, of seven bulls' hides and a sheet of brass.

After gazing at this scornful face for a moment, Gerfaut glanced at his coarse blouse, his leggings, and muddy boots. His usual dainty ways made the details of this costume yet more shocking to him, and he exaggerated this little disaster. He felt degraded and almost ridiculous. The thought took away for a moment his presence of mind; he began mechanically to twirl his hat in his hands, exactly as if he had been Pere Rousselet himself. But instead of being hurtful to him, this awkwardness served him better than the eloquence of Rousseau or the coolness of Richelieu. Was it not a genuine triumph for Clemence to reduce a man of his recognized talent, who was usually anything but timid, to this state of embarrassment? What witty response, what passionate speech could equal the flattery of this poet with bent head and this expression of deep sadness upon his face?

Madame de Bergenheim continued her raillery, but in a softer tone.

"This time, instead of staying in a cabin, the god of poetry has descended to a tavern. Have you not established your general headquarters at La Fauconnerie?"

"How did you know that?"

"By the singular visiting-card that you drew in La Mode. Do I not know your coat-of-arms? An expressive one, as my aunt would say."

At these words, which probably referred to some letters, doubtless read without very much anger, since they were thus recalled, Gerfaut took courage.

"Yes," said he, "I am staying at La Fauconnerie; but I can not stay there any longer, for I think your servants make the tavern their pleasure-ground. I must come to some decision. I have two propositions to submit to you: the first is, that you will allow me to see you occasionally; there are numerous promenades about here; you go out alone, so it would be very easy."

"Let us hear the second," said Clemence, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"If you will not grant my first, I beg of you to persuade your aunt that she is ill and to take her with you to Plombieres or Baden. The season is not very far advanced; there, at least, I should be able to see you."

"Let us end this folly," said the Baroness; "I have listened patiently to you; now, in your turn, listen to me. You will be sensible, will you not? You will leave me and go. You will go to Switzerland, and return to the Montanvert, where you met me for the first time, which I shall always remember, if you, yourself, do not make it painful for me to do so. You will obey me, Octave, will you not? Give me this proof of your esteem and friendship. You know very well that it is impossible for me to grant what you ask; believe me, it is painful to me to be forced to refuse you. So, say farewell to me; you shall see me again next winter in Paris. Adieu!"

She arose and extended her hand; he took it, but, thinking to profit by the emotion betrayed by Madame de Bergenheim's voice, he exclaimed in a sort of transport:

"No! I will not wait until next winter to see you. I was about to submit to your will; if you repulse me I will consult only myself; if you repulse me, Clemence, I warn you that tomorrow I shall be in your house, seated at your table and admitted to your drawing-room."

"You?"

"I!"

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow."

"And how will you do it, pray?" said she, defiantly.

"That is my secret, Madame," he replied, coldly.

Although her curiosity was greatly aroused, Clemence felt that it would be beneath her to ask any more questions. She replied with an affectation of mocking indifference:

"Since I am to have the pleasure of seeing you tomorrow, I hope you will permit me to leave you today. You know that I am not well, and it is showing me very little attention to allow me to stand here in this wet grass."

She raised her skirt a trifle and extended her foot, showing her slipper, which was really covered with pearly drops of rain. Octave threw himself quickly upon his knees, and, taking a silk handkerchief from his pocket, began to wipe away all traces of the storm. His action was so rapid that Madame de Bergenheim stood for a moment motionless and speechless, but when she felt her foot imprisoned in the hand of the man who had just declared war against her, her surprise gave place to a mingled feeling of impatience and anger. She drew her foot back with a sudden movement, but unfortunately the foot went one way and the slipper another. A fencing-master, who sees his foil carried ten steps away from him by a back stroke, could not feel more astonishment than that felt by Madame de Bergenheim. Her first movement was to place her foot, so singularly undressed, upon the ground; an instinctive horror of the damp, muddy walk made her draw it quickly back. She stood thus with one foot lifted; the movement which she had started to make threw her off her balance and as she was about to fall she extended her hand to find some support. This support proved to be Octave's head, for he still remained upon his knees. With the usual presumption of lovers, he believed that he had the right to give her the assistance which she seemed to ask for, and passed his arm about the slender waist which was bent toward him.

Clemence drew herself up at once, and with frowning brow regained her coolness, standing upright upon one foot, like Cupid in the painting by Gerard; like him, also, she seemed about to fly away, there was so much airy lightness in her improvised attitude.

Many puerile incidents and ridiculous events occur in life, which it would render impossible for the most imperturbable of mandarins to struggle against in order to preserve his gravity. When Louis XIV, this king so expert in courtly ways, dressed his hair alone behind his curtains before presenting himself to the eyes of his courtiers, he feared that this disarray of costume might compromise even his royal majesty. So, upon such authority, if one looks upon a complete head of hair as indispensable to the dignity of manhood, the same reasoning should exist for the covering of one's feet. In less than a second, Madame de Bergenheim comprehended that in such circumstances prudish airs would fail of their effect. Meanwhile, the agreeable side of her position operated within her; she felt unable to keep up the show of anger that she had wished to assume. The involuntary smile upon her lips smoothed her forehead as a ray of sun dissipates a cloud. Thus, disposed to clemency by reflection or fascination, it was in a very sweet and coaxing voice that she said: "Octave, give me my slipper." Gerfaut gazed at the lovely face bent toward him with an expression of childish entreaty, then he glanced with an irresolute air at the trophy which he held in his hand. This slipper, which was as small as Cinderella's, was

not green, but gray, the lining was of rose-colored silk, and the whole was so pretty, coquettish, and dainty that it seemed impossible its owner could be vexed with him if he examined it closely. "I will give it back to you," said he, at last, "on condition that you will allow me to put it on for you."

"As to that, certainly not," said she, in a sharp tone; "I should much prefer to leave it with you and return home as I am."

Gerfaut shook his head and smiled incredulously.

"Think of your delicate lungs and of this terrible mud?"

Clemence drew her foot suddenly back under her skirt, concealing it entirely from the sight of the young man, who gazed at it more than she thought proper. Then she exclaimed, with the obstinacy of a spoiled child:

"Very well! I will return hopping on one foot; I could hop very well when I was young, I should be able to do so now."

To give more weight to this observation, she took two little jumps with a grace and sprightliness worthy of Mademoiselle Taglioni.

Octave arose.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing you waltz," said he; "but I admit that I shall be pleased to witness a new dance, and one executed for me alone."

As he said these words, he pretended to conceal the innocent object of this dispute in his blouse. The pretty dancer saw by this that a compromise would be necessary. Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings; but what can one do when every other exit is closed? Obligated by absolute necessity to accept the conditions imposed upon her, Clemence wished at least to cover this defeat with sufficient dignity, and escape from an awkward position with the honors of war.

"Get down upon your knees, then," she said, haughtily, "and put on my slipper, since you exact it, and let this end this ridiculous scene. I think you should be too proud to regard a maid's privilege as a favor."

"As a favor which a king would envy," replied Gerfaut, in a voice as tender as hers had been disdainful. He put one knee on the ground, placed the little slipper upon the other and seemed to await his enemy's pleasure. But the latter found a new subject for complaint in the pedestal offered her, for she said with increased severity:

"On the ground, Monsieur; and let that end it."

He obeyed, without a reply, after giving her a reproachful glance by which she was as much moved as by his silent obedience. She put out her foot with a more gracious air, and thrust it into the slipper. To be a correct historian, we must admit that this time she left it in the hands which softly pressed it longer than was strictly necessary. When Octave had fastened it with skill but with no haste, he bent his head and pressed his lips to the openwork stocking, through which he could catch a glimpse of white, satiny skin.

"My husband!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, as she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs at the end of the avenue; and without adding a word she fled rapidly toward the chateau. Gerfaut arose from his position no less rapidly and darted into the woods. A rustling of branches which he heard a few steps from him made him uneasy at first, for he feared that an invisible witness had been present at this imprudent interview; but he was soon reassured by the silence which reigned about him.

After the Baron and his sister had passed, he crossed the avenue and soon disappeared over the winding road on the other side of the bridge.

CHAPTER V

ART AND MUSIC

A league below the castle of Bergenheim, the village of La Fauconnerie was situated, at the junction of several valleys the principal of which, by means of an unfrequented road, opened communications between Lorraine and upper Alsatia. This position had been one of some importance in the Middle Ages, at the time when the Vosges were beset with partisans from the two countries, always ready to renew border hostilities, the everlasting plague of all frontiers. Upon a cliff overlooking the village were situated the ruins which had given the village its name; it owed it to the birds of prey [falcons, in French: 'faucons'], the habitual guests of the perpendicular rocks. To render proper justice to whom it belongs, we should add that the proprietors of La Fauconnerie had made it a point at all times to justify this appellation by customs more warlike than hospitable; but for some time the souvenirs of their feudal prowess had slept with their race under the ruins of the manor; the chateau had fallen without the hamlet extending over its ruins; from a bourg of some importance La Fauconnerie had come down to a small village, and had nothing remarkable about it but the melancholy ruins of the chateau.

It would be impossible to imagine anything more miserably prosaic than the houses that bordered the road, in regular order; their one story with its thatched roof blackened by rain; the sorry garden surrounded by a

little low wall and presenting as vegetables patches of cabbage and a few rows of beans, gave an idea of the poverty of its inhabitants. Save the church, which the Bishop of St.-Die had caused to be built, and the manse that had naturally shared this fortunate privilege, only one house rose above the condition of a thatched cottage; this was the tavern called 'La Femme-sans-Tete', and kept by Madame Gobillot, an energetic woman, who did not suggest in the least the name of her establishment, "The Headless Woman."

A large sign shared with the inevitable bunch of juniper, the honor of decorating the entrance and justified an appellation one might have regarded as disrespectful to the fair sex. The original design had been repainted in dazzling colors by the artist charged with restoring the church. This alliance of the profane with the sacred had, it is true, scandalized the parish priest, but he did not dare say a word too much, as Madame Gobillot was one of his most important parishioners. A woman in a rose-colored dress and large panniers, standing upon very high-heeled shoes, displayed upon this sign the rejuvenated costume of 1750; an enormous green fan, which she held in her hand, entirely concealed her face, and it was through this caprice of the painter that the tavern came to have the name it bore.

At the right of this original figure was painted, in a very appetizing manner, a pie out of whose crust peeped a trio of woodcocks' heads. A little farther, upon a bed of watercresses, floated a sort of marine monster, carp or sturgeon, trout or crocodile. The left of the sign was none the less tempting; it represented a roast chicken lying upon its back with its head under its wing, and raising its mutilated legs in the air with a piteous look; it had for its companion a cluster of crabs, of a little too fine a red to have been freshly caught. The whole was interspersed with bottles and glasses brimful of wine. There were stone jugs at each extremity, the sergeants of the rear-rank of this gastronomic platoon, whose corks had blown out and were still flying in space, while a bubbling white foam issued from their necks and fell majestically over their sides after describing a long parabola. A misleading sign, indeed!

A remorseful conscience, or a desire to protect herself from all reproach of mendacity on the part of the customers, had made the owner of the inn place a wire cupboard upon the sill of one of the windows near the door; in which receptacle were some eggs on a plate, a bit of bread with which David might have loaded his sling, a white glass bottle filled with a liquid of some color intended to represent kirsch, but which was in reality only water. This array gave a much more correct idea of the resources of the establishment and formed a menu like an anchorite's repast, and even this it was difficult for the kitchen's resources to maintain.

A carriage-gate led into the yard and to the stables, cart-drivers being the principal habitues of the place; another entrance, the one which was

crowned with the fantastic sign, was flanked by two stone seats and opened directly into the kitchen, which also served as parlor for the guests. A fireplace with an enormous mantel, under which a whole family might warm themselves, occupied the middle of one side of the room. There was a large oven in one corner which opened its huge mouth, the door partly hiding the shovels and tongs employed in its service. Two or three thoroughly smoked hams, suspended from the beams, announced that there was no fear of a famine before the gastronomic massacres of Middlemas. Opposite the window, a large, polished oak dresser displayed an array of large flowered plates and little octagon-shaped glasses. A huge kitchen kettle and some wooden chairs completed the furniture of the room.

From the kitchen one passed into another room, where a permanent table surrounded by benches occupied its entire length. The wall paper, once green, was now a dirty gray; it was embellished by half a dozen black frames representing the story of Prince Poniatowski, who shares the honor of decorating village inns with Paul and Virginia and Wilhelm Tell. On the upper floor—for this aristocratic dwelling had a second story—several sleeping-rooms opened upon a long corridor, at the end of which was a room with two beds in it. This room was very neat and clean, and was destined for any distinguished guests whose unlucky star led them into this deserted country.

That evening the inn presented an unaccustomed lively appearance; the long seats, each side of the door, were occupied by rustics stripping hemp, by some village lads, and three or four cart-drivers smoking short pipes as black as coal. They were listening to two girls who were singing in a most mournful way a song well known to all in this country:

”Au chateau de Belfort
Sont trois jolies filles, etc.”

The light from the hearth, shining through the open door, left this group in the shadow and concentrated its rays upon a few faces in the interior of the kitchen. First, there was Madame Gobillot in person, wearing a long white apron, her head covered with an immense cap. She went from oven to dresser, and from dresser to fireplace with a very important air. A fat little servant disappeared frequently through the dining-room door, where she seemed to be laying the cover for a feast. With that particular dexterity of country girls, she made three trips to carry two plates, and puffed like a porpoise at her work, while the look of frightened amazement showed upon her face that every fibre of her intelligence was under unaccustomed tension. Before the fire, and upon the range, three or four stew-pans were bubbling. A plump chicken was turning on the spit, or, rather, the spit and its victim were turned by a bright-looking boy of about a dozen years, who with one hand turned the handle and with the other, armed with a large cooking-ladle, basted the roast.

But the two principal persons in this picture were a young country girl and a young man seated opposite her, who seemed busily engaged in making her portrait. One would easily recognize, from the airs and elegance of the young woman, that she was the daughter of the house, Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, the one whose passion for fashion-plates had excited Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's anger. She sat as straight and rigid upon her stool as a Prussian corporal carrying arms, and maintained an excessively gracious smile upon her lips, while she made her bust more prominent by drawing back her shoulders as far as she could.

The young painter, on the contrary, was seated with artistic abandon, balancing himself upon a two-legged chair with his heels resting against the mantel; he was dressed in a black velvet coat, and a very small Tam O'Shanter cap of the same material covered the right side of his head, allowing a luxuriant crop of brown hair to be seen upon the other side. This head-dress, accompanied by long moustaches and a pointed beard covering only his chin, gave the stranger's face the mediaeval look he probably desired. This travelling artist was sketching in an album placed upon his knees, with a freedom which indicated perfect confidence in his own talents. A cigar, skilfully held in one corner of his mouth, did not prevent him from warbling between each puff some snatches of Italian airs of which he seemed to possess a complete repertoire. In spite of this triple occupation he sustained a conversation with the ease of a man who, like Caesar, could have dictated to three secretaries at once if necessary.

"Dell' Assiria, ai semidei
Aspirar—"

"I have already asked you not to purse up your mouth so, Mademoiselle Reine; it gives you a Watteau air radically bourgeois."

"What sort of air does it give me?" she asked, anxiously.

"A Watteau, Regence, Pompadour air. You have a large mouth, and we will leave it natural, if you please."

"I have a large mouth!" exclaimed Reine, blushing with anger; "how polite you are!"

And she pinched up her lips until she reduced them to nearly the size of Montmorency cherries.

"Stop this vulgar way of judging of art, queen of my heart. Learn that there is nothing more appetizing than a large mouth. I do not care for rosebud mouths!"

"If it is the fashion!" murmured the young girl, in a pleased tone, as she spread out horizontally her vermilion lips, which might have extended from ear to ear, not unlike—if we can credit that slanderer,

Bussy-Rabutin-the amorous smile of Mademoiselle de la Valliere.

"Why did you not let me put on my gold necklace?"

That would have given my portrait a smarter look. Sophie Mitoux had hers painted with a coral comb and earrings. How shabby this style is!"

"I beg of you, my good Reine, let me follow my own fancy; an artist is a being of inspiration and spontaneity. Meanwhile, you make your bust too prominent; there is no necessity for you to look as if you had swallowed a whale. L'art n'est pas fait pour toi, tu n'en as pas besoin. Upon my word, you have a most astonishing bust; a genuine Rubens."

Madame Gobillot was an austere woman, though an innkeeper, and watched over her daughter with particular care, lest any ill-sounding or insidious expression should reach her child's ear. Considering the company which frequented the house, the task was not easy. So she was shocked at the young man's last words, and although she did not quite understand his meaning, for that very reason she thought she scented a concealed poison more dangerous for Mademoiselle Reine than the awful words used by the drivers. She dared not, however, show her displeasure to a customer, and one who seemed disposed to spend money freely; and, as usual in such circumstances, she vented her displeasure upon the persons immediately under her charge.

"Hurry now, Catherine! Will you never finish setting the table? I told you before to put on the Britannia; these gentlemen are used to eating with silver. Listen to me when I am talking to you. Who washed these glasses? What a shame! You are as afraid of water as a mad-dog. And you! what are you staring at that chicken for, instead of basting it? If you let it burn you shall go to bed without any supper. If it is not provoking!" she continued, in a scolding tone, visiting her stewpans one after another, "everything is dried up; a fillet that was as tender as it could be will be scorched! This is the third time that I have diluted the gravy. Catherine! bring me a dish. Now, then, make haste."

"One thing is certain," interrupted the artist, "that Gerfaut is making a fool of me. I do not see what can have become of him. Tell me, Madame Gobillot, are you certain that an amateur of art and the picturesque, travelling at this hour, would not be eaten by wolves or plundered by robbers in these mountains?"

"Our mountains are safe, Monsieur," replied the landlady, with offended dignity; "except for the pedler who was assassinated six months ago and whose body was found in the Combe-aux-Renards—"

"And the driver who was stopped three weeks ago in the Fosse," added Mademoiselle Reine; "the thieves did not quite kill him, but he is still in the hospital at Remiremont."

"Oh! that is enough to make one's hair stand on end! This is worse than the forest of Bondy! Truly, if I knew what direction my friend took this morning, I would follow him with my pistols."

"Here is Fritz," said Madame Gobillot. "He met a stranger in the woods who gave him ten sous for telling him the way to Bergenheim. From his description, it seems that it must be the gentleman you speak of. Tell us about it, Fritz."

The child related in his Alsatian patois his meeting of the afternoon, and the artist was convinced that it was Gerfaut he had met.

"He must be wandering in the valley," said he, "dreaming about our play. But did you not say something about Bergenheim? Is there a village near here by that name?"

"There is a chateau of that name, Monsieur, and it is about a league from here as you go up the river."

"And does this chateau happen to belong to the Baron de Bergenheim—a large, blond, good-looking fellow, with rather reddish moustache?"

"That's the picture of its owner, only that the Baron does not wear a moustache now, not since he left the service. Do you know him, Monsieur?"

"Yes, I know him! Speaking of service, I once rendered him one which was of some account. Is he at the castle?"

"Yes, Monsieur, and his lady also."

"Ah! his wife, too. She was a Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, of Provence. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty," said Mademoiselle Gobillot, pursing up her lips, "that depends upon tastes. If a person likes a face as white as a ghost, she is. And, then, she is so thin! It certainly can not be very difficult to have a slender waist when one is as thin as that."

"Not everybody can have rosy cheeks and a form like an enchantress," said the painter, in a low voice, as he looked at his model in a seductive manner.

"There are some people who think that Monsieur's sister is prettier than Madame," observed Madame Gobillot.

"O mother! how can you say that?" exclaimed Reine with a disdainful air. "Mademoiselle Aline! A child of fifteen! She certainly is not wanting in color; her hair is such a blond, such a red, rather! It looks

as if it were on fire.”

”Do not say anything against red hair, I beg of you,” said the artist, ”it is an eminently artistic shade, which is very popular.”

”With some it may be so, but with Christians! It seems to me that black hair—”

”When it is long and glossy like yours, it is wonderful,” said the young man, darting another killing glance. ”Madame Gobillot, would you mind closing that door? One can not hear one’s self think here. I am a little critical, so far as music is concerned, and you have two sopranos outside who deafen me with their shrieks.”

”It is Marguerite Mottet and her sister. Since our cure has taken to teaching them, they bore us to death, coming here and singing their fine songs. One of these days I shall notify them to leave.”

As she said these words, Madame Gobillot went to close the door in order to please her guest; as soon as her back was turned, the latter leaned forward with the boldness of a Lovelace and imprinted a very loving kiss upon the rosy cheek of Mademoiselle Reine, who never thought of drawing back until the offence was committed.

The sole witness to this incident was the little kitchen drudge, whose blue eyes had been fastened upon the artist’s moustache and beard for some time. They seemed to plunge him into a deep admiration. But at this unexpected event his amazement was so complete that he dropped his spoon into the ashes.

”Eh! mein herr, do you wish to go to bed without your supper, as has been promised you?” said the young man, while the beautiful Reine was trying to recover her countenance. ”Now, then, sing us a little song instead of staring at me as if I were a giraffe. Your little cook has a nice voice, Madame Gobillot. Now, then, mein herr, give us a little German lied. I will give you six kreutzers if you sing in tune, and a flogging if you grate upon my ears.”

He arose and put his album under his arm.

”And my portrait?” exclaimed the young girl, whose cheek was still burning from the kiss she had just received.

The painter drew near her, smiling, and said in a mysterious tone:

”When I make a portrait of a pretty person like you, I never finish it the first day. If you will give me another sitting in the morning before your mother arises I promise to finish this sketch in a way that will not be displeasing to you.”

Mademoiselle Reine saw that her mother was watching her, and walked away with no reply save a glance which was not discouraging.

"Now, then! You droll little fellow!" exclaimed the artist, as he whirled on one foot; "triple time; one, two, begin."

The child burst into an Alsatian song in a high, ringing voice.

"Wait a moment! What devilish key are you singing that in? La, la, la, la; mi, in E major, key of four sharps. By Jove, my little man! here is a fellow who sings B's and C's away up in the clouds; an E sharp, too!" he continued, with astonishment, while the singer made a hold upon the keynote an octave higher in a voice as clear as a crystal.

The artist threw into the fire the cigar which he had just lighted, and began pacing the kitchen floor, paying no more attention to Mademoiselle Reine, who felt a little piqued at seeing herself neglected for a kitchen drudge.

"A rare voice," said he, as he took a great stride; "per Bacco, a very rare voice. Added to that, he sings very deep; two octaves and a half, a clear, ringing tone, the two registers are well united. He would make an admirable 'primo musico'. And the little fellow has a pretty face, too. After supper I will make him wash his face, and I will sketch it. I am sure that in less than a year's study, he could make his debut with the greatest success. By Jove! I have an idea! Why does not that Gerfaut return? Now, then, he would do very well for 'Pippo' in La Gazza, or for Gemma in Wilhelm Tell. But we must have a role for him to make his debut in. What subject could we take properly to introduce a child's part? Why does not that Gerfaut come? A child, girl or boy; a boy part would be better. 'Daniel,' of course; viva 'Daniel!' 'The Chaste Suzannah,' opera in three acts. Madame Begrand would be fine as Suzannah. By Jove! if Meyerbeer would only take charge of the score! That falls to him by right as a compatriot. Then, that would give him an opportunity to break lances with Mehul and Rossini. If that fool of a Gerfaut would only come! Let us see what would be the three characters: Soprano, Suzannah; contralto, David; the old men, two basses; as for the tenor, he would be, of course, Suzannah's husband. There would be a superb entrance for him upon his return from the army, 'cavatina guerriera con cori'. Oh! that terrible Gerfaut! the wolves must have devoured him. If he were here, we would knock off the thing between our fruit and cheese."

Just at that moment the door opened suddenly. "Is supper ready?" asked a deep voice.

"Eh, here he is, the dear friend!

"O surprise extreme!
Grand Dieu! c'est lui-meme—

alive and in the flesh.”

”And hungry,” said Gerfaut, as he dropped into a chair near the fire.

”Would you like to compose an opera in three acts, *The Chaste Suzannah*, music by Meyerbeer?”

”I should like some supper first. Madame Gobillot, I beseech you, give me something to eat. Thanks to your mountain air, I am almost starved.”

”But, Monsieur, we have been waiting two hours for you,” retorted the landlady, as she made each stewpan dance in succession.

”That is a fact,” said the artist; ”let us go into the dining-room, then.

”*Gia la mensa a preparata.*”

”While supping, I will explain my plans to you. I have just found a Daniel in the ashes—”

”My dear Marillac, drop your Daniel and Suzannah,” replied Gerfaut, as he sat down to the table; ”I have something much more important to talk to you about.”