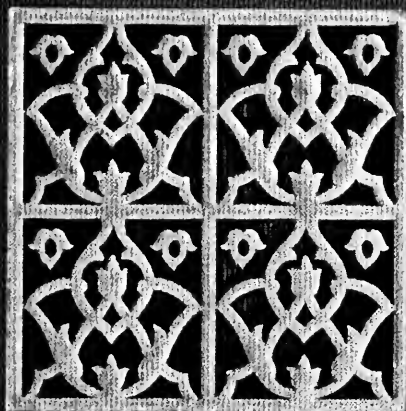
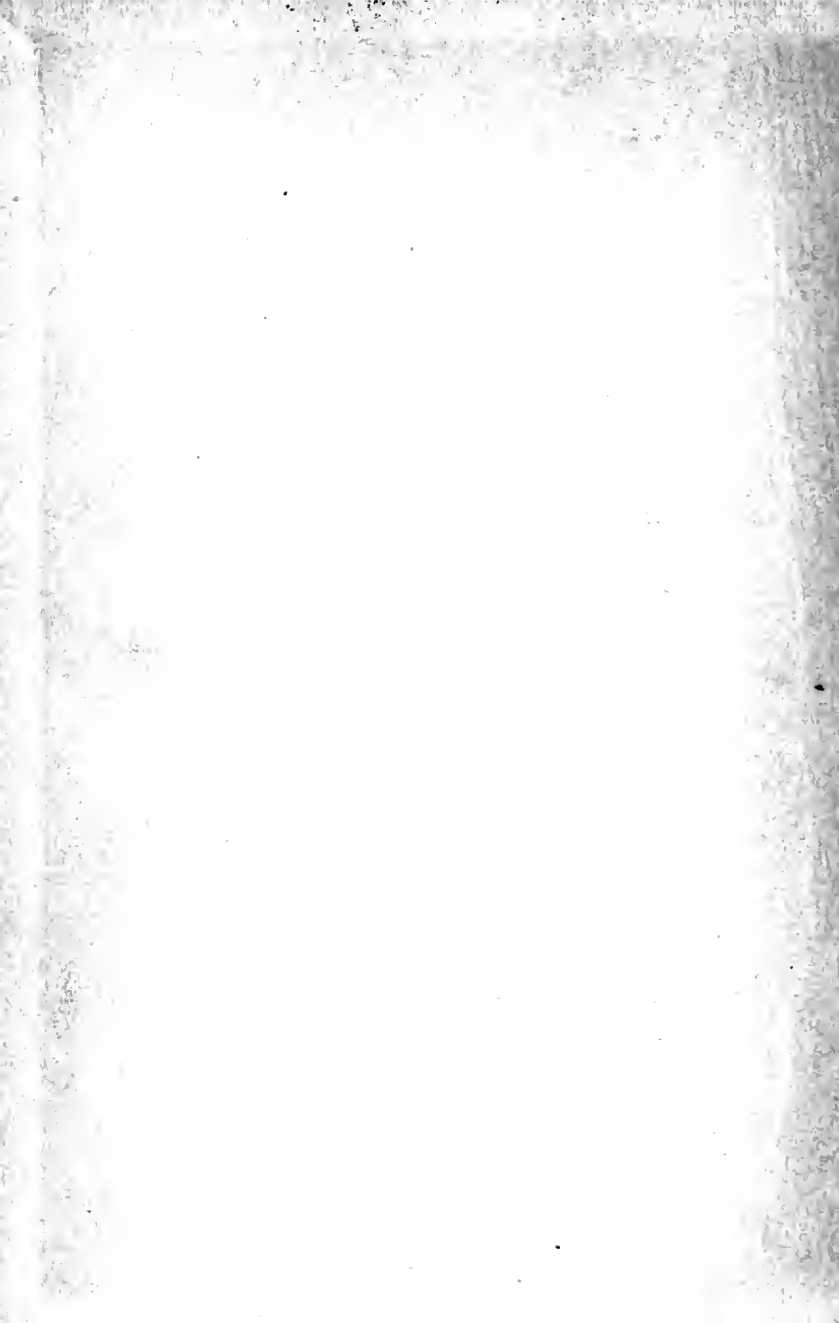


Between
Two Opinions



Pierre Lofi



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Between Two Opinions ❀

❀ ❀ ❀ ❀ Or the Romance of a Spahi

By ❀ ❀ ❀ ❀ ❀ ❀ Pierre Loti

Translated by M. L. Watkins ❀ ❀ ❀ ❀ ❀



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The Romance of a Spahi.

INTRODUCTION.

I.

In descending the coast of Africa, after passing the southern extremity of Morocco, one travels for several days and nights in sight of an interminable country of desolation. It is the Sahara, the great "sea without water," which the Moors also call "Beled-el-ateuch," the land of thirst.

These shores of the desert are five hundred leagues long, yet there is no harbor for the ships which pass that way.

The solitudes spread everywhere with a sad monotony, without a plant or a vestige of life—only the moving sand-hills, the boundless horizons, and the blazing light of the sun.

At last there appears above the sands an old, white city, planted amid rare, yellow palm-trees. It is Saint Louis of the Senegal, the capital of Senegambia; its mosques, towers, and houses of Moorish architecture all seem to sleep there, under the burning sun, like those Portuguese towns that formerly flourished on the coast of Congo—Saint Paul de Loando and Saint Felipe de Benguela.

On approaching the city, one is surprised to find that it is not built on the shore, and that it has not even a harbor, nor any communication with the outside world. The coast, which is almost straight and very low, is as inhospitable as that of the Sahara, whose eternal line of breakers prevents the approach of ships.

The two Jaloff villages, Guet-n'dar and N'dar-toute, that lie between Saint Louis and the sea, are formed of thousands and thousands of mud houses, Lilliputian huts,

where swarms a strange population of black people.

This barrier made by the sea, separating this country from the rest of the world, is the chief cause of its gloom and stagnation. Saint Louis affords no harbor for the packet and merchant boats when they sail into the other hemisphere, and people go there when they are forced to go; but no one ever remains there, for it is like some vast and silent prison.

In the northern part of Saint Louis, near the mosque, not many years ago, there stood a little, old, isolated house, owned by a certain Samba-Hamet, a merchant of some means, who trafficked up and down the river. This house was whitewashed, and its cracked, brick walls and dry, decayed timbers served as the abode of legions of insects, white ants, and blue lizards.

Two storks frequented the roof, chat-

tering gravely to the sun, craning their necks toward the deserted street when by chance a human being passed that way.

A brittle, thorny palm-tree, the only sign of verdure in that vicinity, each day threw lightly upon the glowing walls its meager shadow. On the branches of the palm, there were perched numbers of blue and yellow birds, which in France are called *bengalis*.

Everywhere there is sand—always sand—never a piece of moss nor a sprig of grass on the arid soil; all is withered and scorched by the burning breath of the Sahara.

O, the gloom, the sadness of the land of Africa!

II.

On the ground floor of this isolated house there dwelt, amid the wreck of her fortunes, a horrible old negress named Coura-n'diaye, an ancient favorite of a great, black king. Here she had installed herself with her fantastic rags, her little slaves bedecked with glass beads and trinkets, her goat, her big-horned sheep, and her cadaverous yellow dogs.

On the upper floor there was a large square room, which was reached by an outer stair-way of worm-eaten wood. Every evening at sunset, a man wearing the red uniform and Mussulman fez of a spahi mounted the stair-way and entered the upper apartment of the house of Samba-Hamet. The storks on the roof, catching a glimpse of him when he was

yet a great way off, at the other end of the deserted street, recognized his step and the bright colors of his uniform, and permitted him to enter without showing any inquietude, as a personage long and well known.

He was a very tall man, and of a pure white race, though the sun of Africa had already bronzed his face and breast. He was also extremely handsome, having large, dark eyes, almond-shaped, like those of an Arab, and from beneath his fez, which was pushed back from his spotless brow, there escaped a mass of soft, brown curls.

His bearing was noble and manly, and he held his head boldly erect. Strength and suppleness seemed blended in his graceful form, which was admirably set off by his gay uniform. He was unusually serious and pensive, but his smile had a feline grace, and disclosed teeth white and beautiful.

III.

One day this spahi wore even more than usual a thoughtful, serious air, as he ascended the wooden stair-way of the house of Samba-Hamet.

On entering the upper apartment, in which he seemed to be perfectly at home, he looked surprised to find it empty. The room was bare, and destitute of furniture except for several long benches covered with mats, and a *tara*, a kind of sofa of light straw which is made by the negroes of the coast of Gambia. From the high ceiling were suspended parchments and talismans written by the priests of Maghreb.

The spahi approached a chest in one corner of the room—a chest ornamented with copper bands and sparkling with

variegated colors, similar to those in which the Jaloffs store away their precious objects—and, on endeavoring to open it, found it shut fast.

He then threw himself upon the *tara* and took from his pocket a letter which he began to read, after having kissed the signature.

It was a love-letter without a doubt, written by some beautiful woman, a fair Parisian or romantic señorita, to this handsome spahi in Africa, who seemed just formed to play the grand role of hero in the melodrama of love.

The letter will probably give us a clue to some dramatic adventure from which the story will begin.

IV.

The letter upon which the spahi had pressed his lips bore the post-mark of an obscure village of the Cévennes, and was written by a poor, old, trembling hand unused to holding the pen. The lines ran together, and the mistakes were numerous. It said :

MY DEAR SON : This present is to give you news of our health, which at this time is good, thank God. But your father says he is beginning to feel old, and as his eyesight is failing him fast, I, your old mother, must take the pen to speak to you. You know that I do not write well, so you must excuse everything.

This is to tell you, my dear son, that since you left us, nothing has gone well with us; prosperity as well as joy left us with you. The year has been a hard one on account of a terrible hail which fell in this country, and destroyed almost everything we had.

Our cow is sick, and it has cost us a great deal to doctor her.

Since your father returned to this country, his day's labor does not amount to much, for the younger men do their work in a shorter time than he.

It is necessary for us to repair a part of the roof, which threatens to fall whenever it rains.

I know that in the army one has not much money, but your father says if you can send us what you promised, without depriving yourself, it will help us greatly.

The Mérys could well assist us, but we do not wish to ask it of them, being loath to have them think us beggars. We often see your cousin Jeanne Méry, who grows more beautiful every day. It seems her greatest pleasure to come to us to ask after you. She says that she wishes for nothing better than to marry you, my dear Jean, but that her father will not hear to it, because, he says, you are too poor; and he says, too, you have been a bad subject in your day.

I believe, however, if you win your promotion as quartermaster, that on your return to this country in your military clothes he will decide in your favor. I can die happy if I see you well

married. You will build a house near to ours, which is not fine enough for you. Peyral and I draw plans for it every evening.

Without fail, my dear Jean, send us a little money, for I assure you we are in need of it; we have not been able to recuperate this year, on account of the hail and the cow.

Adieu, my dear son. The people of the village inquire of you, and wish to know when you will return. The neighbors all send good wishes, and as for myself, you know that I have not had a moment of happiness since you left us, three years ago. I close, embracing you, as does Peyral.

Your old mother, who adores you,

FRANCOISE PEYRAL.

V.

Jean, after reading the letter, leaned out of the window and began to muse, regarding vaguely the great African landscape unrolled before him.

The pointed silhouettes of the Jaloff huts massed by the thousand at his feet, and in the distance the great, restless sea, with its eternal line of breakers.

A sickly sun was just sinking behind the horizon, still shedding a dull glimmer on the desert and the limitless waste of sand. A caravan of Moors slowly wound its way across the dreary plains, and a black cloud of vultures circled in the air. And beyond—a point that fixed the eye—the cemetery of Sorr, where already lay so many of his comrades, mountaineers like himself, victims to the fever in that terrible climate.

Oh, that he might return to live near his old parents, in a little cottage with Jeanne Méry! Why have they exiled him to this land of Africa? What is there in common between him and this strange country?

It is true, that gay uniform and that Arabian fez give him an air of splendor; but what a disguise for the poor, little peasant of the Cévennes!

Jean remained a long time at the window, dreaming of his native village. Poor warrior of the Senegal!

The sun went down, the shadows of night fell, and his heart was full of a vague sorrow.

From N'dar-toute he heard the sudden clash of the tam-tam, calling the negroes to the bamboula, and in the Jaloff huts fires were flashing.

It was an evening in December. A rough wind whirled the sand about in

gusts, and it soon began to grow cold, a sensation almost unknown in that burning country.

Suddenly the door opened, and a yellow dog of the *laobé* race (the native dog of Africa) entered the room, with the stealthy movements of a jackal, and began to gambol at his master's feet.

At the same time there appeared in the door-way a young black girl, laughing gayly, who made Jean a brusque, comical little courtesy, the reverence of the negress, and said, "*Kéon*" (good-day).

VI.

The spahi regarded her abstractedly. "Fatou-gaye," he said, in a mixture of Creole-French and Jaloff; "Fatou-gaye, open the chest, that I may get the silver."

"Tes Khaliss!" responded she, opening wide her great eyes under their dark lashes. "Tes Khaliss!" (pieces of silver) she repeated, with the mixture of fear and audacity of a child expecting punishment.

Then she pointed to her ears, from which were suspended three pairs of earrings of exquisite workmanship.

They were jewels set in the pure gold of Gallam, which the black artists have the secret of fashioning as they crouch on the sands, working mysteriously under the shade of their low tents.

Fatou-gaye had just purchased these

long-coveted ornaments with the silver, a hundred francs, which Jean had amassed little by little, the result of his poor savings as a soldier, and which were destined for his old parents in France.

The eyes of the spahi darted lightning; he took down his whip to strike her, but his heart failed him, and his arm fell helpless to his side. He quickly grew calm; he was tender-hearted, Jean Peyral, with all his faults.

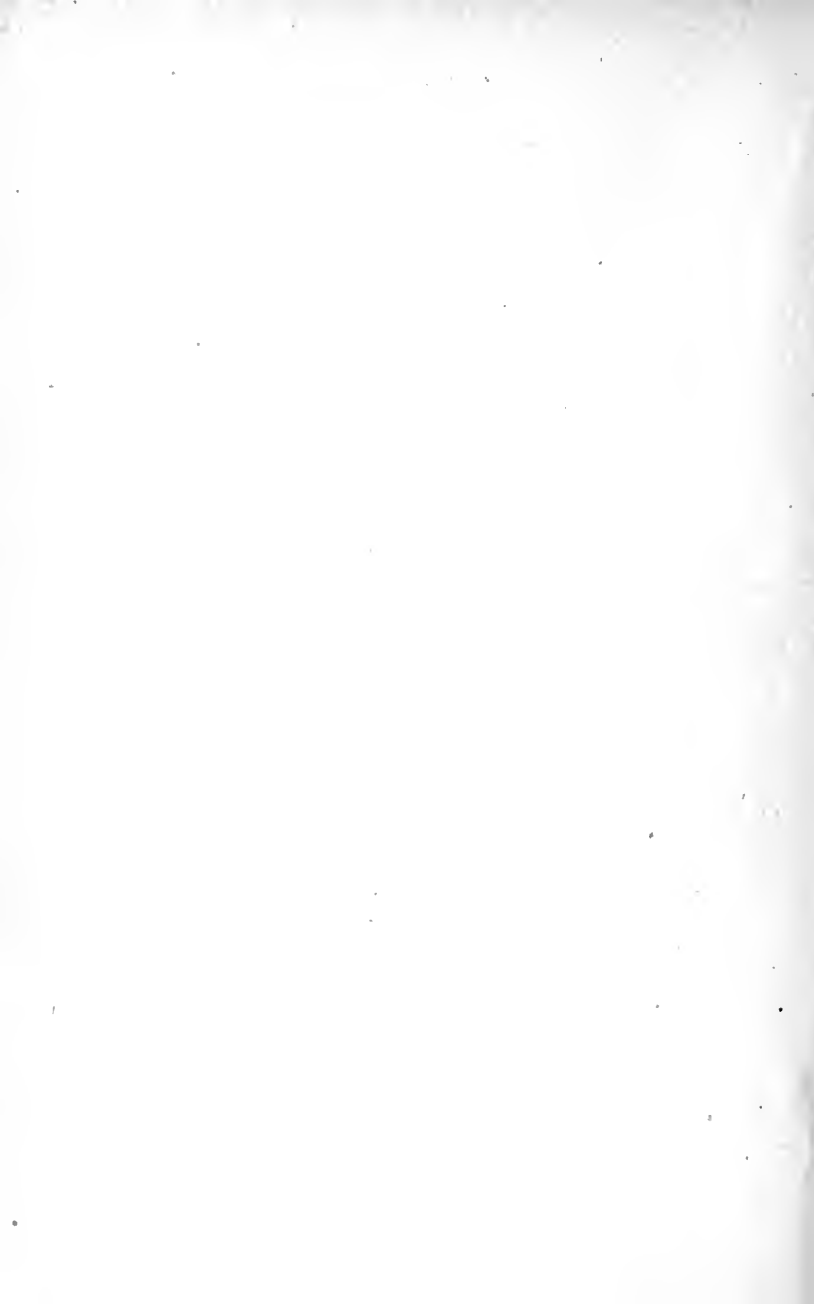
He did not even reproach her, for he knew it would be useless, and besides, it was partly his own fault; he should have concealed the money more carefully. It was now necessary to find it elsewhere at any price.

Fatou-gaye knew well how to soothe and flatter Jean, and as he reclined nonchalantly on his *tàra*, she knelt beside him on the floor and embraced him with her beautiful, shapely arms, encircled with

silver bracelets, and leaning her head on his breast, regarded him with her dark eyes full of fire and passion.

Jean did not long withstand these warm caresses, and soon she had obtained his full pardon for her fault.

He postponed till to-morrow the search for the money so anxiously expected at the home of his old parents.



PART I.

CHAPTER I.

Three years had elapsed since Jean Peyral first planted his foot on the soil of Africa, and since his arrival he had passed through the many phases of a great moral transformation.

Temperament, climate, and nature had gradually wrought the change, and still kept him under the spell of their enervating influence.

He felt that he was gliding down unknown precipices, for to-day he was the lover of Fatou-gaye, a dusky young girl of the Khassouké race, who had thrown over him her seductive charms, entralling his senses as if with the spell of her amulets.

The past history of Jean is not very

complicated. At the age of twenty, chance took him from his mother's side, and he went away with the other sons of his mountain village, singing very bravely, that he might not shed tears.

His tall stature and fine form had marked him for a cavalryman; the mysterious fascination for the unknown made him choose the corps of the spahis.

His childhood was spent in an obscure village in the depths of the forests of the Cévennes mountains, where he had grown like a young oak in the pure mountain air.

His father and mother were the most cherished figures of his childhood, and deep in his heart there were ineffaceable memories of his early happy life—the little old-fashioned cottage at the edge of the forest, the mountain stream, the mossy paths, his many youthful adventures and liberty.

In his boyhood he knew nothing of the world outside of the village, which to him had no boundary but the wild country inhabited by shepherds. He spent whole days in the forests wandering under the great oaks, sometimes in the deep reverie of a young shepherd, and then again savagely climbing the trees and breaking their branches like the wild, untamed boy that he was.

On Sundays he accompanied his parents to church, attired in clothes very fine for a mountaineer, always holding by the hand little Jeanne Méry, whom they took with them as they passed the house of his uncle Méry.

As he grew older, that spirit of independence and the desire to roam increased. He appropriated horses for long rides, and poached with an old gun that hardly ever went off. His frequent encounters with the gamekeeper greatly mortified his uncle

Méry, who dreamed of his learning a trade and of his making himself a useful and respectable citizen.

It was true, he had been a "bad subject;" but the people in the village loved him, even those who had suffered most from his youthful misdemeanors, for he had a frank and noble heart, and no one could resist his smile.

His uncle Méry, with his sermons and threats, had no influence over him; but when he found that he had wounded his mother, his heart swelled within him, and the great, strapping youth would lower his head and weep.

He was an untamed colt, but not a libertine.

The village, with its environments of simplicity and innocence, shielded him from the unhealthy contagions and precocious depravity of the dissipated and abandoned of large cities; so that, when

his twenty years suggested it was time for him to enter the service, Jean was as pure and almost as innocent of the evils of life as a little child.

II.

But after awhile he encountered surprises of every kind, and, in passing through a large city, he followed his companions into resorts of debauchery, and for awhile his head was turned with the novelty and fascination of such a life. But at last his soul revolted with disgust at its revelations; and in a few days a vessel bore him away—very far away—on a calm, blue sea, and landed him, bewildered, exiled, by the side of the Senegal.

It was a day in the month of November, the time when the great baobabs shed the last leaves of autumn on the yellow sands, that the first curious gaze of Jean Peyral fell on the corner of the globe where his destiny had abandoned him to spend five years of his life.

The strange country made a vivid impression on his mind, and the life of a spahi pleased him, for he took great delight in having a horse, in curling his mustache, in wearing his Arabian fez, his big saber, and his red uniform. He also made the discovery that he was handsome and attractive.

III.

November is the *belle saison* on the Senegal, corresponding with our winters in France, and it is then that the heat decreases in intensity, and the dry wind of the desert succeeds the terrible storms of summer. Not a drop of rain falls, and each day the soil is unceasingly, unmercifully scorched and burnt by a devouring sun.

This is the season when lizards abound, water fails in the cisterns, marshes dry up, vegetation withers, and even the cactus and thorny fig-tree refuse to open their dull-yellow blossoms. But the evenings are cool, and at sunset a strong sea-breeze rises, which causes the breakers to roar and lash the shore, and shakes down pitilessly the last sad autumn leaves.

Sad autumn, which brings with it neither the long evenings, as in France, nor the charm of the frosts, the harvest, and golden fruits ! For there is no fruit in that God-forsaken country ; nothing but the arachis and the bitter pistachio.

As far as the eye can see, there are great hot plains, gloomy and desolate, covered with withered herbs, and here and there, side by side with the diminutive, stunted palms, grow the colossal baobabs, the mastodons of the vegetable kingdom, whose gigantic branches are inhabited by vultures, bats, and lizards.

IV.

The ennui which Jean now so often felt was to him an entirely new sensation ; it was a kind of vague melancholy, a longing for the mountains, the village, and the cottage of his old parents.

The spahis, his new companions—a great many of whom had carried their formidable sabers into India and Algeria—had caught there, in the ale-houses of these maritime towns, a spirit of libertinism, and their contact with the world had furnished them with a ready stock of cant phrases and cynic pleasantries, which they were always ready to apply to everything.

Brave fellows they were at heart, joyous comrades ; but they had ideas which Jean could not understand, and pleasures which were revolting to him.

For Jean was a dreamer, because he was a mountaineer. Reflection is almost unknown to the giddy and foolish population of large cities; but among men reared in the country, among sailors and the sons of fishermen who have grown up in the paternal bark amid the dangers of the sea, we meet with men who dream—true, silent poets, who comprehend everything, but who have not the gift to put their thoughts into words, and so they remain forever untranslated.

Every evening Jean walked on the great sea-shore when the sands were rosy and purple in the light of indescribable sunsets. He bathed in the mighty breakers of the coast of Africa, and dreamed himself once more a child as he rolled in the waves that covered the sands.

The beach at twilight always swarmed with black men returning to the villages laden with sheaves of millet, and fisher-

men bringing in their nets, followed by crowds of noisy women and children. There are wonderful fish in the river Senegal; the women carry on their heads baskets full of them, and the young black girls return to their lodgings crowned with crawling fishes pierced through the gills.

At each step unexpected pictures greeted his eye, warm and glowing in the weird light; for there are many strange and unfamiliar scenes in that country—extraordinary figures from the interior, and picturesque caravans of Moors who descend by the Cape of Barbary.

The crests of the purple sand-hills and the great, gloomy desert gleam for a moment in the last rays of the sun, which fades away in a bloody vapor, and all the black people throw themselves on their faces to offer up their evening prayer. It is the holy hour of Islam, and from

Mecca to the coast of the Sahara the name of Mahomet is heard on every tongue, passing like a mysterious breath over the land of Africa, growing fainter and fainter as it crosses the Soudan, finally dying away on these black lips on the shores of the great, restless sea.

The old Jaloff priests in their flowing robes turn toward the sea in reciting their prayers, and the whole sea-shore is covered with prostrate forms. A mighty silence ensues, and night descends suddenly, with the rapidity peculiar to that country of the sun.

At the close of day Jean returned to the barracks in the southern part of Saint Louis, for at twilight all was silent and tranquil there. His comrades were generally scattered about the streets in search of pleasure, and it was then that these isolated quarters seemed to him very sad and lonely, and he thought of his mother.

V.

In the southern part of Saint Louis there were a number of ancient brick houses of Moorish architecture, which in the dead of night were always brilliantly illuminated, when elsewhere silence and darkness reigned. From these houses, which are inhabited by negroes, would issue strange odors developed by the tropical heat, and the night was made hideous with infernal noises.

There the spahis were masters of the scene; it was there the poor warriors in the red uniform went to make an uproar, stupefying themselves with alcohol, which they poured down in unreasonable quantities, from necessity or bravado. But Jean avoided these disreputable places, and prudently stored away his small sav-

ings, thinking even then of his happy return home. He was very wise and serious, yet his companions did not ridicule him, for the handsome Muller, a big Alsatian youth who was accounted very knowing at the barracks on account of his vast experience in duelling and other thrilling adventures, had taken Jean into his favor, and somehow the others were always of the same mind as Fritz Muller.

However, Jean's best friend was Nyaorfall, a black spahi, an African giant of the magnificent race of Foota-Diallonké. He was a singular character, on whose lips was always a mysterious smile—a beautiful statue in black marble.

Such was the friend of Jean, and he often accompanied him to his home at the village of Guet-n'dar, where the black made him sit among his wives upon a white mat, and offered him, in negro hospitality, the *Kouss-Kouss* and the *gonrous*.

VI.

At Saint Louis the days passed by with the dreary monotony characteristic of life in all small colonial towns, but the mild season of the year brought a little animation to the streets of the necropolis; for every day at sunset the women whom fever had spared promenaded on the Government square, and on the avenue of yellow palms leading to the village of Guet-n'dar.

They were attired in European costumes, which gave one an impression of Europe in that land of exile. Indeed, the great Government square, with its symmetrical buildings, was not unlike a portion of some southern town of Europe, apart from that immense horizon of sand—that infinite breadth of space defining afar its interminable line.

The handsome spahi always walked alone with a serious and reserved air, and soon awakened the curiosity of the inhabitants of Saint Louis, who imagined him the hero of some romantic adventure.

Among the gay promenaders who often threw glances on Jean, was a woman more beautiful than all the rest, and she it was particularly who seemed to regard him with peculiar interest.

Some people called her a mulattress, but her skin was so white that others swore she was a Parisian. Her complexion was very white, and her hair was of a reddish-blond—the blonde of the mulattress. Her eyes were dark and dreamy, half-closed, and full of a Creole languor.

Although she was the wife of a rich river merchant, the people of Saint Louis addressed her disdainfully by her Christian name, as a woman of color, and she was known to all as *Cora*.

The other women soon discovered from her toilets that she had lived in Paris, and even Jean discerned that her flowing robes, severely simple as they were, possessed a peculiar grace which the others had not. He saw, too, that she was very beautiful, and he felt a tremor, a kind of delicious thrill, when he passed her, for she always lowered her eyes beneath his gaze.

“She loves you, Peyral,” said the handsome Muller, with the air of a man well versed in the affairs of the heart.

VII.

It was true, she did love him after a fashion, and one day she invited him to her house to tell him of it.

Poor Jean! the two following months slipped away amid enchanted dreams. This unknown luxury, this elegant, perfumed woman strangely stirred his pure but ardent heart. Love, which he had heretofore regarded cynically, now held him a slave. And it had all been bestowed upon him unsought, unreservedly, like those grand fortunes in fairy tales, the thought of which often filled him with disquietude, for there was to him something immodest and revolting in this avowal of love. But he did not allow his mind to dwell upon that part of it, for in her presence he was intoxi-

cated with love, and thought of nothing else.

Then he began to devote much time to his toilet. He perfumed himself, and curled his mustache and brown hair, and it seemed to him, as to all young lovers, that he began to live the day he found his mistress.

VIII.

Cora loved him, it is true, yet her heart was not much involved.

A mulattress of Bourbon, she had been reared in all the idleness and luxury of a rich Creole ; but the white women around her kept her at a distance with a merciless disdain, for, as a *filie de couleur*, she was repulsive to them. The same race prejudice followed her to Saint Louis, and though she was the wife of one of the most influential merchants on the river, they avoided her as a creature unfit for their association.

In Paris, however, she had a number of refined lovers, and as her fortune enabled her to cut a considerable figure while in France, she enjoyed elegant vice to her heart's content.

Besides, she had a lovely face and form; beautiful, soft hands; languid, fascinating manners; and then, too, she was surrounded by an atmosphere of romance and mystery.

She loved Jean because he was tall and handsome; she was delighted with his boyish, ingenuous manners, and, above all, she was pleased with his fine red uniform.

IX.

The house in which Cora lived was a large brick building, as white as an Arabian caravansary, with something of an Egyptian aspect, like the rest of the houses in the most ancient quarters of Saint Louis.

Below, there was a great court, where camels and Moors of the desert came to crouch upon the sand, and where also swarmed a strange mixture of dogs, ostriches, and black slaves.

Above, there were innumerable verandas resting on square columns, resembling the terraces of Babylon.

The upper apartments were reached by white marble stair-ways of a monumental look.

It was all in ruins, and as gloomy as

everything else at Saint Louis, a city whose glory has long since departed—a colony of other days.

Still there was a certain air of grandeur about the salon, with its seigniorial dimensions and furniture of a hundred years ago. It was haunted with blue lizards, cats, and parrots; even gazelles sported there over the fine mats of Guinea.

Black slaves, listlessly dragging along their sandals, crossed and recrossed it with a mournful tread; leaving behind them an acrid odor of *soumere* and scented amulets.

An indescribable melancholy of exile and solitude rested on all things, and it grew more intense during the hours of evening, when there was perfect silence save for the unceasing plaint of the African breakers.

In the apartment occupied by Cora everything was bright and modern. The

furniture, which had recently arrived from Paris, was fresh, comfortable, and elegant, and the air was full of the odors of essences bought from the most fashionable perfumers of the boulevard.

It was here that Jean spent hours of ecstasy; it affected him as the chamber of some enchanted palace, for he had never dreamed of such splendor and luxury.

This woman had become his life, his happiness, and she, a creature *blasé* and weary of other pleasures and amusements, desired to possess him, body and soul.

With the ingenuity of a Creole, she succeeded in appearing to her lover younger than she really was, playing with admirable skill and cunning the irresistible comedy of love.

She had her wish: she possessed Jean, body and soul.

X.

Among the captives in the house of Cora there was a queer little negress named Fatou-gaye, of whom Jean had taken scarcely any notice.

She had recently been brought to Saint Louis and sold as a slave by the Moors, who had taken her captive in one of their raids on the country of the Khassoukés.

Her malicious disposition and fierce, independent spirit caused her to be consigned to a very obscure place in the domestic arrangements of the household.

Not having reached a marriageable age, at which time the negresses of Saint Louis consider it proper to clothe themselves, she was generally quite nude, wearing only a necklace of charms and

glass beads. Her hair was carefully shorn, except of four little locks, which were plaited and oiled, and placed at regular intervals from her forehead to the nape of her neck. Each of these plaits terminated in a coral bead, except the middle one, which was reserved for something more precious. This one was ornamented with a sequin of gold, very ancient, which must have been brought originally from Arabia, and whose peregrinations across the Soudan no doubt were long and complicated.

Without this queer head-dress, one would have been impressed with the beauty and regularity of Fatou-gaye's features, for she was of the Khassouké type in all its purity, possessing a fine Grecian form, and skin as smooth as polished onyx. Her teeth were white and dazzling, her expression mobile and animated; but the most attractive feature of

this strange little face were her dark, brilliant eyes, encircled with blue, moving restlessly about under their black eyelids, and which at times were as soft as velvet, and then again as bright and sparkling as diamonds, changing with the passions of her capricious heart.

When Jean went to the house of Cora he sometimes encountered Fatou-gaye, and, as she saw him approaching, she would envelope herself in the folds of a bright blue *bon-bon*, her holiday attire, and advance, smiling, to meet him, the soft and flute-like voice of the negress assuming its most wheedling intonations.

Hanging her head with the affected air of a monkey, she would say :

“ May man coper, souma toubab.”
(Give me a copper, white man.)

This was the refrain of all the children at Saint Louis, and Jean was used to it. If he was in a good humor, and had a sou

in his pocket, he gave it to Fatou-gaye, and she, strange to say, instead of buying sweetmeats, as did the other children, would conceal herself in some obscure corner and sew the money carefully in the sachets of her amulets.

XI.

One night in February Jean suspected something was wrong.

Cora had requested him to leave before midnight, and at the moment of his departure he imagined he heard footsteps in the adjoining apartment, as if someone awaited her there.

At midnight he bade her adieu, and left the house; but in a little while he returned stealthily, walking noiselessly on the sands, and, climbing the wall to a balcony, he peered through the half-open door into the chamber of Cora.

A young man in the uniform of an officer of the Marines had taken his place beside Cora, and he seemed to be perfectly at home there, reclining gracefully on a sofa, with an air of ease and familiarity.

She sat near him, conversing with him in a language which Jean did not understand. They were really French words, but Jean did not comprehend them. To him they were mocking enigmas, these brief words, and far beyond the reach of his understanding.

Cora was changed. Her expression was not the same, and a peculiar smile played on her lips.

Jean trembled ; the blood rushed to his heart, and in his head he felt a roaring like the sea. He was ashamed of being there ; yet he wished to remain and further comprehend.

He heard his own name pronounced, for they were speaking of him, and he drew nearer, supporting himself by the wall, to hear the words more distinctly.

“ You are wrong, Cora,” said the young officer, tranquilly, with a perceptible smile on his lips. “ In the first place, he is very

handsome, this youth, and then you love him."

"That is true," she replied; "I love you both, and I have chosen you because your name is Jean, also; if I had not taken this precaution, I would long ago have betrayed myself by using your name; I am so thoughtless."

She then drew nearer to the new Jean and caressed him, speaking to him soft, endearing words, lisped in the winning accents of a Creole, and on his lips she pressed kisses warm and passionate.

* * * * *

But the officer had seen the obscure figure of Jean Peyral gazing at them through the open door with blood-shot eyes.

He said not a word, but made a sign to Cora with his hand.

The spahi stood there, transfixed, immovable; but when he saw that he was discovered, he retreated hastily into the

shadows. Cora suddenly advanced toward him, her countenance distorted with the look of a wild animal. She frightened him; she was near enough to touch him.

Closing the door with a gesture of rage, she placed across it a bar of iron, and all was over.

This mulattress, the grandchild of a slave, was miserably disguised as an elegant lady of gentle birth; for she had neither remorse, fear, nor pity.

* * * * *

After awhile Cora and her lover heard a noise as of a body falling to the ground, falling heavily, making a great noise in the silence of the night; and then, toward morning, a sound as of someone feeling his way in the darkness.

And Jean Peyral, regaining consciousness, raised himself up and crept away, timidly, confusedly, in the gloom of the night.

XII.

Staggering along like a drunken man, sinking ankle-deep in the sand of the deserted street, Jean went as far as Guet-n'dar, the negro village with its thousands of thatched roofs.

In the darkness he stumbled over men and women asleep on the ground, wrapped in ghostly garments of white, who appeared to his excited imagination as phantom people.

He rushed blindly along, and at last found himself on the sea-shore.

Hundreds of crabs, crawling about on the beach, fled at the sound of his footsteps. He remembered to have seen, once, a dead body, cast up on the sea-shore, torn and mangled by crabs, and a thrill of horror seized him at the thought of such a death.

The breakers and the surging waves were already shining in the first glimmer of dawn. They had for him a peculiar fascination. How fresh and cool they would feel to his burning head! In their beneficent humidity death would seem less cruel.

Then he thought of his mother; of Jeanne, the little friend and sweetheart of his boyhood, and he no longer wished to die.

He sank upon the sands, and soon fell into a deep, unnatural sleep.

XIII.

It had been daylight three hours ; but Jean slept on.

He dreamed of his childhood in the forests of the Cévennes ; he was a child again, roaming with his mother in the shadows of the grand old oaks, where the ground was covered with lichens and tender grass, gathering bluebells and heather.

* * * * *

At last he awoke and stared around him, bewildered. The sands were glowing in the heat of the torrid sun ; black women wended their way over the burning soil, singing strange and unfamiliar songs ; great vultures passed and repassed in the air above him, and in his ears was the shrill hissing of the grasshoppers.

He discovered that his head was sheltered from the burning rays of the sun by an awning of blue cloth supported on sticks driven in the sand, which threw over him, with its fantastic folds, a cool, gray shadow.

The pattern of the cloth was familiar to him, and on turning his head he perceived Fatou-gaye sitting near him, regarding him anxiously with her great, dark eyes.

She had followed him and improvised this awning as a protection from the torrid heat; it was her holiday dress of bright blue cloth, which Jean had often seen her wear.

She had crouched there a long time in a kind of ecstasy, kissing his eyelids softly when she could do so unobserved—very softly, for fear of awakening him, for then he would hasten away, and she would no longer have him there to herself alone.

“It is I, white man,” she said, with an air of tragic seriousness, and in an incomprehensible jargon. “I have done this because I knew that the sun of Saint Louis was not good for the *toubab* of France. I know well there was another lover who came to see her, for I kept awake all night to listen. I was hidden away under the stair-way among the gourds, and when you fell at the door I saw you, and when you went away I followed you.”

Jean looked at her in astonishment, his eyes full of gentleness and gratitude, for he was deeply touched.

“Do not speak of this, little Fatou,” he said; “but return quickly to your mistress, and I will go to the barracks. Do not tell anyone you found me lying on the shore.”

And he caressed her gently, as he would scratch the neck of a little tame kitten

that came every night to the barracks and curled at the foot of his bed.

But she, thrilling under the innocent caress, lowered her head and drooped her eyelids. With a choking sensation in her throat, she gathered up her holiday garment, folded it carefully, and went away, trembling with joy.

XIV.

Poor Jean! suffering was a new thing to him, and he rebelled against the unknown power that was crushing his heart with bands of iron.

His soul was filled with concentrated rage; rage against the man whom he wished to destroy; rage against the woman whom he longed to murder with a blow from his whip or his spur. He was consumed with an intense desire for revenge.

That same day he obtained permission to accompany Nyaor-fall, the black spahi, to a point north of Saint Louis, in the direction of the Cape of Barbary, to exercise their horses.

They galloped furiously across the desert under a somber, threatening sky, for

in that country the winter skies are fearful and marvelous, and the banks of black clouds hang so low on the horizon that the desert beneath them has the appearance of an endless waste of snow.

As the two spahis rode along, their burnos floating behind them in the breeze, enormous vultures stalking leisurely about on the sands were startled and took their flight, describing fantastic circles in the air above them.

At nightfall Jean and Nyaor returned to the barracks, weary and exhausted, on jaded steeds.

The next morning, after the excitement of the previous day, Jean was prostrated with a burning fever, and they laid him, helpless and unconscious, on his poor gray mattress, and carried him to the hospital.

XV.

Noon! The great hospital is as silent as the grave.

Noon! The grasshopper chirps shrilly, and the Nubian women, with plaintive voices, sing vague and dreamy airs.

On all the desert plains of the Senegal the vertical rays of the sun beat down fiercely, and the great horizons dapple and quiver in the torrid heat.

Noon! The hospital is as silent as the grave.

The long galleries and corridors are empty. A clock on a high, white wall marks, with slow-moving hands, the mid-day hour. Around its dim and faded dial is the sad inscription: "*Vitæ fugaces exhibet horas.*"

The twelve strokes of the weak bell

sound feeble and muffled in the hot air, but they reach the ears of the dying, who, in their feverish wakefulness, imagine it is the solemn tolling of a knell.

Noon! The mournful hour when the sick die!

* * * * *

In an open chamber on the upper floor the silence of death reigns, and only whispered words are spoken.

There is no perceptible sound except the soft footsteps of the good Sister Pacôme as she walks lightly on the mats, with a look of agitation on her serious face, which is so pale and sallow under her great white cap. A physician and a priest are also there, sitting near a bed which is draped in white curtains.

Through the open windows there is nothing to be seen but the sun and the sand, the distant blue lines of the boundless horizons, and the blazing light.

Will the spahi die? Has the moment come for his soul to take its flight at this stifling hour of midday, so far away from home and his mother?

Where will he find a resting-place on these desert sands?

* * * * *

No, he will not die to-day; the doctor, who has waited there to see him breathe his last, quietly retires.

Evening, with its fresh, invigorating breezes, brings relief to the sick and dying; Jean becomes more calm, and his fever decreases.

Crouching before the door, on the street below, is a little negress, playing osselets with the white pebbles. She has been there since morning, dissimulating, for fear of attracting the attention of those who pass by, and of being driven away. She was afraid to make inquiries, and she well knew that, if he died, his

body would be borne through that door,
over yonder to the lonely cemetery of
Sorr.

XVI.

For a week longer his fever continued, with delirium each day until noon. They awaited anxiously the crisis, and at last the disease was vanquished, and the danger past.

Those who have had fever on the banks of the Senegal well know the fearful hours of sleep and torpor that weigh so heavily on the sick during the warm mid-day hours.

One day, just before noon, Jean fell into a kind of trance, full of suffering and confused visions. He believed that he was dying, and he became unconscious.

At four o'clock he awoke and asked for water. The visions fled, retreating into the distant corners of the room, behind the curtains, then vanished entirely.

He no longer felt as if they were pouring burning lead upon his head, for he was better.

Among the forms, real and imaginary, smiling and grimacing, that floated around him, he sometimes saw the lover of Cora standing at his bedside, regarding him with a look of pity. It was a dream, no doubt, like the visions he had of his native village and the beloved ones, who stood near him with strange miens and distorted faces.

The most singular thing about it was that, since he dreamed he saw him there, he no longer hated him.

One evening, when his head was perfectly clear and all the confused visions had vanished, he saw standing before him, at the foot of the bed, the young officer, in the same uniform he wore that night at the house of Cora, his blue sleeves glittering with golden stripes. Jean raised his

head and regarded him with astonishment, at the same time extending his feeble arm to ascertain if there really was anyone there.

The young man, seeing that he was recognized, instead of disappearing, as he generally did, took the hand of Jean, and, pressing it, said, simply, "Pardon."

Tears, the first that he had shed for years, flowed from the eyes of the spahi, and his heart felt lighter.

XVII.

His convalescence was of short duration; the fever once conquered, his youth and strength soon effected his recovery.

But he could not forget, and at times his mental anguish was intense. He sometimes indulged in foolish thoughts of vengeance, and he became almost savage; but these moods were fleeting, and he would say to himself that he would be willing to endure almost any humiliation to possess Cora as before.

The officer of the Marines, his new friend, often came to sit at his bedside.

He spoke to Jean very gently, as he would to an erring child, although he was scarcely so old as the spahi.

“Jean,” he said, one day, “Jean, you know that woman; well, if it will make

you calmer, I give you my word of honor that I have not seen her since the night you remember. There are many things in the world of which you yet have no knowledge—later on you will understand. You will also understand that it is very foolish to grieve over so small a matter. As to Cora, I wish you to swear to me that you will never see her again.”

This was the only allusion he ever made to her, and Jean, having made the promise, felt less wretched.

Undoubtedly there were many things he did not understand. There was a society advanced far beyond his knowledge; tranquil and refined perversities which his imagination had never pictured.

And he soon began to love this friend, who, though still somewhat of a mystery to him, was so kind after being so cynical, and looked at things with such an air of ease and indifference.

He had come to offer Jean his protection because of the anguish he had caused him; but he only made him an offer of protection, not of advancement; he never touched on that, and Jean's youthful heart was yet filled with the bitterness of its first despair.

XVIII.

It was nearly midnight at the house of Dame Virginie Scolastique.

The cabaret was large and gloomy, and, like other disreputable places, the doors were closed and secured with heavy bars of iron.

A little fetid lamp threw a sickly light upon a confused mass of objects, stirring about painfully in an atmosphere redolent of smoke, absinthe, musk, and spices.

Upon the table and on the floor were broken glasses, bottles, and various garments dragged along by the sabers of the spahis in a sea of beer and alcohol.

The feast had been joyous and the noise uproarious; but now it was over, both song and tumult, and was followed by the drowsiness and depression which always comes after hard drinking.

The spahis were there ; some of them leaning on the tables, with dull, sunken eyes and beastly smiles, and others, more respectable, striving to overcome their drunkenness, were holding their heads up proudly, their eyes, full of an inexpressible gloom, resting gravely on the scene.

In the distance—if one had listened—could be heard the cry of the jackal roaming around the cemetery of Sorr, where many among the revelers there already had their places marked on the desert sands.

Dame Virginie was copper-colored and thick-lipped, and around her head was bound a Madras handkerchief of gorgeous colors.

She was drunk also. Lying near her on the floor was a tall young spahi of a fine, robust figure, and hair as golden as ripe wheat. He was unconscious, and on his forehead was a deep gash. Dame Vir-

ginie, aided by a black slave, was sponging the wound with cold water and a vinegar compress. Neither pity nor sensibility prompted her to do this, but rather a fear of the police.

She was greatly disquieted, for the blood continued to flow; it had already filled a dish, and as it could not be arrested, fear sobered the woman.

Jean was there, seated in one corner of the room, more intoxicated than all the rest; yet he sat upright in his chair, his eyes fixed and gloomy. It was he who had wounded his comrade with a bar of iron snatched from the door, which he still held in his clenched hand, unconscious of the blow he had given.

A month had elapsed since his recovery from the fever, and every evening since then he could be seen dragging himself into dens of iniquity, in the first ranks of scoffers and débauchés.

There was much of boyish recklessness in his behavior, it is true; nevertheless, he had run a terrible course since the month of his suffering.

He had devoured immoral romances, where all was new to his imagination, and otherwise abandoned himself to unhealthy extravagances, completing the round of revelry and dissipation at Saint Louis, where he made an easy conquest of every woman with whom he was thrown, his good looks assuring him possession without resistance.

And then he began to drink.

You who lead domestic lives, seated peacefully with your families around the fireside, judge them not harshly, the sailors, soldiers, and those whom destiny has thrown, with their ardent natures, into abnormal conditions of life, upon the great seas or in the distant countries of the sun, amid unheard-of privations and influences

of which you know nothing. Judge them not harshly, poor exiles!

Then Jean began to drink, and he drank more than his companions; he drank terribly.

Heretofore he had remained pure and uncorrupted in spite of all his temptations, and he still retained the manners of a great, untamed boy. When the pensioners of Dame Virginie came near enough to touch him, he scattered them with the end of his whip as unclean animals, and they began to regard him as a fetich man, whom they dared not approach, and the miserable little creatures no longer attempted to beguile him.

He was terribly savage when he was intoxicated, when he lost his head, with that great physical force unchained.

This evening he had been startled by a random word about one of his amours—and he remembered nothing more, but sat

there immovable, still clutching in his hand the bloody iron bar.

Suddenly his eyes darted lightning ; it was the old hag he wanted now, and without any apparent motive ; but, possessed with the unbridled rage of a drunken man, he raised himself half-way from his chair, furious and menacing.

The old woman uttered a hoarse cry, and for a moment she trembled with fear.

“Hold him!” she fairly screamed to the drowsy forms of those who were asleep under the tables.

Some heads were raised, and one languid hand attempted to hold Jean back by his coat, but this help was not sufficient.

“Give me something to drink, old witch!” he cried. “Something to drink, old night hag! Give me something to drink, I say!”

“Yes, yes,” she replied, in a voice

shaking with fear. "Yes, here is something to drink. Bring me some absinthe quickly, to finish him—absinthe dashed with brandy."

She did not consider expense on such occasions.

Jean drank it all at one draught, and dashing the glass against the wall, he fell to the floor like a thunderbolt.

"That finished him!" chuckled the old woman; "there is no danger in him now."

She was very strong, this old Virginie Scolastique, and solidly built; and being sobered all at once, with the assistance of a black slave and the little negresses, she lifted Jean, an inanimate lump. After having searched his pockets in order to take from them the last pieces of silver, she opened the door and threw him out.

Jean fell heavily to the ground, his arms outstretched on the sands.

Then the old hag, vomiting a torrent of vituperation, slammed to the door, which closed with a horrible, grating noise.

And all was silent. The wind blew mournfully from the direction of the cemetery, and the only sounds to break the great calm of midnight were the lugubrious yells of the jackals in a sinister concert over the resurrected bodies of the dead.

XIX.

FRANCOISE PEYRAL TO HER SON.

MY DEAR JEAN : We have received no response to our last letter, and Peyral says it has been a long time since we have heard from you. I can see that he suffers greatly each day when Toinon passes by with his mail-box and says there is nothing for us. I also feel great anxiety, but I always believe that the good God will take care of you, my dear son, for I pray to Him very often that He will allow no misfortune to befall you.

Your father says he understands how it is, because he was in the army, and that he has seen rough roads for young men who are not prudent in their selection of companions, and who allow themselves to be led into drinking. And he warns you against association with wicked women, who will surely bring you to grief in the end. I say this to please your father; as for myself, I am sure that my dear boy is prudent, and that he has something in his heart which will keep him aloof from all such evils.

Next month I think we will be able to send you a little money, for I know in that country one has to pay a great deal for trifling things; and I am sure you will not spend the money recklessly after your father has gone to so much trouble to obtain it. As for myself, the wants of women are few; I speak for him only.

We talk of you every evening as we sit under the chestnut tree; we rarely ever spend a day that your name is not mentioned.

The neighbors send you good wishes.

My dear son, your father and I embrace you affectionately. May the good God protect you.

Your mother,

FRANCOISE PEYRAL.

When Jean received this letter he was in the prison of the barracks, where he was confined for drunkenness.

Fortunately, the wound inflicted on the head of the blonde soldier had not proved serious, and neither the wounded man nor his comrades wished to denounce Jean.

His clothes were blood-stained, his shirt

in tatters, and in his head there were still the fumes of alcohol. A mist was before his eyes, and it was with difficulty that he read the letter.

Between him and the pure affections of his childhood there was now a dark shadow; this shadow was Cora—his passion, his despair. He had some moments of oblivion, and then it was he could think with happiness of other days.

The poor, confiding letter touched his heart; he kissed it fervently, and began to weep.

Then he swore he would never drink again; and as the habit had not yet a strong hold on him, it was easily broken.

He never drank again.

XX.

Several days after this, an unforeseen circumstance brought a happy and salutary diversion into the life of Jean Peyral.

An order was given for the spahis to establish themselves—men and horses—for a change of air in encampment at Dialambam, several miles south of Saint Louis, near the mouth of the river.

On the day of their departure, Fatou-gaye came to the barracks, gaily attired in her bright blue holiday garment, to say farewell to Jean, and he embraced her, kissing her gently on her two little black cheeks.

And at night-fall they started on the march.

As for Cora, after the first moments of rage and excitement were over, she re-

gretted her lovers, for in truth she had loved them both. The two Jeans appealed equally to her senses; treated as a divinity by Jean Peyral, and, on the other hand, by the officer as a pretty girl.

But no one witnessed her mortification, for she was never again seen at Saint Louis strolling along the sands. One day she went away secretly—sent by her husband on an official errand to a factory far away, south of Saint Louis.

Fatou-gaye had undoubtedly gossiped, and the last escapade of the woman Cora created at Saint Louis a profound sensation.

XXI.

One calm night toward the end of February—a real winter night, clear and cold, after a day of burning heat—the column of spahis, en route for Dialambam, crossed the plains of Legbar.

They were straggling at their own pleasure, and Jean lingered in the rear, walking along tranquilly in company with his friend Nyaor-fall.

The Sahara and the Soudan both have cold nights, which are even more brilliant and transparent than the winter nights in France.

A deep silence rested on the whole country. The heavens, as blue as sapphire, were profound and mysterious. Myriads of stars twinkled in the blue depths of the skies, and all objects were

defined with a wonderful accuracy in the silver moonlight.

In the distance, as far as the eye could see, were great marshes covered with a dreary vegetation of mangroves. So it is in the whole country of Africa, from the left banks of the river Senegal to the inaccessible confines of Guinea.

Sirius rose, the moon was in its zenith, and the silence was overwhelming.

The great euphorbias lifted their branches heavenward, mingling their shadows with the shadows of the lesser plants on the ruddy sands. Scattered here and there were clumps of stunted trees and pools of stagnant water, over which floated thick, white vapors. The scene was full of mysterious immobility.

The air was heavy with the odors from the great marshes, and at this hour of the night the miasma of fever is most subtle and fatal.

Everywhere along the route were scattered ghastly skeletons, the decaying bodies of camels bathed in a black and fetid blood, lying there in the moonlight, displaying their hideous, mangled carcasses, torn and disembowelled by the vultures.

From time to time they heard the plaintive cry of the marsh-bird, the only sound amid an awful calm.

On every side the baobabs stretched out their massive branches, like great boulders or trees of stone. The moon shone on these rigid structures with a sad cheerlessness, giving them the appearance of objects cold and petrified. Whole families of vultures were perched upon the polished branches, fast asleep, their large folded wings gleaming in the moonlight with a blue metallic luster.

They permitted Jean to approach them and touch them as if they were bewitched.

At two o'clock there was a strange concert of voices, as of dogs baying the moon, but something more lugubrious and funereal.

In Saint Louis, at the dead of night, Jean had often heard such groans in the distance ; but this evening it seemed they were there close to him in the bushes, the weird yelping of the jackal mingling with the sharp cry of the hyena. It was a combat between two roving bands in their raids on the bodies of the camels.

"What is that?" demanded Jean of Nyaor. A horrible presentiment oppressed his heart, and a cold chill crept over him.

"Those who are dead," answered Nyaor, with an expressive wave of the hand. "Those who die on land are sought out by these beasts and eaten by them."

And as he said "eaten by them," he gnawed his black arm with his shining white teeth.

Jean comprehended and trembled ; and ever after that, each time he heard in the night those mournful, weird voices, he remembered this explanation, the graphic description of the mimicking Nyaor.

And he, who in the daylight feared nothing, shuddered with the vague and gloomy fear of a superstitious mountaineer.

At last the voices died away in the distance, now and then sounding faintly from some other point on the horizon, and then ceasing altogether.

The milky vapor thickened over the still waters, the dew began to fall, and the damp air from the marshes was cold and penetrating.

Dawn approached, the moon sunk behind the western horizon, and solitude oppressed the heart. Finally there appeared low on the horizon the pointed roofs of the village of Dialambam, where to-morrow the spahis would pitch their tents.

XXII.

Around the encampment of Dialambam were great marshes filled with stagnant waters, and arid plains where the stunted mimosa grew in profusion.

Jean often took long, solitary strolls with his gun upon his shoulder, hunting sometimes, and then again dreaming in the vague reveries of a mountaineer.

And he also loved to take his canoe to ascend the yellow waters, losing himself in the mazes of the Senegal.

In the wide marshes there were pools of warm and tranquil waters, sleeping there unruffled under the blazing sun. On their banks the soil was treacherous and inaccessible to the foot of man.

White aigrettes walked gravely in the depths of the monotonous verdure of the

humid mangroves, and great, hissing lizards crawled in the mud. Water-lilies and white and red lotus-flowers bloomed there in the heat of the tropical sun, for the delight of the alligator.

And Jean Peyral began to love this country.

XXIII.

The month of May arrived.

The spahis began joyously to fold up their baggage and pull down their tents, collecting their possessions with energetic ardor.

For they were about to return to Saint Louis, to the great white barracks, which had been repaired and repainted in their absence. They were going to resume their old pleasures—to find again their sweethearts and their absinthe.

The month of May! In France this is the beautiful month of verdure and of flowers, but in the sad country of Dialambam there is nothing suggestive of spring-time. The trees, herbs, and all vegetation that does not grow in the muddy waters of the marshes are withered and

lifeless, for not a drop of water falls in this country for six months, and the soil is dry and parched.

Then the temperature rises, the evening breezes cease; the winter season is over, and spring-time arrives with its sultry heat and torrents of rain. This is the season of the year regarded with fear by the Europeans on the Senegal, because it brings lassitude, fever, and often death.

It is necessary to live in this country of thirst to appreciate the indescribably delicious sensation one feels at being wet to the skin by the large drops in the first wave of the storm in the first rain-fall.

And the first tornado! In the immobile, sombre sky there is a kind of leaden dome, and a strange *signe du ciel* rises above the horizon. The clouds assume fearful and fantastic forms, bringing to mind the eruption of a mighty volcano—the explosion of a world.

Then they form themselves into grand arcs, rising one above the other; and then again the dark, heavy masses of clouds collect, resembling vaults of stone that seem about to fall on the world to crush it.

Artists who paint the deluge, the cataclysm of a primitive world, have not depicted objects more grotesque, nor skies more terrible.

Suddenly there bursts from the clouds a terrific rain-storm; the trees are lashed as with whips; the leaves, the birds and vultures are blown about in a furious gale. Everything in the path of the storm is overturned; the tornado is unchained; nature is convulsed; it is like the passage of a frightful meteor.

The cataracts of heaven are poured down upon the earth, the wind blows a terrific gale, and the ground is covered with a débris of branches, birds, and flowers.

But suddenly the fury of the storm is allayed; the last blasts of the gale chase from the skies the dull, copper-colored clouds, and sweep away the tattered rags of the tempest; the meteor has passed, and the heavens become pure, blue, and immobile.

The first tornado surprised the spahis en route to Saint Louis, and, breaking ranks, they soon became a noisy, joyous band, running toward the village of Touroukambé in great disorder.

The women beating the millet, the children playing in the bushes, the pilfering fowls, the dogs sleeping in the sun, all ran to the huts precipitately, and crowded under the pointed roofs.

These huts—already too small—were invaded by the spahis also, who walked right in, stumbling over the gourds, upsetting the *Kouss-Kouss*.

Their horses, haltered near by, rushed

about frantically, neighing and pawing the ground with fright; the dogs yelped; the goats, sheep, and all the domestic animals of the village ran to the doors, bleating, yelping, leaping, endeavoring to push their way in with their horns, claiming their share of shelter and protection.

The cries, the screams, the bursts of negro laughter, the hissing noise of the tempestuous wind, and the thunder drowning all with its formidable artillery, made a wild, discordant tumult; a grand confusion under a black and raging sky; darkness at midday, with only a rift of light now and then, from a flash of lightning.

When the tornado had passed, and order was restored, the spahis started forth on the beaten path, refreshed by the rain and the rest by the wayside.

Soft, little clouds floated above them in the clear, blue heavens, curling and twist-

ing like airy vapories, then fading away in the distant blue ether.

Strong odors rose from the moistened earth; Nature was beginning her rejuvenation.

XXIV.

Fatou-gaye lingered at the entrance of Saint Louis for many hours, that the arrival of the troops might not escape her.

When she saw Jean pass, she saluted him with a discreet "*Keou*" (good-day), accompanied by a graceful little courtesy, for she did not wish to disturb him in ranks. She had the good taste to wait two long hours before she went to see him at the barracks.

She had changed greatly; in three months she had developed suddenly, like the plants in her own country.

She no longer demanded coppers, and she had acquired a certain graceful timidity so becoming to young girls.

A *bon-bon* of white muslin now covered her shapely form, as was customary with

girls of a marriageable age, and she was highly perfumed with musk and *soumeré*.

Scattered over her head were innumerable little tight curls, for she had permitted her hair to grow that she might go at an early day to a practiced hair-dresser, who would arrange it in the elaborate head-dress which always adorns the heads of African women.

At present it was too short, so it lay in curled and disheveled masses, which changed her looks entirely, and from being comical and savage, she had become graceful and almost charming.

In her *tout-ensemble* were blended the child, the young girl, and the black imp; a very fantastic little person!

“She is pretty, that little Fatou-gaye; don’t you think so, Peyral?” laughingly remarked the spahis.

Jean had discovered that she was pretty, but it mattered little to him.

The months of calm and reflection which he enjoyed during encampment had a most salubrious effect on him in every way. He had by degrees recovered his moral equilibrium, and the images of his old parents and his betrothed had regained all their honorable charm and former empire.

He entirely abandoned his reckless habits, and he could not now understand how Dame Virginie Scolastique had ever counted him among her clients.

Not only had he sworn never to drink absinthe, but also to remain faithful to Jeanne Méry.

XXV.

When Jean took his twilight strolls he often encountered Fatou-gaye on the way, her hair, which had grown very quickly, standing out from her head like the wool on a black sheep.

Formerly, during the first months of his life in Africa, he had regarded the black population with disgust. In his eyes they all had the appearance of monkeys, and beneath that oily, polished ebony he had never been able to recognize one from another. But after awhile he grew accustomed to their faces, and he could distinguish them. When he saw the young black girls passing by, adorned with trinkets and silver bracelets he compared them, pronouncing this one pretty, that one ugly, this one graceful and

charming, and that one savage; in fact, they were no longer repulsive to him.

Jean often visited his friend Nyaor at Guet-n'dar, and the scenes of the interior of a Jaloff hut, of a life in common, troubled him greatly, and made him feel more keenly than ever his exile in that accursed land, where he was entirely isolated from his kind.

He often dreamed of her whom he had loved with the chaste love of his boyhood — of Jeanne Méry. Alas! he had only been six months in Africa, and almost as many years must elapse ere he returned.

He sometimes felt that he would not have the courage to live alone, with no companion to make the years of his exile endurable.

There was Fatou-gaye, but what a profanation of himself! He would then be no better than his comrades, the clients of old Virginie!

For he possessed a kind of dignity, an instinctive modesty which had preserved him from all corrupting influences, and his soul revolted at the thought of descending so low.

XXVI.

He continued his long evening walks, though the heavy rains had begun to fall.

The wide marshes were filled with fetid, stagnant waters, and a rank, herbaceous vegetation covered the face of the earth. Even the light of the sun was pale from excessive heat and deleterious exhalations, and fever and miasma were each day gaining on the land.

Often at sunset, when Jean was alone amid these desolate scenes, his heart was oppressed with an unaccountable melancholy; there was something in the aspect of nature in that gloomy and abnormal country that paralyzed him.

At the hour of twilight these African marshes have a sadness which can never be expressed in any human language.

The eternal gloom of the land of Ham rests on all things.

XXVII.

June is ever the ideal marriage month.

Often, during these enervating evenings, Jean would meet nuptial corteges filing their way across the yellow sands in long, fantastic processions. They all sang, and the chorus of voices—most of them in a fine, apish treble—was always accompanied by a *contretemps*—a beating of hands and blows on the tam-tam.

The songs at these negro celebrations were always suggestive of a gross and voluptuous sensuality.

June! It was indeed spring-time, but the spring-time of Africa, fleeting and feverish, with enervating odors and oppressive storms.

It was the return of butterflies, of birds, of life. Humming-birds doffed their robes of gray and resumed the gor-

geous colors of summer ; all had become green, as if by enchantment ; soft, warm shadows fell from the light foliage of the trees and herbs on the moist soil.

The mimosa, flowering in profusion, resembled enormous bouquets ; birds flitted airily among the large tufts of orange blossoms, singing low, sweet notes.

Even the clumsy baobab was re clothed in a fresh foliage of pale and tender green.

The large, odorous blossoms of the datura, moistened by the light showers, yielded their sweetest perfumes, and from the tops of the plants fire-flies twinkled with phosphorescent scintillations.

Nature was in great haste to rejuvenate, and in eight days she had accomplished it all.

XXVIII.

“Anamalis fobil!” howl the griots, fiercely striking the tam-tam, their eyes inflamed, muscles distended, and the sweat streaming down their distorted bodies.

And they all repeat, clapping their hands in a frenzy, “Anamalis fobil! Anamalis fobil!”

These are the first words, the predominant refrain, in that mad, devilish chant teeming with passion and voluptuousness—the chant of the spring-time bamboula.

“Anamalis fobil!” they all cry in a frenzy of passion.

It is the alleluia of negro love, the seductive song full of nature, of the air, the earth, the perfumes of flowers.

At the spring-time bamboula, the

young boys and girls, attired with great splendor in their nuptial robes, mingle freely together, dancing on the sands, wildly singing in a mad rhythm, "Anamalis fobil!"

XXIX.

Anamalis fobil! The milk-white buds on the great baobabs had burst into a tender foliage.

Jean felt the African spring-time burning in his blood; it ran like poison through his veins.

The sap that rose in the plants was empoisoned, the flowers were full of dangerous perfumes, the beasts were fierce, the reptiles venomous.

The voluptuous delights of life in this new season of the year were new to him, and the fire of youth—for he was only twenty-two years old—burned within him, and he felt that it would consume him.

Anamalis fobil! how quickly time was flying! June was almost gone, and al-

ready in the vital heat the foliage was turning yellow, the plants were dying, and the over-ripe fruit was falling to the ground.

Anamalis fobil! There is a certain kind of bitter fruit in that hot country—the *gourous* of the Senegal, for instance—which in our temperate latitudes would be detestable, but which obtained there when one is suffering from thirst, is eagerly coveted and is strangely sweet.

. . . And so this little black creature, with skin as smooth as marble, and her dark, enameled eyes already lowered beneath the gaze of Jean—this savory fruit of the Soudan, mellowing prematurely in the sensuous, tropical spring-time—was full of intoxicating sweets, and untasted, unhealthy delights.

XXX.

Anamalis fobil! Jean with great haste, but a little abstractedly, was making his evening toilet.

That morning he had requested Fatougaye to meet him at twilight beneath a certain great, isolated baobab in the marshes of Sorr.

And now, before going, he leaned out of the window to collect his thoughts, if possible, while he breathed the fresh air of evening.

He trembled at what he was about to do. For several days he had resisted the complicated feeling struggling within him, for, with the instinctive horror and dread of a superstitious mountaineer, he had a vague fear of those charms and amulets, lest their enchantment might hold him forever in a gloomy bondage.

He felt that he was about to step across the fatal threshold to sign a funereal compact with the black race, and that dark shadows were descending which would separate him forever from the beloved ones so far away.

A warm twilight fell along the river, the old white city gleamed for a moment in its rosy lights, and then the purple shadows deepened. Long files of camels took their way across the sands, going northward. Already the clash of the tam-tam could be heard in the distance, and the griots singing in a frenzy, "Anamalis fobil! Faramati hi!"

The hour appointed for the meeting with Fatou-gaye had nearly passed, and Jean hastened to join her on the marshes of Sorr.

Over these strange nuptials the lonely baobab threw its deepest shadows, and the heavens, which hung like a great yel-

low vault above them, were sad, motionless, and oppressive, charged with electricity, terrestrial emanations, and vital substances.

To *paint* these nuptials, it would take colors so warm and glowing that no palette could furnish the like.

It would take African words and sounds, and, above all that, silence! It would take all the perfumes of the Senegal, its tempests and burning heats, its most transparent lights, its darkest shadows, and the great, solitary baobab in the depths of the marshes of Sorr!

Jean, though intoxicated with delight, felt a thrill of horror when he saw there so near to him the gleam of those brilliant, enameled eyes.

Bats flew noiselessly above them in a flight as soft and gentle as the flutter of a silken scarf. They approached very close to them; their curiosity was excited, for

Fatou-gaye wore a robe of white which trailed on the rosy herbs.

Anamalis fobil ! Faramati hi !

PART II.

I.

Three years have passed. . . .

Three times have the terrible wind and spring returned; three times the *saison de la soif*, with its chilly nights and desert winds.

Jean sleeps upon his *tara* in the airy upper apartment of the house of Samba-Hamet; near him lies his wolf-dog, thirsty and motionless, tongue hanging out, and nose on its paws, in the attitude and with the expression of the sacred jackals in Egyptian temples.

It is noon—the dreamy, silent hour of the siesta—and warm, warm, strangely warm, like the oppressive days of sultry July; yet it is a day in December, and the wind, blowing gently across the sands,

gives them an undulating motion, as if there were thousands and thousands of minute waves upon the great *mer-sanseau*.

Fatou-gaye, resting on her elbows, reclines upon the floor, as nude as a statue (costume of the interior), her polished, black limbs lying in curves of exquisite grace. Her hair was arranged in a most extraordinary head-dress, adorned with amber and coral.

All is silent around the house of Samba-Hamet, save for an almost imperceptible rustling of flies and the slight noise of the sands which are blown in blinding gusts against the house. Jean has almost fallen asleep listening to the low, crooning songs of Fatou-gaye, who sang airs she had never heard, but which nevertheless were not original. They were her own dreamy, passionate reveries, translating themselves into musical sounds, strange and somnolent; a kind of reflex

action—an effect produced upon the brain by all the overwhelming force of circumstances.

Peace had been restored between Jean and Fatou-gaye; Jean had forgiven, as he always did, and the affair of the *Khaliss* and the ear-rings of the gold of Gal-lam were soon forgotten.

Money was found elsewhere and sent to France. Nyaor-fall had loaned it to him in large, white pieces engraved with ancient effigies, which he had, with many others, hidden away in a copper box. Jean was to repay him when he was able. It was a grave responsibility for him, it is true, but his poor parents, who had counted upon him, were not disappointed; as for the rest, it mattered little.

Asleep on his *tara*, with the little slave crouching at his feet, Jean had an indescribable air of superb indifference—the affected air of an Arabian prince—for he

possessed all the poor majesty of a *fils de la tente*; he was no longer the little mountaineer of the Cévennes.

The three years on the Senegal, which had mowed down here and there in the ranks of the spahis, had spared him. He was much bronzed from contact with the burning rays of the sun, but his strength had developed and his manners accentuated in all that was elegant and graceful. He had become a model soldier, punctual, vigilant, and brave, but the golden lace of a quarter-master was always refused him; for many reasons, but principally because of his life with a black woman.

Rioting, intoxication, being reported for assault, frequenting ale-houses, and otherwise debasing himself, was bad enough, but to live with a captive slave, even though she had been baptized, could not be forgiven him; her color was unpardonable.

He had often received from his superiors violent remonstrances and terrible threats of punishment. Before the storm he showed a bold spirit, listening with the stoicism of discipline, dissembling under an air of contrition; he had even evinced a willingness to undergo the lash. But he still protected Fatou-gaye, and nothing more was ever done about it.

His feelings for the little creature were complicated; the most skillful would have lost his labor in trying to unravel it.

He abandoned himself to her influence, and was powerless to separate himself from her; following unresistingly the dictates of his troubled heart, for in those early days of separation and exile he was indecisive and easily decoyed. And day by day the shadows deepened over the memories of the past.

Two years had passed since Jean and Fatou-gaye first inhabited the house of

Samba-Hamet. In the house of Cora she had been a captive, not a slave, an essential distinction established by the laws of the colony, and of which she very soon took advantage.

As a captive she had the right to escape, and they could not pursue her, and after she had fled, she was free. She had made use of the privilege. Moreover, she was baptized, which was another guarantee of liberty. Cunning as an ape, she turned it all over in her little head and comprehended.

For a woman who has not abjured the faith of Maghreb to give herself to a white man is an act of ignominy which is punished by the scorn and contempt of the public.

For Fatou-gaye, however, this terrible prejudice no longer existed. It is true they called her *Kafir*, and she was excessively sensitive on this point.

The word *Kafir* (infidel) is the Roumi of the Algerians, the Giaour of the Orientals.

There would frequently arrive from the interior, bands of Khassoukés, whom Fatou-gaye readily recognized at a distance by their towering head-dress. She would run timidly and excitedly around them and endeavor to engage them in conversation in the beloved language of her native country; but they, after a word or two with the arch little creature, would turn their heads with scorn and laugh at her with an inexpressible curl of the lip.

And Fatou-gaye would turn away with shame and a heavy heart. But, after all, there was nothing that gave her so much happiness as to be a *Kafir* and possess Jean.

II.

Poor Jean slept deeply upon the light *tara*—the heavy, dreamless sleep of midday ; but the first moments of his awakening were very sad and gloomy.

That awakening after the deep trance of sleep at midday, the sudden realization of things after perfect oblivion, was terrible.

At first his ideas were confused, disconnected, and mysterious ; but suddenly his mind became clear, painfully clear, and there arose before him from the depths of an irrevocable past the forms of his beloved ones in the cottage of the Cévennes, and he seemed to hear the faint tinkling of the herd bells mingling with the shrill piping of the African grasshopper.

Those sounds at midday in the feverish half-wakefulness of the siesta, those vague,

unconscious thrills, brought tears to his eyes ; it was the result of circumstances, the paraphrase of silence and heat, of solitude and exile.

He suffered once more the anguish of separation and lost happiness ; his whole life seemed wounded. Over all things hung the gloomy aspect of the tomb.

He arose quickly, seized with a desire to go far away ; his heart was full of the rage of despair, and he thought of the dreary years that lay between him and his return. The feeble pulsations of the arteries in his forehead sounded to him like the beating of some great, mysterious clock of eternity, and he felt that his life was rolling away from him, and he was powerless to stop it.

Fatou-gaye vaguely comprehended that this awakening was a dangerous moment, a critical time, when the white man was beside himself. She watched him as he

slept, and when she saw him open his great, melancholy eyes full of a wild despair, she approached him humbly to do his bidding. Entwining her supple arms about him, she would look into his eyes questioningly, and say, in a voice as soft and languishing as the notes of a *griot's* guitar: "What is it, my white man?" And so these gloomy impressions of Jean were not of long duration; and when he was wide awake, his habitual insensibility resumed its sway, and he saw things in their accustomed light.

III.

Fatou-gaye's hair-dressing was a very important and complicated performance, occurring once a week, and often occupying a whole day.

In the morning she walked to the negro village, Guet-n'dar, where, in a hut of reeds and straw, there dwelt a hair-dresser of great renown among the Nubian women.

She would remain there for hours sitting on the sands before the door, giving herself up entirely to the hands of the patient and careful artist.

He unplaited her hair at once, taking off, one by one, the jewels, and after combing out the thick tresses he began to reconstruct the wonderful edifice, adorning it with coral, bands of gold, spangles

of copper, and balls of amber and emerald.

The amber balls were as large as apples, and were precious heir-looms inherited by Fatou-gaye from her mother. She had brought them from the far-off Gallam into the land of her captivity, concealed in a casket.

The most difficult part to arrange of this wonderful coiffure were the curled masses just above the nape of the neck, for there it was necessary to comb out the innumerable little kinks, which would then resemble a thick black fringe.

Then with deft and nimble fingers the hair-dresser would roll each of these locks separately around a straw, and paste them there with gum, which held the straws permanently in their places.

In the evening Fatou-gaye would return home with her hair supported on these straws, which had the appearance of the quills upon a porcupine. In the

morning, however, when the straws were removed, the effect was startling and beautiful.

She enveloped it all in a blue transparent gauze, as light and airy as a cobweb—a fashion peculiar to the Khassouké women—and this coiffure would last, night and day, for a whole week.

She wore elegant sandals of leather, tied on with flaxen strings passed between the great and little toes, after the manner of the buskins of the ancients, and a garment similar to those worn by the Egyptian women of the time of Pharaoh, which they bequeathed to the Nubian women.

Across her bosom was thrown a *bon-bon*, a large square of muslin with an opening through which the head is passed, and which reaches almost to the knees.

Her ornaments were heavy rings of silver riveted to her wrists and ankles,

and necklaces redolent with the odor of *soumere*.

The *soumere* is a kind of berry which matures on the banks of the Gambia. It has a pungent, penetrating odor, a perfume *sui generis*, characteristic of the Senegal. These berries are woven into necklaces, and are the favorite adornment of the African women.

Fatou-gaye was very beautiful with this high, fantastic head-dress, which gave to her the air of a Hindoo divinity arrayed for a religious festival. She did not have the flat nose and thick lips that we generally regard as the common type of the negro race; but she possessed the pure Khassouké type of beauty—a straight, delicate nose, with nostrils thin and flexible, a perfect mouth, glittering white teeth, and, above all, large dark eyes encircled with blue, which sometimes were full of a strange gravity, and then again with mysterious malice.

IV.

Fatou-gaye was very indolent ; it was truly an odalisque that Jean was worshipping.

She knew how to repair her scanty garments, and she always looked as neat and dainty as a little black cat when she arrayed herself in her snowy-white clothes; but beyond the care of her person, she was incapable of labor.

The poor Peyrals could no longer send to their son their small savings, for nothing succeeded with them any more, as the old mother had written, and since they were obliged to have resource to the modest purse of Jean, Fatou-gaye's income was more slender than ever. But happily she was a person of very frugal habits, and her wants were few.

Everywhere in the Soudan the woman is placed in strong contrast with the man, in the most degrading conditions of inferiority. Many times during her life she is sold as a beast of burden, at a price depending entirely on her looks—her ugliness, defects, and old age.

One day Jean demanded of his friend Nyaor :

“What have you done with your wife Nokhoudoukhuillé, the one that is so beautiful?”

And Nyaor replied, with a tranquil smile :

“Nokhoudoukhuillé talked too much, and I sold her; with the money they gave me for her I bought two sheep that never speak.”

The women labor hard beating the millet for the *Kouss-Kouss*; from morning till night in all Nubia, from Timbuctoo to the coast of Guinea, in every hut under

the burning sun is heard the sound of the pestles falling noisily in the mortars of stone.

Thousands of arms encircled with glittering bracelets grow weary and exhausted at this labor. This monotonous sound, mingled with the sharp, querulous voices of the women, who chatter away like monkeys, is the characteristic tumult that afar in the desert announces the approach to an African village.

The product of this eternal beating, which has been done by generations of women, is a coarse meal of millet, from which they make an unsavory liquor called *Kouss-Kouss*. This *Kouss-Kouss* is the chief food of the black people.

Fatou-gaye escaped the legendary labor of the women of her race, but each evening she descended to the lodgings of Coura-n'diaye, the ancient poetess of El Hadj, the female griot, and there, after

paying her feeble monthly allowance, she had the right to sit among the slaves of the old favorite, around a large gourd smoking with *Kouss-Kouss*, to satisfy the greedy appetite of a sixteen-year-old girl.

Extended upon a *tara* of finely woven mats, old Coura-n'diaye presided with an inexpressible dignity.

The scenes at these repasts were indescribably noisy. The little black slaves, crouching on the ground around the gourd, leaned over the crude liquor and ate it with their fingers, occasionally bursting into peals of merry laughter, displaying their white teeth set in gums as red as a peony. The stealthy paws of cats, the noses of the yellow dogs and the big-horned sheep were also thrust into the gourd for their share of the *Kouss-Kouss*.

V.

The deserted square before the house of Samba-Hamet was always very sad and lonely at twilight. Jean often remained for hours leaning out of the window at that time, when all was silent save the rustling of the parchments of the priests suspended from the ceiling, as they fluttered about in the evening breeze. Fatou-gaye had hung them there to guard them while they slept.

This evening he sat in the door-way smoking cigarettes, which he had taught Fatou-gaye to make, watching with his great, languid, brown eyes the little negresses who had come to play in the dim, weird twilight on the deserted square, where they flitted about like moths in the evening breeze.

The sunsets in December invariably bring to Saint Louis refreshing breezes, while overhead the clouds hang like dark curtains, growing darker and darker toward night-fall; but never a drop of rain falls, for this is the dry season, and there is no moisture anywhere. This respite at twilight always gives one a sensation of physical solace, yet it also brings with it a feeling of intense sadness and melancholy.

As Jean sat there before his lonely door he was lost in a deep reverie—his thoughts were very far away. Every day at the barracks he took a journey, as the flight of a bird, over the great geographical charts, and as he sat there he traveled it again in spirit.

He first traversed the gloomy desert; and this part of his journey, through those infinite, mysterious solitudes where the burning heat and all the sands re-

tarded his footsteps, he accomplished but slowly.

Then he crossed Algeria and the Mediterranean, and reaching the coast of France, he ascended the Rhone. Finally he came to the little black marks on the map that represented to him lofty pinnacles in the clouds—the Cevennés.

Mountains! It had been so long since his eyes had rested on anything but the low, sombre plains, so long since he had seen mountains, that he had almost forgotten their aspect.

And forests! The grand forests of oak trees in his own country, so cool and shadowy, where flowed rivers of sparkling waters, and whose soil was covered with a carpet of green mosses and wild flowers! What a relief it would be to him if he could behold that moist, green earth, instead of the arid sands swept by the desert winds!

And he saw in this ideal voyage the dear village, the old church, upon which he imagined there was snow, and his cottage near by, and he seemed to hear the ancient bell sounding the Angelus.

He saw it all as in a vision in the blue vapors of the cool December twilight, and the familiar faces of his loved ones shone on him tender and beautiful as he viewed them in the rosy lights of memory. Was it possible that they existed in reality, and were not even so far away but that he might reach them in a few days?

What were they doing then, his old parents, at this hour when he was thinking of them so intensely? Seated by the fireside, no doubt, near the wide chimney, where blazed a cheerful fire made of the dry branches collected in the forests. He could see there each familiar object of his childhood: the little lamp for winter

evenings, the old furniture, the cat dozing on a stool, and in the midst of it all the beloved tenants of the cottage.

It was seven o'clock ; the evening meal was finished ; his old father sat in his habitual attitude, his head supported on his hand—the head of an old cuirassier who had become a mountaineer. And his mother: she was knitting, perhaps, the long needles flying in and out of her active fingers, or holding the distaff, spinning flax. And Jeanne Méry, she was with them probably ; his mother had written him that she often came to keep them company winter evenings. She was "*changed, but more beautiful than ever,*" they had written him, for she had blossomed like a flower into lovely womanhood—no longer the little Jeanne he once knew.

Night had fallen over the lonely square, but the little negresses still flitted about

in the growing darkness, the fluttering folds of their flowing garments resembling the outstretched wings of bats as they ran about in the cool breeze with the sportive movements of little kittens gamboling when the wind is dry and frost is in the air.

The moon rose and made a vivid picture of the spahi in his gay red uniform ; and Fatou-gaye, who sat near him, her towering head-dress glittering with amber and gold, her great eyes full of a dreamy melancholy, was a bit of color that made the picture perfect.

VI.

A PEDANTIC DIGRESSION ON MUSIC AND
THAT CLASS OF PEOPLE CALLED
GRIOTS.

The art of music in the Soudan is confined to a peculiar caste of men called *griots*, who are from father to son itinerant musicians and composers of heroic songs.

These griots beat the tam-tam at the bamboula, and on festive occasions sing the praises of persons of rank.

When a chief desires to hear his own name exalted he commands the griots, who come and sit before him on the sands and improvise in his honor a long series of official couplets, accompanying their sharp voices with the notes of a primitive little guitar whose strings are stretched over the skin of a serpent.

The griots are the most philosophical and idle of people, leading wandering lives and taking no thought of the morrow.

They roam from village to village, or follow in the suite of the grand chiefs who go to battle; here and there receiving alms, and treated everywhere as pariahs, like the European gypsy.

Sometimes they are loaded with gold and favors, and then again in other countries they are excluded during their lives from all religious ceremonies, and at their death from the rights of sepulture.

They compose plaintive romances with vague, mysterious words; heroic songs that are melodious even in their monotony; marches for the warriors, in a nervous, stately rhythm, and airs for the dance which bring to mind the frenzied ravings of enraged beasts.

But there is a peculiar melody in all the music of the blacks, as with all primi-

tive people, which is expressed in short, sad phrases with a gamut, more or less accidental ; rising at one moment to the highest notes of the human voice, then descending suddenly to the lowest, dragging itself along in a kind of lamentation.

The negresses always sing at their work during the warm, drowsy hours of the siesta.

In the great calm of midday, so enervating there on the banks of the Senegal, the plaintive songs of the Nubian women have a strange charm.. Transported from this exotic frame-work of sun and sand, they would no longer possess the same thrilling pathos.

Although these negro melodies seem primitive on account of their repetitions and unceasing monotony, they are really very often difficult and complicated.

The marriage processions which one

so often meets winding slowly over the sands always sing under the guidance of the griots, their strange chorus being invariably accompanied by a persistent *contretemps*, bristling with fantastic difficulties.

A simple instrument, reserved for women, plays an important part in the music of these assemblages. It is only a gourd flattened at one end, which is struck with the hand, sometimes at the opening, and then again on the side, producing two very different sounds—the one dry and sharp, the other dull and muffled. It is so difficult to draw any sound from this instrument that the result obtained is surprising. The effect of the distant voices of the negroes mingling, half-drowned by the noise of hundreds of these instruments, is strange, and weird.

The perpetual *contretemps* of the ac-

companiment, the unexpected pauses, perfectly understood and observed by all the performers, are the most noticeable characteristics of this music, inferior perhaps, but very different from ours.

VII.

A passing griot strikes the tam-tam ; it is a summons, and they all gather around him, the women arranging themselves in a circle, singing sensual and passionate songs.

The one who arrives first leads the throng, and darting into the middle of the circle, dances to the music of the tambour—very slowly at first, with licentious gestures, then faster and faster, until she reaches a frenzy. As she moves her body there is a noisy clashing and jingling of glass beads and trinkets, and her movements resemble the friskings of a foolish ape or the contortions of one possessed.

When completely exhausted she retires, panting and overcome, the slimy drops of sweat bathing her black skin.

Her companions gather around her with whoops of applause; then another woman takes her place within the circle, and each one successively until they have all had their turn.

The older women are even more conspicuously and outrageously indecent. The infants, which they often carry on their backs, being frightfully tossed about, raise their voices in piercing cries; but the negresses on such occasions seem lost to all maternal sentiments, and nothing can induce them to pause in their mad dance.

On the Senegal the time of full moon is particularly consecrated to the bamboula and other great fêtes of the negroes. In that country of endless sands it seems that the moon attains a greater size than elsewhere, and its light is more brilliant and ruddy.

The crowd begins to gather at the close of day; the women are attired in gorgeous

colors and bedecked with jewels and the fine gold of Gallam. Their arms are ornamented with heavy silver rings, and around their necks is a wonderful profusion of trinkets, amber, coral, and glass beads.

When the red disk of the moon appears above the horizon, shedding its bloody lights upon the sands, the furious tumult begins.

At certain seasons of the year the lonely square before the house of Samba-Hamet becomes the theatre of these weird bamboulas.

On these occasions Coura-n'diaye would lend Fatou some of her precious jewels that she might attend the *fête*, and sometimes she herself would appear, as in olden times. Then there was a great buzz of admiration as the old griot advanced, glittering with gold and jewels, her head thrown back and a strange light shining in her aged eyes.

With a brazen face she would appear as nude as a statue, though her body was as tough and wrinkled as a black mummy.

She would then display the marvelous gifts of El Hadj, the Conqueror. There were necklaces of emerald of the purest water, rows upon rows of golden bells of inimitable workmanship; there was pure gold on her arms and ankles, and her head was adorned with exquisite ornaments of antique gold.

Then the old, bedizened idol would begin to sing, and becoming more and more excited each moment, she wildly tossed about her skeleton arms, though it was with difficulty she lifted the weight of her heavy bracelets. Her harsh and cavernous voice resounded as from an empty carcass, then sank into a groan—a posthumous echo of the poetess of El Hadj. In her bright, dilated eyes one

seemed to see a reflection of the great, mysterious wars of the interior of former days—the armies of El Hadj flying through the desert—horrible massacres, where whole tribes were left to the vultures—the siege of Segou-Koro, and the villages of Messina, Medina, and Timbuctoo all burning under the blazing sun like a fire of herbs on the plains.

Coura-n'diaye would be entirely overcome with exhaustion when she had finished her songs, and on returning to her house she would throw herself, panting and trembling, upon her *tara*, and after her little slaves had taken off her jewels and arranged everything to make her comfortable, she would remain there, silent and motionless, for many hours.

VIII.

One morning Fatou-gaye conducted Jean out of Saint Louis in the direction of Guet-n'dar, leading him, after the fashion of negroes, by one finger held in her little black hand covered with silver rings.

Guet-n'dar is a negro village built upon the sands, and is composed of thousands of small, round huts with pointed roofs of stubble, many of which assume the most extraordinary shapes.

Some of them are tall and peaked, menacing the skies; others are horizontal, threatening their neighbors, and many of them have a parched and shriveled look, as if they were suffering from the drought and were about to roll themselves up like the trunk of an elephant.

Under the uniformity of the blue sky

these hundreds of peaks and points give one an impression of many horned objects.

Guet-n'dar is divided by a wide street of sand running from north to south, very straight and regular, opening afar in the great desert—the desert that forms both country and horizon.

On either side of this vast, sandy way are numbers of narrow streets turning in and out as tortuously as the paths in a labyrinth.

It was in the month of January, and seven o'clock in the morning; the sun was just rising, and at this hour the air is fresh and agreeable even on the Senegal.

Jean walked along with a firm and steady step, smiling inwardly at the droll expedition upon which he was allowing Fatou-gaye to take him, and at the thought of the personage they were about to visit.

He permitted himself to be led along with a good grace, for he was amused and interested.

He was very handsome this morning, for the rare freshness of the pure air had brought out all of his physical elasticity, and had upon him a most exhilarating effect.

Fatou-gaye appeared to him in a most favorable light, and he almost loved her.

It was one of those singular, fugitive moments when memory was dead and the land of Africa seemed to smile upon him; when he abandoned himself without a retrospective glance to the life which for more than three years had lulled him into a dangerous sleep haunted with prophetic dreams.

Behind the reedy palisades that bordered the streets of Guet-n'dar could be heard the sonorous blows of the pestles beating the millet for the *Kouss-Kouss*.

mingled with bursts of negro voices and the rattling of their glass beads and trinkets.

At every street corner were skulls of great horned sheep attached to the end of long wooden poles, and skimming about everywhere were fetich lizards with sky-blue bodies and heads of a beautiful orange color which were swinging about perpetually from side to side.

The air was full of the strong odors of negroes, leather amulets, *Kouss-Kouss* and *soumere*.

Little negresses appeared at the gates with strings of blue pearls around their necks and their pear-shaped heads covered with coquettish little kinks; their mouths were stretched from ear to ear with smiles, and craning their necks over the gates they regarded Jean with curiosity and astonishment, chattering away in an incomprehensible jargon.

These scenes forcibly reminded Jean that he was in a land of exile; yet there was a certain charm about it all, and the rising of the tropical sun, the limpid morning air with its animating inspiration had a magical effect on the young soldier. He responded gaily to the salutations of the little negresses, smiled upon Fatou-gaye, and for the moment the past sank into oblivion.

They finally arrived at the hut of an old black man with a sharp and cunning look in his eye, named Samba-Latir. When they were seated upon mats on the ground in the house of their host, Fatou-gaye began the conversation, explaining the situation, which was, as will be seen, of a very grave and critical nature.

For several days, always at the same hour, she had met a certain ugly old woman, who regarded her in a very singular manner out of the corner of her eye, over her shoulder.

Yesterday, Fatou-gaye had returned home in tears, declaring to Jean that she was bewitched, and that night she was obliged to bathe her head in cold water to diminish the first effects of the evil eye.

In her collection of amulets there were those against all sorts of accidents, pains, bad dreams, poisonous plants, dangerous falls, and venomous reptiles; against the infidelity of Jean, the devastations of white ants, and alligators; but there was not a single one to ward off the bad luck which certain people have the power to throw over those who pass them—not an amulet to drive away the baleful effects of the evil eye!

And this was a recognized specialty of Samba-Latir, who had the charm already prepared.

With a mysterious air he took from an old chest a small red bag attached to a

leather string, and placed it around Fatou-gaye's neck, at the same time pronouncing cabalistic words to conjure the malignant spirit.

This only cost ten francs, and Jean, who did not know how to bargain even for an amulet, paid it without murmuring. But he felt the blood mounting to his temples when he saw his money go that way, for he thought with a pang of remorse of his old parents, who deprived themselves of many things that were certainly of more value than the amulets of Fatou-gaye.

IX.

LETTER FROM JEANNE MÉRY TO HER COUSIN
JEAN.

MY DEAR JEAN: Almost three years have passed since your departure, and I am always looking for you to say something about your return home. I have great faith in your remaining faithful to me, yet I can not deny that there are times in the lonely hours of the night when regret seizes me and my heart is full of fear.

My parents say that if you had very much desired it, you might have obtained a permit to pay us a visit.

It is true our cousin Pierre returned twice to this country during the time he served as a soldier.

They say that I am going to marry that big Suirot, but you must not believe it, for you know I could never marry that great simpleton. They may talk, but I know there is no one in the whole world so dear to me as my dear Jean.

They also say that I am putting on airs because

I will not dance with that numbskull Toinon, and others like him, but it is not true. I sit quietly on the bench before the door, with Rose, and think of you, whom I love more than all the rest.

Thank you for the picture, which is very good, though they tell me you are greatly changed; it is like you, though somehow you have not the same expression.

I hung it above the chimney among my Easter boughs, so it is the first thing that greets my eyes when I enter my chamber.

I have not yet dared to wear the bracelet you sent me that was made by the black people, for I am afraid that Rose and Olivette may ridicule me. They already think that I affect the airs of a fine lady. When you return, and we are married, it will be different; I will then wear it openly, with the beautiful chain and scissor-case of my aunt Toinette.

Only come, for you see that I am longing for a sight of you. I have the appearance of being happy, but sometimes regret and disappointment rise in my heart so strong that I go to my own room and weep.

Adieu, my dear Jean. I embrace you with all my heart.

JEANNE MÉRY.

X.

Fatou-gaye's hands, which were a beautiful glossy black outside, were pink inside. For a long time Jean shuddered whenever he caught a glimpse of that inside color, and a cold chill crept over him as if he had touched the feet of an ape.

Her hands, nevertheless, were small and delicate, and attached to round and very slender wrists; but those fingers of two different colors had something about them that was not human, which to Jean was horrible.

And there would escape her sometimes, when she was very animated, certain intonations in a strange treble, and peculiar gestures, which recalled mysterious resemblances and troubled his imagination.

But after awhile he grew accustomed to

them, and no longer allowed these peculiarities to annoy him, and at times when Fatou-gaye was gentle and amiable he loved her, though he often laughingly called her by an odd Jaloff name that means "little monkey."

This nickname mortified Fatou greatly, and Jean was much amused at the serious and imposing airs she assumed.

One fine day Fritz Muller paid a visit to Jean, and mounting noiselessly to the threshold, he paused a moment to watch the following scene: Jean, who was laughing like a boy, held Fatou-gaye by the arm, and turning her around, at the same time gazing intently at her, he seemed to be closely inspecting her. Suddenly, with an air of conviction, he thus expressed his conclusions:

"Yes, Fatou, you are a perfect little monkey!"

And she, greatly vexed, replied :

“Oh, T’ Jean, T’ Jean! you ought not to say so; for in the first place the monkey knows not how to speak, and I know very well.”

Then Fritz Muller laughed aloud, and Jean joined him; but Fatou-gaye assumed an air of offended dignity, as if to protest by her deportment against these impolite criticisms.

“A very pretty little monkey, anyhow,” said Muller, who greatly admired Fatou-gaye. He had lived in the black country a long time, and recognized in her one of the most attractive of the beautiful daughters of the Soudan. “A very pretty little monkey! If all the monkeys in the woods of Gallam were like her, one could have become acclimated in that accursed, God-forsaken country.”

XI.

A noisy crowd of men in the uniform of the spahis were assembled one evening in a large hall.

The windows were thrown open to catch the evening breeze ; swarms of fire-flies, attracted by the dazzling light, came to beat their wings against the great, swinging chandeliers.

Scattered about in the crowd were negroes and mulattresses, who were there to serve the spahis, for it was a grand banquet.

That day there had been a *fête* at Saint Louis—a military *fête*—a review of the troops at the barracks, horse-races on the desert, canoe-races on the river ; in fact, the usual programme of merriment and rejoicing of a provincial town. In addi-

tion to which, the musicians had been brought from Nubia.

All the handsome, robust men of the garrison—spahis, sailors, and sharpshooters—were promenading the streets.

There were also mulatto men and women in holiday attire—old *Signardes du Senegal*, grave and dignified, their high coiffures of Madras silk handkerchiefs arranged in the fashion of 1820, and young *Signardes* in more modern toilettes, much faded and wrinkled, and smelling of the coast of Africa; then there were other females in fresh, fashionable costumes; and behind them, as if for an offset, were crowds of little negroes bedecked with beads and savage ornaments.

It was a day of wonderful animation for Saint Louis, and all the inhabitants of the old city thronged the usually deserted streets, ready to return to-morrow to the gloom of the silent houses under their uniform shroud of white lime.

The spahis, who by order had paraded all day on the Government square, were joyous and excited at the unusual exercise and movement. That evening they would receive their promotions and the medals that had arrived by the last mail from France.

Jean usually sat apart from his companions, but this evening he joined them around the festal board.

A number of toasts were drunk. Many songs were sung; songs brought from Algeria, India, and elsewhere; some as solos, discreet and comical, and others in a fearful chorus, accompanied by the breaking of glasses and blows of the hands on the table. They also repeated anecdotes and threadbare jokes, and above the uproar could be heard words to make the devil blush.

Then suddenly, amid the surging tumult, a spahi raised his glass, and proposed this unexpected toast:

“To those who fell at Mecca and Bobdiarah!”

How strange, how unforeseen! An homage, a sacrilegious pleasantry, in memory of those long dead!

He was very drunk, the spahi who had proposed the funereal toast, and his eyes were dull and gloomy.

Alas, in a few years who will give a thought to “those who fell at Mecca and Bobdiarah,” whose bones are already bleaching on the desert sands!

The people at Saint Louis who saw them depart may retain a memory of their names for a little while; but after a few years, who will remember them, who will speak of them?

And every glass was emptied in memory of “those who fell at Mecca and Bobdiarah.”

This strange toast was followed by a great silence of awe and astonishment,

and it seemed as if a black pall had fallen upon the joyous feast of the spahis.

Jean particularly, whose eyes had been flashing with merriment, and whose ringing peals of laughter had been heard above the others, became grave and thoughtful, powerless to explain wherefore.

“To those who fell on the desert!” somehow those words thrilled him with horror, and a tremor ran through his flesh as when he heard the voices of the jackals borne to him on the wind from the gloomy plains of Sorr.

Notwithstanding, he was very brave, and had no fear of battle; and when he heard of Boubakar-Segou, who was then roaming about with his army near the gates of Saint Louis, he felt his heart bound at the thought of seeing a battle, even if it was only against a negro king. He felt that it would awaken him from

the life of dreamy idleness in the old white house, under the charm of a dusky child of the Khassoukés.

Poor fellows! You who drink to the memory of the dead; who laugh, who sing, profit by the joyous passing moment! Yet those gay, reckless songs have a mournful sound in the land of the Senegal, where many of you, beyond a doubt, have your graves already marked on the desert sands.

XII.

In Gallam! Who can comprehend what mysterious echoes these words awaken in the heart of the negro exile?

When Jean demanded of Fatou-gaye, long ago in the house of Cora:

“Where was your home, little one?” she responded in tremulous tones:

“In the land of Gallam.”

Poor negroes of the Soudan—exiled, driven from their native villages by all the devastations of these primitive countries; by great wars and great famines; sold into captivity, sometimes going on foot before the lash of a master, over a country more extensive than Europe! Still the memory of their native land is ineffaceably written in the depths of their faithful hearts.

Where formerly could be seen, in the far distant Timbuctoo, the grand palaces of white clay of Segou-Koro, mirrored in the bright waters of the Niger, or where the simple, straw-thatched villages lifted their pointed roofs in the heart of the desert, or in some deep defile of the mountains of the South, there the passage of the conqueror has left but a heap of ashes—a charnel-house for the vultures.

In Gallam ! Words to be repeated with mystery and contemplation !

“Some day,” said Fatou-gaye to Jean, “some day you will go back with me into the land of Gallam.”

Old, sacred land, of which she dreamed for hours with closed eyes ! The land of gold and ivory, in whose warm waters sleeps the alligator in the shadows of the lofty mangroves, and where the heavy foot of the elephant is heard striking the

ground as he rushes through the forest solitudes.

Formerly, Jean had dreamed of seeing this country; Fatou-gaye had excited his imagination with her extraordinary recitals and descriptions, but he no longer had any curiosity to see more of the country of Africa. He liked better to continue his monotonous life at Saint Louis, always to be ready there for the happy moment of his return to the beloved Cévennes.

He no longer wished to go into the land of Gallam, where the air was so hot and oppressive, and he began to have a horror of burying himself in the suffocation of the interior.

He dreamed of his own native land, with its mountains and shining rivers, and thought no longer of the land of Fatou-gaye; it made him warm, and gave him the headache.

XIII.

Fatou-gaye could not look upon a hippopotamus without running the fearful risk of dropping dead ; it was a curse thrown over her family many years before, in the land of Gallam.

They had endeavored in every way to exorcise the spell, but in vain, and there were numerous instances of persons dropping dead at the sight of these enormous beasts, and the curse had followed her ancestors unmercifully for several generations.

In the Soudan, it is no unusual thing to hear of such a curse; certain families can not see a lion, others a hippopotamus, and others an alligator—the worst misfortune of them all, a misfortune so great that charms and amulets avail nothing.

One can imagine the precautions necessary to be taken by the ancestors of Fatou-gaye, for in Gallam the hippopotamus is always abroad, roaming about in the swamps, where he loves to sport in the undergrowth and stagnant waters.

Fatou-gaye, having learned there was a pet hippopotamus at a certain house in Saint Louis, always avoided passing that way, for fear of yielding to the great curiosity she had to look upon this terrible beast, of which her friends had given her minute descriptions.

XIV.

The warm, oppressive days passed by in dreary monotony; they were all alike, never any change—the same regular duties at the barracks, the same burning sun on its white walls, the same unbroken silence resting on all things.

There were rumors of war with Bou-bakar-Segou, the son of El Hadj, and the spahis discussed it unceasingly, for nothing ever happened in that dead city; the sounds from Europe seemed extinguished by heat and distance.

Winter approached; the breakers on the coast were calm, and there were days when the air failed the lungs, when the warm sea waters were as unruffled and as smooth as oil, reflecting like a great mirror the burning tropical lights.

Jean often suffered from weariness and lassitude in that enervating climate, and from time to time with homesickness, which was always there in his heart ready to awaken to make him suffer.

Did he love Fatou-gaye? He did not know, himself; he certainly considered her an inferior being—a little nearer his equal, perhaps, than his yellow wolf-dog—and he did not trouble himself to ascertain what other feelings he had for the little black creature, whose soul was as black as her skin.

She lied and dissimulated, and possessed an incredible amount of malice and perversity. Jean knew this; but she was so absolutely devoted to him—the devotion of a dog for its master, the adoration of a negro for his fetich—that he was touched and softened by it.

Sometimes pride awoke in his heart, and his dignity as a white man revolted

at the life he was leading. The troth he had plighted with Jeanne Méry, and this treachery to this little black creature, sometimes rose before his honest conscience, and he was ashamed of his weakness.

Fatou-gaye had grown to be very beautiful. As she walked, supple and graceful, with the swinging movement which the African women seem to have borrowed from the feline tribe of their own country, as she passed along with a white muslin *bon-bon* thrown gracefully over her swelling bosom and shapely arms, she possessed the lovely grace of an ancient amphora.

Under that high head-dress, sparkling with amber and jewels, her form for the moment had something of the mysterious beauty of an idol of polished ebony.

Her great dark eyes, encircled with blue, were always half closed and dreamy,

and when she smiled, disclosing her pearly-white teeth, there was about her a certain indescribable charm and grace; a combination of the monkey, the young virgin, and the tigress.

Jean had a superstitious dread of her amulets; not that he had any faith in them, but seeing them everywhere, and knowing they were kept to bind him closer to her, he began to regard them with a peculiar horror.

They were on the ceiling, on the walls, concealed under the mats, on the sofa—they were everywhere—presenting the fantastic appearance of things bewitched.

When he awoke in the morning he felt them gliding over his chest, and at last it seemed that he was irrevocably entangled in their dark, invisible manacles.

After awhile his money gave out. He declared very decidedly that he would send Fatou-gaye away, and employ the

last two years of his exile in winning the golden epaulets of a quarter-master, that had so long dazzled his eyes and hopes.

He determined to send to his parents a small amount each month, to render their lives more comfortable. Then he would purchase wedding presents for Jeanne Méry, and he would also lay aside a little money to assist him in defraying the expenses of the marriage festivities.

Was it the baleful spell of the amulets, the force of habit, or the inertia of his will-power in that enervating climate? For Fatou-gaye continued to hold him under her little black hand—he did not send her away.

Yet he dreamed of his betrothed, and there was a radiance around his memory of her. “She grows more beautiful every day,” they had written him. He tried to picture her as his wife, with all the lovely

promise of her youth fulfilled, and his whole heart was full of her image.

And his old parents, how he loved them! For his father he had a profound and filial love, a veneration that approached idolatry. But the most tender, most sacred spot in his heart was given to his mother.

Take soldiers, sailors, and all of those young men abandoned to a life on the great seas, or in lands of exile—take the most rude and careless, the most dissipated, the most reckless of roués—look into their hearts, and nearly always you will find enthroned in that sanctuary a mother—an old peasant woman, perhaps; a good woman from Brittany in her high white cap, or a woman of Biscay with her head-dress of woolen.

XV.

Winter arrived for the fourth time.

The days were sultry and oppressive, without a breath of air stirring. All along the coast of Africa, the sands were dazzling and white under the burning rays of the sun.

The sea waters were calm and unruffled, save when the battles of the sharks made them turbulent, for these were the days for the great fish combats. Suddenly, the polished surface of the waters become troubled over an extent of several hundred meters, and the water is tossed up violently in jets and sprays.

This agitation is caused by immense banks of fugitive fish scampering away with all the swiftness of their millions of fins, before the hungry, voracious sharks in pursuit of them.

These are also the days best loved by the negro boatmen for their long, swift boat-races, and the shores are crowded with black people who stand in animated groups, exciting the contestants with a great tumult of cheers; and there, as in France, the victors are welcomed with the clapping of hands, and the vanquished with hisses.

Jean never appeared at the barracks unless his presence was absolutely needed; and his comrades often filled his place. The officers shut their eyes to this arrangement, which permitted him to pass almost the entire day at the house of Samba-Hamet.

For they all loved Jean; the charm of intelligence and honesty redeemed him, and his attractive form, voice, and manner had gradually cast over them a spell of which they were almost unconscious. He had, in spite of everything, won their

esteem and respect, at the same time making for himself a sort of situation that gave him almost liberty and independence.

One day he entered the barracks at call of retreat.

The old quarters did not wear their accustomed look of loneliness and gloom.

Groups of spahis were ascending and descending the stair-way, conversing animatedly and noisily.

There was something in the air.

“Good news for you, Peyral!” cried Alsatian Müller; “you go to-morrow to Algeria, lucky fellow that you are.”

Ten or twelve spahis had arrived from France by a boat from Dakar, and as many of the old ones were to be sent, as a special favor, to finish their time of service in Algeria.

Jean was among the number. They were to leave the next morning for Dakar,

where they would take a packet-boat destined for Bordeaux. Then they would go to Marseilles by way of the south, and, with the delays of the route, would catch a glimpse of their native land. At Marseilles they would take a packet-boat for Algeria, a land of milk and honey for the soldier; and so the last years of their service would pass away as a dream.

XVI.

Jean returned to his lodgings, strolling along the deserted banks of the river.

A starry night had fallen upon the Senegal; the fragile crescent of the moon hung low on the horizon; fires were flashing on the opposite bank of the river in the negro village of Sorr, tracing on the still, warm waters their vague lights and shadows.

In the distance he heard the deafening noise of the tam-tam sounding the spring-time revelry, which he had heard four times already at the same place, and which was blended with the memory of his first enervating pleasures in Africa; it now saluted him on his departure.

His mind was troubled; his thoughts and impressions were confused and incoherent.

The air was full of heat and phosphorus; a tranquil melancholy, a calm full of mystery, rested on all the borders of the Senegal.

Was it really true, this unexpected news? It had been whispered for a long time; now it was confirmed, and his name was on the list. To-morrow he would descend the river, never to return!

Preparations for their departure would not begin until to-morrow; this evening there was nothing to do but to dream—to bid adieu to all things in that land of exile.

In less than a month, he would probably pay a flying visit to his native village; he would embrace his old parents, and the betrothed of his boyhood—Jeanne Méry, now grown into a serious woman—he would see them all in passing, as in a dream.

But he was not prepared for the meet-

ing, and painful reflections mingled with his great, unexpected happiness.

He was about to return, after an absence of four years, almost a beggar—without even having won the modest shoulder-straps of a sergeant—and shabbily dressed, for he would not have time to provide himself with a new and suitable outfit in which to make his appearance at the village.

And then to acclimate himself in Algeria—to spend the remaining years of his service anywhere but on the banks of the gloomy Senegal, whose sadness was now so familiar to him !

Alas ! he loved the Senegal ; he realized now that he was attached to that unfortunate country by a number of strong and mysterious ties.

He had been foolishly overjoyed at the thought of his return, yet he loved the land of sand, the house of Samba-Hamet,

the excessive light and heat, and even the great gloom and silence ; he was not prepared to leave it all so suddenly.

The effluvium, the subtle exhalations, all that by which he was surrounded, had by degrees become infiltrated into the blood in his veins. He felt an invisible power holding him back as if he was inextricably entangled in the gloomy shackles of those amulets.

His brain was confused ; he was dazed ; this sudden deliverance frightened him.

XVII.

Military departures are always sudden. The following day, the baggage was hastily packed, the papers put in order, and Jean found himself leaning over the side of the vessel, descending the river.

Through the smoke from his cigarette he could see Saint Louis disappearing in the distance; crouching near him on the deck was Fatou-gaye with all her possessions, inclosed in haste in three large gourds.

Jean had taken his last franc to pay her way to Dakar; he had done so willingly, happy to rid himself of this last phantasy, but glad to keep her a little longer under his protection. The tears which she shed, the *cris de veuve*, as was customary in her own country, were heart-rending to hear,

and touched him deeply; he forgot that she was wicked, deceitful, and black.

As his heart expanded with joy at the thoughts of his return, his pity and tenderness for Fatou-gaye increased; he would carry her with him as far as Dakar—it was time gained in which to decide what to do with her.

XVIII.

Dakar is an old colonial town built on sand and rocks of a reddish color—an improvised harbor for the packet-boats of that western point of Africa called Cape Verd.

Here and there on the desolate sand-hills grew the mighty baobabs, and over the whole country floated dense clouds of vultures and eagle-fishers.

Fatou-gaye was temporarily installed there in the house of a mulattress. She declared that she did not wish to return to Saint Louis, and there her plans ended. She knew not what would become of her; neither did Jean, for he had failed to reach any decision in regard to her, and besides, he had no money.

The next morning, a few hours before

the departure of the packet-boat, Fatou-gaye crouched on the floor in the hut of the mulattress, beside her three gourds. She was speechless; her eyes were fixed and immovable, full of grief and wild despair, as if her heart was broken.

Jean stood near her twisting his moustache, not knowing what to do.

Suddenly the door opened noisily, and a spahi entered like the wind, his eyes flashing with excitement, his manner anxious and confused.

It was Pierre Boyer, who for more than a year had been the comrade and room-mate of Jean at Saint Louis.

They were both reserved, and rarely ever spoke, but they esteemed each other, and when Boyer went to serve at Goree, they grasped each other's hands with cordiality.

Taking off his cap, Pierre murmured a rapid excuse for entering so unceremo-

niously, and trembling with emotion, he took Jean's hand.

"Peyral," said he, "I have been searching for you all day; listen to me a moment. I have a great favor to ask of you; hear what it is, and reflect on it. To-morrow you are going to Algeria. Alas! to-morrow I go to Guadiangué, in Ouankarah, with some others from Goree. They are fighting there; it will only be for three months, and you will surely gain promotion or a medal. We have the same time, are the same age, so it will not change the time for your return home. Peyral, will you exchange places with me?"

Jean had divined it from the first; his eyes were dilated with intense emotion; a tumultuous flood of thoughts, convictions, and indecisions rushed through his brain; he lowered his head, folded his arms in deep thought. Fatou-gaye, who

understood it all, arose, panting, breathless, awaiting the sentence that was about to fall from his lips, which she trembled to hear.

“Peyral,” continued Boyer, “you will make a good thing of this—”

“Have you asked the others?” said Jean.

“Yes,” he replied, “but they have refused me; they have good reasons for it, but it will just suit you. The Governor of Goree is interested in me, and promises you his protection if you will exchange. We thought of you at first (looking at Fatou-gaye), for you like this country. On your return from Guadiangué, you will go to finish your service at Saint Louis; they have agreed to this, and it shall be done, I swear to you.”

“But we will not have time to arrange matters,” interrupted Jean, who, feeling lost, wished to recover himself if possible.

“Yes,” said Boyer, “we have the whole afternoon before us; you will have nothing to do, all has been arranged with the Governor; the papers are ready, your signature is all that is needed. I will go to Goree and return in two hours, and all will be done. Listen, Peyral: here are my savings, three hundred francs; they are yours, to install yourself on your return to Saint Louis, or to spend as you wish.”

“Thank you,” said Jean; “but I will not accept pay for this;” and he turned away his head proudly.

And Boyer, who saw that he was offended, grasped his hand, saying gently:

“Do not be angry, Peyral.” And they stood before each other, speechless and silent.

Fatou-gaye, who saw that she might lose all by speaking, knelt on the floor, reciting prayers, embracing Jean’s knees,

and endeavoring to drag him toward her.

Jean, who was ashamed that Boyer should witness such a scene, said roughly:

“Leave me, Fatou-gaye, I entreat you. You are becoming silly.”

But Boyer did not regard the scene as ridiculous; on the contrary, he was touched by it.

The sunlight crept through the open door, and illuminated their gay uniforms and lighted up their handsome, animated faces, now so full of anxiety and indecision. It fell on the silver rings that encircled the arms of Fatou-gaye, and made them shine like glittering serpents.

There they stood, those three abandoned human beings, in the poor, bare hut of wood and straw, with beating hearts and flashing eyes, about to decide their destinies.

“Peyral,” continued Boyer, in a low,

gentle voice, "it is because I am an Algerian; you know what this means. In that country there is a village where my parents are expecting me. I am their only child; you ought to know what it is to return to one's country."

"Well, yes," said Jean; "I will exchange;" and throwing his red cap behind him, he stamped the ground with his foot. "I will remain. Let us go."

Pierre clasped him in his arms and embraced him, and Fatou-gaye raised a shout of triumph; then hiding herself behind Jean, shook with sobs, which ended in bursts of nervous laughter.

XIX.

It was necessary to hasten; Pierre Boyer went as he came, without ceremony.

He hurried to Goree, bearing the precious paper to which Jean had placed his soldier's signature, correctly and legibly written. It was signed and countersigned, his baggage was transferred, and the substitution effected.

All was concluded so rapidly that the two spahis had no time for reflection, and promptly at four o'clock the packet-boat put itself en route, carrying away Pierre Boyer, and leaving poor Jean behind.

When all was irrevocably ended and Jean found himself alone on the sandy beach watching the departing vessel, he grew desperate, and his heart was full

of anguish and terror at what he had done.

He became enraged with Fatou-gaye ; her presence horrified him, and he drove her away from him.

He felt as if he had just signed a compact of death with the black country, which seemed to possess for him a fatal fascination.

He ran along the sands without knowing where he was going ; he wished to breathe the fresh air, to be alone, and to follow with his eye as long as he could the disappearing boat.

The sun was yet high when he started out, and under the great, blazing luminary the desert plains had an impressive majesty.

For a long time he walked on the wild coast, then on the crests of the sand-hills, and then high up on the ruddy cliffs, to catch the last glimpse of the vessel fast

fading from view in the distance, flying over the waters before a strong wind.

He was so distracted with grief that he no longer felt the burning rays of the sun ; he thought of the years that he had yet to spend in that gloomy land, when he could have been yonder, swiftly sailing toward his dear old home.

What malignant influence, what charm, what amulet, had kept him there, great God!

He walked onward toward the north so as not to lose sight of the boat which was rapidly disappearing. A shower of startled locusts beat against his face and breast as he passed through the winter herbs ; his hands were torn and bleeding from contact with the thorny plants.

He had gone a great distance into the depths of a rough, savage country in the direction of Cape Verd.

For some time he had seen ahead of

him, afar off, a large, isolated tree, more immense even than the baobab, with a dense, dark foliage—a giant of the flora of the ancient world, forgotten there for ages.

He sat down, exhausted, on the sands beneath this great dome of shadows, and bowing his head, began to weep. When he arose, the boat had vanished, and night had fallen.

The evening was clear and cool; as the twilight shadows deepened, the immense tree rose like a great black mass on the desolate plains.

Before him lay the tranquil sea, the terraced cliffs, and as far as the eye could see, the mighty Cape Verd, with its monotonous plains, divided into deep defiles and ravines, a dismal and dreary country with little vegetation of any kind.

Behind him, in the direction of the interior, were mysterious ridges of low hills,

and in the distance the great baobabs, casting shadows like those of the madre-pore.

The atmosphere was dense and heavy almost to suffocation ; the sun went down in thick vapors, its yellow disc strangely increased and distorted in the mirage.

The air was filled with perfumes from the large white blossoms of the datura and the sickly odor of the belladonna. Myriads of moths flitted about these poisonous flowers, and from the bushes sounded the plaintive notes of the ring-dove.

The whole land was covered with a deadly vapor, and the horizon was dull, sombre, and almost indefinable.

And there behind him lay the interior, which to him was once so full of wonder and mystery—now it was nothing to him. Podor, nor Medina, the land of Gallam, nor the far distant Timbuctoo—he no

longer wished to see them ; his heart divined their gloom, sadness, and suffocation. His thoughts were of his own country, and he only desired to free himself from this horrible nightmare and depart at any price.

The tall African shepherds with fierce and savage countenances passed him, driving toward the village their lean, hump-backed beeves.

The image of the sun, which is called in the Bible "a sign in the heavens," vanished as quickly as a pale meteor, and it was night. Above him, the boughs of the mighty tree formed a gloomy temple. He fell asleep, and dreamed of his own home at this hour on summer evenings ; of his mother, his betrothed ; then he dreamed that he was dead, and would never see them again.

XX.

The die was cast, and it was necessary for him to go on to the end of his destiny.

Two days afterward, Jean embarked in the place of his friend on board of a little man-of-war vessel, to report at the distant post of Guadiangué, in Ouankarah, where they were sending men and munitions to reinforce that obscure post.

In the adjoining country affairs were in a confused state, so much so that caravans could no longer cross the desert.

It was a dispute between the negroes of different rapacious tribes and pillaging kings, which would no doubt be settled during the winter, when Jean, according to the promise made by the Governor to Boyer, would be returned to Saint Louis, to end his years of service.

There were many people crowded on the little vessel. Fatou-gaye was there; she had succeeded in getting aboard with her usual cunning and persistence, passing herself off as the wife of a black sharp-shooter; she had followed Jean, with her three gourds.

Then there was a regiment of soldiers from Goree, who had been in encampment there for a season, and about twenty native sharp-shooters with their whole families.

It was a curious mixture, for they had several wives apiece, and numerous children; besides, they were taking with them their provisions, millet in gourds, and their clothes, also packed in gourds, their amulets, and a crowd of domestic animals. There was a great agitation on board at the time of their departure; a great entanglement of people and things.

The negresses slept tranquilly on the

floor of the deck, wrapped up in their clothes, as close together as sardines in a box.

The vessel moved gently southward, and was soon lost in regions where the tropical heat every moment became more and more intense.

XXI.

It was a night of equatorial calm; an absolute silence reigned; the air was still and motionless, and there was scarcely a perceptible movement of the sails.

The warm sea waters were gleaming and phosphorescent, reflecting as in an immense mirror the brilliant heavens above them; they were like two great mirrors—the sea and the sky—reflecting each other, blending in the distance.

The vessel seemed to be sailing through a terrible gulf with no horizon, where all was overwhelmed in a cosmic profundity, vague and infinite; the moon dipped into the sea, a blood-red circle without a ray, amid vapors pale and phosphorescent.

In the first geological ages, before day was separated from darkness, when all

things wore the tranquillity of expectation, the repose between the creations must have been a grand and inexpressible immobility. At that epoch when the world was not yet condensed, when the clouds were suspended, uncreated lead and iron, when all eternal matter was sublimated in the intense heat of a primitive chaos—what a sublime silence then!

XXII.

They had been en route three days.

At sunrise, when all things were glittering in the light of golden clouds, they saw far away in the distance a line of green—an indescribable green—that brilliant color with which the Chinese painters trace on a fan some gorgeous landscape.

This line was the coast of Guinea. On arriving at the mouth of the Diakhallémé, the vessel directed its course toward the wide entrance of the river.

The country there is as flat as that of the Senegal; otherwise the face of nature is entirely different. Everywhere there is an equatorial verdure of eternal freshness, and the foliage on the trees is a bright emerald green, a color which the trees in

France never attain, even in the leafy month of June.

All along the banks of the river there are forests of a uniform breadth, overshadowing warm, inert waters—forests full of poisonous odors and venomous reptiles.

This country, as all of Africa, rests under a spell of gloom and silence; yet it is a great relief for the eye after the monotony of the sands of the desert.

At the village of Ponpoubal, on the Diakhalleomé, the vessel landed its passengers to await the canoes which would carry them to their destination.

On this July night at nine o'clock, Jean, with Fatou-gaye and the spahis from Goree, took their places in a canoe manned by six black rowers under the guidance of Samba-Boubon, the most experienced pilot on the rivers of Guinea, to proceed to Guadiangué, situated several leagues up the river.

The night was warm, starry, and cloudless—a real equatorial night.

They glided up the calm river with astonishing swiftness, borne toward the interior by the rapid current and the indefatigable efforts of the rowers. The banks of the river faded away into obscurity, and forest after forest fled by them.

Samba-Boubon led the chant of the rowers, sometimes pitching his plaintive, ringing voice on the highest key, then descending suddenly to low, soft notes full of a strange melancholy.

Then the chorus would begin, slow and grave, and all through the night was heard that plaintive voice, always followed by the same response from the rowers.

For a long time they chanted the praises of the spahis, their horses, and even their dogs, and at last the praises of the family of Soumaré, and of Saboutané, a legendary woman of the coast of Gambia.

When fatigue or sleep relaxed the regular movement of their oars, Samba-Bou-bon hissed through his teeth like a serpent, and this hissing was repeated by all the rowers, who became reanimated in their ardor as if by magic.

All night long they glided past the great forests sacred in the religion of the Mandingoes, whose ancient trees extended overhead their gaunt and angular branches like gigantic structures of bones dimly defined in the starlight—grand rigidities of stone.

The songs of the rowers, the rushing of the waters, the weird chatterings of the monkeys in the woods, and the cries of the marsh-birds mingled their sad, nocturnal voices in the depths of the forest; and sometimes in the distance they heard the cries of human beings, the cries of the dying, the firing of guns, and the deafening strokes of the warlike tam-tam, all

blending in a wild harmony with the melancholy music of the black rowers.

As they passed the outskirts of some of the villages along the route, the forests were brilliantly illuminated by the light of blazing fires, for there was warfare in all that country—Sarakholes against Landoumans, Nalous against Tonbacayces—and many of the villages were fired.

For leagues there was silence—the silence of night in deep forests—unbroken save by the monotonous chants and the muffled sound of the oars dividing the still waters through the region of shadows.

They were borne along swiftly toward the interior; the rowers rowed with fury and superhuman force, and as they neared their destination, they seemed electrified as with a fever.

At last the dim outlines of a high rock rose before them, from which gleamed bright lights.

Samba-Boubon waved a torch, and raised a rallying cry; the inhabitants of Guadiangué came to meet them, and their journey was at an end.

Guadiangué is perched upon the summit of a vertical rock, which they ascended by tortuous paths, illuminated by the flaring torches of the blacks.

When they reached the top of the rock, they were conducted to a large flat house which had been prepared for them, where they slept on the ground on mats, awaiting the break of day.

XXIII.

After a few hours of sleep, Jean was the first to awaken, and on opening his eyes he saw the daylight gleaming through the chinks of the wooden house, revealing the prostrate forms of his companions reposing on the ground, their heads resting on their clothes.

There were Bretons, Alsatians, and Picards, all with the blonde hair of the North; and Jean in the first moments of his awakening had a kind of dazed conception of the sad scene, and he thought of all these young lives wasted in a country of exile, and some of them so soon to meet death.

Reclining near them was the graceful form of Fatou-gaye, her black arms, encircled with silver rings, thrown above her

head ; those supple arms which he knew on her awakening would be so eager to entwine about him.

It began to dawn upon him that he was lost in the depths of an immense savage region, farther than ever from his native land ; so far that even a letter could not reach him—in an obscure village of Guinea.

He rose noiselessly, so as not to awaken Fatou-gaye and the spahis, and approached an open window to get a glimpse of this unknown country.

The village crowned a precipice more than a hundred metres high, and the hut in which he stood seemed suspended in the air. At his feet was spread out a landscape of the interior, scarcely visible in the pale morning light. There were abrupt hills covered with an unfamiliar vegetation, at the foot of which flowed the river that had brought him there,

gliding like a silver ribbon through the marshes, half veiled in a white cloud of morning vapors.

XXIV.

Jean left the house and started out for a stroll through the village; he could have imagined himself anywhere than in an obscure corner of the interior of Africa.

The verdure, the bright foliage of the trees, the limpid river flowing over a bed of many-colored stones, between two walls of humid, polished rocks, made the scene one of picturesque beauty.

Scattered about everywhere were groups of women with complexions of a reddish-brown, the color of the rocks, washing their clothes in the river, and relating with animation the thrilling events of a combat the night previous. Warriors were passing and repassing over the ford, armed *cap-a-pie*, ready for battle at a moment's notice.

There was a certain novelty about all this which delighted Jean ; it was so different from the oppressive silence and gloom which weighs on the hearts and spirits of those who dwell on the banks of the Senegal.

He felt the exhilarating charm of the forests, flowers, hills, and bright waters ; there was nothing sad or depressing in this terrible splendor in nature.

Suddenly he heard the deafening noise of the tam-tam, the music of war, and it approached so near that Jean and the women who were washing in the stream ran to look out through the blue openings in the rocks. An ally chief was passing above them with great pomp and splendor, marching to the sound of martial music, the arms and trinkets of the warriors in his suite flashing in the blaze of the sunlight as they moved along.

It was nearly midday before Jean re-

turned to his quarters in the village, walking through verdant paths in the shade of the trees overhanging the streets. Some of the houses in Guadiangué are high, and almost elegant under their tall roofs of stubble.

Although the foliage and vegetation wore the vivid colors of early spring-time, and the shadowy forests looked cool and inviting, the days were extremely hot and oppressive. In the morning, even before sunrise, in these forests inhabited by monkeys, green parrots, and rare humming-birds, the air was hot and empoisoned with deadly odors; serpents glided through the wet herbs, and it seemed that all the heat of the equator had concentrated there.

Jean began to regard his sojourn in Ouankarah as a time of delightful freedom in a country marvelous for the beauty of its vegetation and the grandeur of its

forests; a happy respite after the crushing monotony and gloom of his life at Saint Louis.

In three months, as was predicted, the country was at peace; war and the slaughter of the blacks was at an end.

Caravans began to pass again, bringing to Guadiangué from the depths of the interior gold, ivory, feathers, and other products of Guinea and the Soudan.

An order was received for the reinforcements to return, and a vessel came to meet them at the entrance of the river to carry them back to the Senegal.

But they were not all there, poor spahis; some of them were left sleeping under the burning sun, far away from home and friends, victims of the deadly African fever.

Jean's hour had not yet come, and he descended the river in the canoe of Samba-Boubon.

XXV.

The journey in the canoe was begun this time at full midday. The waters were stagnant and motionless; the sun was in the zenith, and the heat was so terrible that the black rowers in spite of their courage were forced to cease rowing. The canoe drifted slowly on, drawn gently, almost insensibly, by the river current.

The water failed to appease their thirst, and they were exhausted and bathed in perspiration. Sometimes they rowed close to the banks, to profit by the dense but dangerous shade of the forest trees. Then the spahis caught a glimpse of people moving about in the deep shadows of the mangroves, for there is a race of people who inhabit the marshes of Africa, dwelling there among the great roots of those trees.

And there, not two paces from them, were serpents gliding along so gently that they did not awaken the sleeping birds. Great blue alligators were stretched out lazily in the mud, their slimy mouths gaping wide. On their backs were perched airy white aigrettes, who slept there to escape the mud that covered everything.

Martin-fishers with brilliant plumage were taking their afternoon siesta, in company with the lizards, on the branches of the trees almost dipping in the sluggish waters.

Rare butterflies flitted here and there ; with their gorgeous wings closed, hiding all their metallic splendor, they resembled dead leaves, but with their wings spread open they shone like sparkling jewels in the sunlight.

Entwining, interlacing everything, were myriads of roots of the mandrake trees ; they look like strands of threads, or the

thousands of veins in the trunk of an elephant, and cover vast areas of country.

In the mud with the alligators were immense shoals of crabs perpetually moving their white ivory claws as if to seize in their dreams an imaginary prey.

The canoe dividing the waters of the Diakhallémé continued its sinuous course down the river, threading its way quickly through the sombre forests. As they neared the sea, the hills and tall trees of the interior disappeared, and they soon reached an immense flat country with little verdure of any kind except the groves of mandrakes, through which ran other water-courses. The consummate skill of Samba-Boubon was needed to thread the way through this labyrinth of rivers.

The cool shadows of evening began to fall, and the mournful cadence of the voices of the oarsmen, or the plunge of the hippopotamus as it floated off, leaving

behind it great whirling eddies on the surface of the warm, dark waters, were the only sounds to break the mighty silence.

Fatou-gaye, who was lying at the bottom of the canoe for greater safety, closed her eyes with fear and trembling, though she was already doubly protected with leaves and moist canvas thrown over her head.

When they arrived at Pouponbal, she had accomplished the entire journey without daring to look up for fear of seeing a hippopotamus.

Jean, in order to arouse her, had to swear that they had arrived at their destination, and the danger over, consequently.

She was quite benumbed, and responded faintly, entreating Jean to take her in his arms and carry her to the boat, which he did.

Those childish ways of hers succeeded very well with Jean, and sometimes he

allowed himself to spoil Fatou-gaye, for he needed someone to cherish, and he bestowed his caresses on her for want of a better object.

XXVI.

The Governor of Goree fulfilled his promise to Pierre Boyer, and Jean was returned to Saint Louis to finish his time of exile.

When Jean saw once more the white walls of the old city he experienced a deep emotion, for he was attached to it as one is always attached to a place where one has lived for a long time and suffered.

Houses were not much in demand at Saint Louis, so the house of Samba-Hamet had found no new tenants.

Coura-n'diaye saw Jean and Fatou returning, and opened the door of their old lodgings, and things soon resumed their former course of monotony and gloom.

Nothing had changed; the tame storks that inhabited the roof clacked, as they

basked in the sunshine, in the same wooden voices, like the grating of a wind-mill, and everywhere there were the same familiar sounds.

The negresses were eternally beating the millet for the *Kouss-Kouss*; the same quiet and tranquillity existed at the barracks—the same silent monotony, the same overwhelmed nature; and Jean soon grew weary of it all.

From day to day he shunned Fatou-gaye, and she grew more and more wicked and exacting; especially since she knew that he remained on her account.

There were frequent scenes between them. Sometimes he was exasperated beyond endurance with her malice and perversity, and he commenced to beat her with blows from his whip; not very hard at first, but each time with increased violence, and sometimes on her naked back there were bloody stripes, and then he was

ashamed of himself, and resolved never to strike her again.

One day, on returning to the house, he saw a Khassouké—more like a gorilla than a man—pass hurriedly under the window. He did not mention it to Fatou-gaye; it was a matter of no consequence to him, after all, what she did. All sentiments of tenderness and pity which he had once felt for her, had vanished. He was weary of her, and allowed her to remain because he was too indifferent to force her to go.

The last year of his exile was drawing to a close; he began to count by months.

Sleep, which at best comes slowly in that enervating country, often fled from him, and he passed hours of the night leaning out of the window, dreaming of his return. The moon in her course across the desert always found him there at the window. He loved the brilliant nights;

the ruddy splendor of the moonbeams reflected on the sands and on the bosom of the dark river; even the sinister cries of the jackals on the plains of Sorr had become a familiar sound to him, and no longer disturbed him.

And when he thought of leaving it all forever, for a moment a gloom overcast his joyful anticipations.

XXVII.

Jean possessed an old silver watch, which he esteemed as highly as Fatou did her amulets; it was his old father's watch, which he had given him on his departure for Africa. With a medal he wore on his breast, suspended by a chain around his neck, he held it the most precious thing in his possession.

The medal was an image of the Virgin, and was placed there by his mother once when he was very ill, long ago in his childhood, and he had never abandoned it. He was lying on his little bed, attacked by some malady of childhood, and on opening his eyes from a deep sleep he saw his mother near him, weeping. It was a winter afternoon, and through the window he saw the snow lying on the mountains like a white mantle.

His mother raised his head gently and passed the medal around his neck; then she kissed him, and he fell asleep again.

That was fifteen years ago, and the medal still remained in its place.

As for the watch, forty years had passed since it was purchased by his father, second hand, with his first savings as a soldier. It had once been a remarkable watch, but now it was somewhat out of order; it was big and bulging, and showed considerable old age.

His father, however, had considered it an object of great value, for watches were not common among the mountaineers of his village.

The watchmaker in a neighboring town, who repaired it for Jean just before his departure, declared the movements very remarkable, and his old father confided to him the companion of his youth with all sorts of recommendations.

At first Jean wore it proudly, but since he had been in the regiment, whenever he looked to see the time there were bursts of laughter, and his companions made so many untimely jokes about the *onion* that several times Jean felt his face flush with anger and chagrin. He would have preferred all sorts of blows and injuries to himself rather than a want of respect for the old watch.

It pained him more because he knew that the poor old watch was ridiculous, and it gave him an inexpressible pang for his comrades to make fun of it, especially since he found it so droll himself.

Finally he ceased to carry it altogether, to spare himself these mortifications; he did not even wind it up, so as not to wear it out. Since the shaking-up it had on the voyage, and under the influence of the warm climate, it began to indicate the wrong hours; in fact, it never kept the right time.

He put it away tenderly, with his letters and other precious articles, in a box in which he kept the souvenirs of his native land.

For a long time Fatou-gaye refrained from touching it, though it interested her greatly. But one day when Jean was absent she opened the precious box, and taught herself how to wind the watch. When she placed it to her ear and heard the ticking, her antics were as ludicrous as a monkey with a music-box.

XXVIII.

Several weeks had passed since Jean had opened his box of treasures to look at his old watch.

One day when he was on duty at the barracks, he was suddenly seized with a presentiment. He returned to the house, walking rapidly, and on his arrival he opened the box.

He felt a sudden pang, for the watch was not there!

He feverishly turned over the other articles in the box, but the watch was gone.

Fatou-gaye sat in one corner of the room, humming abstractedly. She was stringing beads, arranging them into different designs for a necklace, preparatory for the grand fête next day. It was

the bamboula of Tabaski, at which she wished to appear beautiful and finely dressed.

“You have misplaced it,” said Jean, turning to her in a rage. “And I told you never to touch it; what have you done with it? Answer me quickly.”

A cold perspiration was on his brow, and, wild with fear and anxiety, he shook Fatou-gaye rudely by the arm.

“*Ram*” (I do not know), responded she, with exasperating indifference; and that was her only answer to his excited interrogations.

But all at once a light broke upon him; he saw her new clothes of most gorgeous colors, folded carefully and concealed in a corner, ready for to-morrow’s festivities. He understood then, and seizing the holiday garment, he unfolded it and threw it upon the floor.

“You have sold the watch!” cried he,

in a rage. "Tell me quickly, Fatou-gaye, is it true?"

She threw herself on her knees on the floor, and he took down his whip.

She well knew that in stealing the precious charm she had committed a very grave fault; but she possessed both impudence and audacity, for she had already done so much, and Jean had always pardoned her.

But she had never seen him like this. She screamed aloud with terror, and threw herself at his feet, crying :

"Pardon, T'Jean, pardon !"

Jean did not feel her influence in this moment of his fury, for he had the violent passions of a savage boy. He struck Fatou-gaye harshly upon her naked back, marking it with streaks of blood, and with every blow his rage increased.

Then he was ashamed at what he had done, and throwing the whip upon the floor, he sank down upon the sofa.

XXIX.

A moment afterward, Jean went running to the market-place at Guet-n'dar.

Fatou-gaye had confessed all, and given the name of the black merchant to whom she had sold the poor old watch. He hoped it was still there, so that he might buy it back again.

He had just drawn his monthly pay, and this would be sufficient. He ran very quickly, that he might arrive before some black purchaser had carried it off, for then it would be lost to him forever.

Upon the sands at Guet-n'dar there was a great tumult, a confusion of all races, a Babel of all the languages of the Soudan.

They held there perpetually a grand market, attended by people from all coun-

tries, who sold everything—the most trifling of articles, and the most precious.

There were jewels, cheap and costly; incongruous things, such as gold and butter, meat and ointments, sheep on foot and manuscripts, captives and soup, amulets and cabbage.

On one side of the market-place, making a background for the picturesque scene, was an arm of the river, with Saint Louis in the distance; its long, straight streets, old white houses, and Babylonian terraces blending their lights and shadows under the lofty palm trees that lifted their golden tufts against the deep blue skies. On the other side was Guet-n'dar, the negro village, with its thousands and thousands of pointed roofs.

Near by were stationed caravans; camels slept on the ground, and Moors unpacked their bales of arachis and leather fetich-bags. Merchant men and women

crouched upon the sands, elbowing each other, their wares almost under the feet of their customers.

There were merchants of sour milk contained in goat-skins, the hair turned inward; merchants of butter, who fish out their merchandise with their fingers from the hairy leather bottles; they also offer for sale little balls of salt, which they roll in their hands, afterward running their fingers through their hair to cleanse them. These merchants are of the Puehle race, and wear enormous chignons ornamented with copper.

Then there were merchants of simples, balls of charmed herbs, lizard tails, and magic roots; and merchants who kneel on the sands offering for sale gold dust, emeralds, pearls, and amber; merchants of pistachios, live ducks, and dead eatables, provisions dried in the sun, and sugar patés covered with flies.

There were merchants of salt fish, of pipes, of ancient jewelry—of everything. And among their wares were old clothes, butter of Gallam for curling the hair, tresses cut or torn from the heads of dead negresses, trinkets, amulets, old guns, old Korans, musk, flutes, silver - handled poignards, gongs, horns of giraffes, and old guitars.

Seated under the yellow cocoa trees were beggars covered with vermin, lepers holding out their hands, eaten with white ulcers, demanding alms, and lean old women, almost skeletons, with swollen, deformed limbs, in the midst of débris of all kinds.

And upon it all the perpendicular rays of the sun beat down with a heat as burning and intense as that of a fiery furnace, and always—always for a horizon—the desert, the infinite breadth of sands.

Jean stopped before the stall of a cer-

tain Bou-Bakary-Diam, and regarded with anxious eyes and a beating heart the heterogeneous mass of things spread out before him.

“O, yes, white man,” said Bou-Bakary-Diam, in the Jaloff tongue. “You mean the watch that *talks*. At four o’clock the young girl came to sell it to me for three *Khaliss* of silver, and as it talked, I sold it very readily that same day to a chief of Trarzas, who has gone with a caravan to Timbuctoo.”

And so it was all over; it was lost to him forever, the poor old watch! Poor Jean was as broken-hearted as if he had lost a beloved friend through some fault of his own. If he could only have gone and embraced his old father and asked his pardon, that would have brought some consolation. Or if it had fallen into the sea or river; or if he had lost it on the desert; but to have it sold, profaned by that Fatou-gaye!

That Fatou-gaye, who for two years had taken from him his savings, his dignity, his life ! To protect her he had remained in Africa ; for her he had forfeited his future as a soldier—for that black creature, covered with her hateful amulets. And as he thought of her wicked ways, her impudence, her audacity, he was filled with an ungovernable rage.

He left the market-place and walked rapidly toward the house ; his blood was boiling and his brain on fire.

XXX.

Fatou-gaye awaited his return with great anxiety. As soon as he entered the door she saw that he had not found the old watch, and his manner was so threatening that she thought he was going to kill her. She realized what she had done, for she knew that if anyone had taken from her a certain cherished amulet, the most precious one in her possession, given to her by her mother long ago in the land of Gallam, she would have thrown herself upon the robber and torn him to pieces.

She understood that she had done something terrible, influenced by wicked spirits and her great love for fine clothes; she knew that she had brought a great sorrow to Jean, and she longed to fall at his feet and embrace him. She almost hoped he

would beat her again, that she might touch him ; for she felt that she could die happy pressed close to him, begging for mercy. And now that he was going to kill her, she had nothing to risk ; she would put her arm around him, cling to him, reach his lips.

If Jean could have read what was passing in her little black heart, he would have forgiven her, for it was not difficult to move him ; but Fatou-gaye did not speak ; she thought it was useless. The idea of that last struggle, in which she would cling to him, kiss him, die for him, pleased her ; and she waited, fixing upon him her great dark eyes, full of passion and terror.

But Jean said nothing to her ; he did not even look at her, and he threw down the whip as he entered, for he was ashamed of his former brutality to the little creature, and did not wish to strike her again. Then he began to tear down the amulets

from the walls and threw them out the window; and he took her clothes, her trinkets, her gourds, and without saying a word, dashed them out on the sands.

It began to dawn on poor Fatou-gaye what awaited her; she divined that all was over; she was to be driven away, ruined.

When all her possessions had been thrown out of the window, scattered upon the square below, Jean pointed to the door, saying simply, in a deep, stern voice, "Go!"

And Fatou-gaye, with her head bowed low, went out, not opening her lips.

She had never imagined anything so horrible as being driven away from him like that; she could not shed a tear or utter a lamentation; she felt that her heart was breaking.

XXXI.

Then Jean began calmly to collect his possessions, and he packed them carefully, a habit acquired at the barracks in spite of himself ; but he hastened, also, for fear of being overcome with regrets.

He felt somewhat consoled by what he had just done, regarding it as a tribute paid to the memory of the old watch. He was happy at having at last had the courage to send Fatou-gaye away, and he said to himself he would soon see his old father, and, confessing it all, would obtain his pardon.

When he had finished, he descended to the apartment of Coura-n'diaye. Fatou-gaye had fled there ; he saw her crouching silently in one corner of the room. The little slaves had collected her things from

the street and put them in gourds near her. He did not speak to her, but approached Coura-n'diaye and paid her his monthly rent, anticipating that he would never return ; and throwing his light baggage over his shoulder, he departed.

Poor old watch ! His father had said to him : " Jean, it is a little old, but still it is a very good watch ; they don't make as good nowadays. When you are rich, in the future, you can buy a fashionable one if you wish ; then return this one to me. I have worn it forty years, and when they bury me, if you have no further use for it, put it with me in the coffin ; it will keep me company then."

Coura-n'diaye took the money from the spahi without making any comment on his abrupt departure.

When Jean was out of doors he called his wolf-dog, who followed him with his ears hanging down, as if he understood the situation and was sorry to depart.

Then Jean went away without turning his head, walking rapidly through the lonely streets of the dead city.

PART III.

I.

When Jean had thus definitely expelled Fatou-gaye, and was comfortably installed at the barracks with his modest possessions brought from the house of Samba-Hamet, he felt really light-hearted, for it seemed to him that he was now making some progress toward the blissful time when he would bid an eternal farewell to Africa. Nevertheless, he had in his heart some pity for her, and desired to send her a little money to facilitate her arrangements in other quarters.

Not wishing to see her, he charged Muller with the commission.

Muller went to the lodgings of Coura-n'diaye, but Fatou-gaye had departed. She had suffered much grief, said the

little slaves in the Jaloff tongue, as they gathered around him, all speaking at the same time.

In the evening she refused to eat the *Kouss-Kouss* which they offered her.

“That night,” said the little Sam-Lélé, “I heard her talk in her sleep, but I could not understand what she said, and then the wolves howled, which is a bad sign.”

She went away before sunrise, bearing her gourds upon her head.

Bafou-falé-Diop, the head woman of the slaves of Coura-n'diaye, a person of a very prying nature, followed her some distance, and saw her cross the wooden bridge over a narrow arm of the river, walking in the direction of N'dar-toute, apparently knowing quite well where she was going.

They conjectured she had gone to seek the protection of a rich old Mahometan

priest who lived at N'dar-toute, who greatly admired her beauty; she was pretty — indisputably so — although a Kafir.

For a long time Jean avoided passing by the old white house, but after awhile he ceased to care anything about it.

And since he had recovered from that intoxicating fever of the senses, excited by the climate of Africa, and resumed the dignity of a white man, sullied so long by his life with Fatou-gaye, he looked back upon it all with a shudder of profound disgust, and resolved to lead an entirely new life of honesty and morality.

In the future he would live at the barracks like a prudent man, and save his money to purchase for Jeanne Méry a number of souvenirs of the Senegal. He would take her, among other things, some of those beautiful mats and embroidered cloths, to adorn their little cottage; they

would be the wonder and admiration of all the people of the village. And he particularly wished to present to her a pair of ear-rings and a cross of the fine gold of Gallam, which he had already ordered to be made by one of the best black artists in that country. She would wear them to church on Sundays, and certainly there would be no other young woman in the village with such fine jewels.

And so this poor spahi, with such a grand, grave air, formed in his young head a number of childish projects, innocent dreams of happiness, of domestic life and peaceful honesty.

Jean was now nearly twenty-six years old, but he looked much older, which is often the case with those who have led rough lives upon the sea or in the army. These five years on the Senegal had changed him greatly; his features were more accentuated, thinner, and much

bronzed by contact with the burning rays of the sun. He had acquired a military air; his chest had expanded and shoulders broadened, but his figure was still supple and slender.

This air of distinction and his manly beauty inspired with involuntary respect and admiration all who approached him. A painter would have chosen him as a noble type of manly perfection.

II.

One day Jean found two letters inclosed in an envelope bearing the post-mark of his native village; one was from his mother, the other from Jeanne Méry.

LETTER OF FRANCOISE PEYRAL TO HER SON.

MY DEAR SON: Something strange has happened since my last letter, which will astonish you greatly. But do not grieve about it; only pray to the good God as we do, and keep a brave heart. I will begin by telling you that there has come to this country a young bailiff, M. Prosper Suirot. He is very unpopular here, as he is so hard on the poor people, and very sullen in his manner; but that he has a good position, no one can deny.

This M. Suirot has demanded in marriage the hand of Jeanne Méry, and your uncle Méry is willing to accept him as a son-in-law. Méry came here one evening recently, and made quite a scene. It seems that he has been making inquiries about you from your officers without our knowl-

edge, and they have given him some information very detrimental to you. They say you have a black wife there, and that you live with her against the wishes of your superiors, which is the reason you have not been promoted. There are bad rumors afloat about you, my son, many things that I could never believe; but your uncle showed us a paper upon which we could see the seals of your regiment. Now Jeanne has come over to our house in tears, vowing that she will never marry Suirot, and that she will always remain faithful to you. She will enter a convent if they press her too closely, she declares. She writes you the inclosed letter, and tells you what you must do; she is an intelligent girl, so take her advice and write immediately to your uncle as she tells you. You will return to us in a few months, and with good conduct until then, and reliance on God, no doubt all may be arranged yet. We are much grieved, as you must know, and are afraid your uncle Méry will forbid Jeanne to visit our house, and that would make us very unhappy.

Peyral joins me in embracing you, and prays you to write to us immediately.

Your old mother, who adores you,

FRANCOISE PEYRAL.

JEANNE MÉRY TO HER COUSIN JEAN.

MY DEAR JEAN: I am so unhappy that I almost wish to die. I regret that you have not returned, and do not even speak of it, especially since my parents, agreeing with my godfather, wish me to marry Suirot, of whom I have already written to you. They are continually telling me that he is rich, and that I ought to feel honored that he has requested me to marry him. I continue to say no, and to weep. I am so unhappy, my dear Jean, at having them all against me. Olivette and Rose laugh at me for always having red eyes; I believe they would willingly marry Suirot if he only desired it. At the thought of it, I shudder with horror, and I will fly to a convent if they press me too closely. If I might only go to your home sometimes to speak to your mother, for I have as much affection for her as if I were her own daughter; but they open their eyes when I go there so often, and soon they may forbid it altogether. My dear Jean, it is necessary for you to do all that I am about to tell you.

I understand there are some bad rumors about you, but I content myself by believing they are circulated to influence me, so they do not trouble

me. They can not possibly be true, for no one knows you so well as I do. Still, I would be glad if you would explain some things to me; you know it is always pleasant to be assured that what one believes is true. Then write immediately to my father, and demand my hand in marriage, promising to conduct yourself as a well-regulated, prudent man, against whom no one can whisper an unkind word. After that, I will beg him upon my knees. May the good God have mercy upon my dear Jean.

Your betrothed for life,

JEANNE MÉRY.

To those who live in obscure villages the vocabulary of passion is unknown; they only know how to translate their feelings into simple, tranquil phrases. Jeanne must have been deeply moved in writing this letter to Jean; but he also spoke that simple language, and understood all she wrote of her love and resolutions. His reply to her was full of tenderness and gratitude. He also addressed

a letter to his uncle Méry, a formal request, accompanied with sincere pledges of prudence and good conduct, and then he awaited with much anxiety the return of the mail from France.

M. Prosper Suirot was a young bailiff, stiff and pompous; and a fierce free-thinker, having imbibed all of the atheistic nonsense of the age. He was very near-sighted, his small, red eyes peering through smoky spectacles, which would have excited the contempt of Jean, who always felt an instinctive repulsion for persons badly formed and ugly.

Influenced by the dowry and beautiful figure of Jeanne Méry, the little bailiff believed, in his puffed-up vanity, that he was greatly honoring the young peasant girl by offering her his ugly person and high social position. He intended after their marriage to place her high in society, and that Jeanne should become a fine lady.

III.

Several months passed, but the mail from France brought no letter for Jean.

In the letters from his mother Jeanne had always sent some message of love and fidelity. His uncle Méry might remain inflexible, but so would Jeanne; so he was full of hope, not doubting but that all would be satisfactorily arranged on his return to the village.

He indulged more than ever in delicious dreams. After nearly six years of exile, this return to his native village appeared to him in the most glowing colors, and all his dreams were radiant with rosy anticipations. To arrive in the gay uniform of a spahi in the village diligence, to see the Cévennes reappearing with their familiar lights and shadows, the well-known paths,

the beloved steeple, the paternal roof by the wayside—and then to clasp in his arms in ecstasy his old parents!

They would go together to the Méry's; the young girls, all the good people of the village would run to the doors and windows to see them pass. He would appear very grand to them in his red clothes and his military air. His uncle Méry would see the golden lace of a quarter-master (which he intended to win) shining on his sleeve, and the effect would be irresistible. After all, his uncle Méry was a good man and had loved him, though he had grumbled about his conduct formerly.

Far away in exile, one always sees those who remain at home in the most favorable light; they are always good and affectionate; only their defects are forgotten.

Jean was confident his uncle would not remain obdurate when he saw his two children supplicating at his feet. He

would certainly relent ; he would place Jeanne's hand in his own, and then what happiness, what a sweet and beautiful life, what a paradise on earth !

Jean never pictured himself dressed like the men of his village, wearing the modest hat of a mountaineer ; he never allowed his thoughts to dwell on this subject. In his red uniform, under the sun of Africa, he had really begun to live, and had grown to be a man. And he loved it all—his Arabian fez, his sabre, his horse, and that great, God-forsaken country—the desert.

He knew not how often delusions vanished and ideals were wrecked for poor sailors and soldiers when they return to the long-dreamed-of village which they had left in their youth, and which, when far away, they had only seen through the enchanted prisms of sweet memory.

Alas ! what sadness, what weariness,

often follow these poor exiles to their own country !

Young men like Jean, acclimated, enervated in the land of Africa, have often wept for the desolate banks of the Senegal, the long rides on horseback, the free life, the burning sun, and the limitless horizon, for all of this is wanting elsewhere ; and when it no longer exists, in the tranquillity of home, they feel the need of the devouring sun, they sigh for the desert, and are homesick for the endless sands.

IV.

In the meantime, Boubakar-Segou, a powerful black king, was playing his pranks in Diambour and the country of Djiagabar.

An expedition of war was in the wind ; it was whispered in official circles at Saint Louis, and commented upon and discussed in a thousand ways by the spahis, marksmen, and the infantry troops of the marines. It was noised abroad, and each one expected to win his promotion—a medal or a grave.

Jean was about to finish his service, and he was anxious to regain all he had lost by his past misconduct. He had dreams of wearing in his button-hole, on the yellow ribbon of the brave, the military medal. He wished, in bidding an eternal

farewell to Africa, to do some act of valor that would make his name remembered at the barracks of the spahis in that corner of the world where he had lived and suffered so long.

Between the barracks, the officers of the marines, and the Government officials a rapid exchange of correspondence took place; and there arrived at the quarters large sealed envelopes that greatly excited the curiosity of the spahis.

A long, serious expedition was predicted.

The spahis sharpened and polished their great sabres, refilled their powder-flasks, and drank absinthe with gay words, bravados, and joyous anticipations.

One day about the first of October, Jean was sent to the palace of the Government to carry an important document.

As he hastened along the long straight street, which was as empty and as dead as

a street of Thebes or Memphis, he saw a spahi approaching him, bearing in his hand a letter.

It was Sergeant Muller, who was distributing among the spahis the mail from France, which had arrived but an hour ago with a caravan from Dakar.

"This is for you, Peyral," he said, as he extended to him a letter bearing the postmark of his native village.

The letter which Jean had been expecting for a month burned his hand, and he hesitated to open it, finally resolving to finish his mission before reading it.

At last he arrived at the railings of the Government house; the gate was open, and he entered.

In the garden there was the same lack of animation he had observed in the street. A great tame lioness lay extended on the sands; ostriches slept on the ground, under the stately blue aloes, in

the cool gray shadows. It was mid-day; no one was in sight; silence reigned, the silence of a necropolis. The shadows of the yellow palm trees fell on the great white terraces and relieved the glare of the burning sun.

Jean hastened in search of someone to whom he might deliver the document. He at last arrived at a bureau where he found the Governor surrounded by the different heads of the colonial service, deeply engaged in discussing weighty matters.

In exchange for the document which Jean brought they gave him another, addressed to the commandant of the spahis.

It was a definite order to march, and that afternoon it was communicated officially to all the troops at Saint Louis.

V.

When Jean found himself once more in the solitary street he opened the letter, trembling with a vague fear.

He found only the handwriting of his old mother. The penmanship was more irregular than ever, and it was stained with tears.

He eagerly devoured the contents; it bewildered him, and he leaned against a wall for support.

All was over! They had taken away from him his betrothed, whom his old parents had chosen for him—the sweet-heart of his boyhood :

The bans are published; the marriage will take place in a month. I do not doubt it now. Jeanne never comes to see us. I would not write it to you sooner, my dear son, so as not to trouble you when you could do nothing. We are

in great despair. Yesterday, Peyral had a presentiment that terrified us. It was that you would *never return from Africa*. We are both old, my dear Jean, and I beg you on my knees not to allow this news to keep you from being prudent, and that you will come home as soon as you expected. If you disappoint us, I would rather die at once, and so would Peyral.

His brain was full of incoherent and tumultuous thoughts. He made a rapid calculation of dates—no, it was not over yet. He would telegraph! But why did he dream of such a thing; there was no telegraphic connection between France and the land of the Senegal—and what more could he have told them than he had already written?

O, that he might sail on some vessel at that moment, leaving all behind him! That he might arrive in time to throw himself at their feet with tears and supplications; he might be able to soften their hearts.

What impossibilities, what impotency ! All would be consummated ere he could reach them to utter one cry of grief.

He felt that around his head there were bands of iron, and his whole body seemed to be undergoing some terrible pressure.

He suddenly remembered that the document consigned to him by the Governor was an important one; so, piously kissing the name of old Françoise, he folded the letter and staggered along like a drunken man.

Around him all was asleep in the great calm of mid-day. The ancient Moorish houses shone milk-white against the intense blue of the skies. Now and then there floated from behind the brick walls the plaintive song of a negress. Little negroes adorned with necklaces of coral slept on the door-steps, their faces upturned to the blazing sun—dark spots in bold relief in that uniformity of light.

Lizards glided across the smooth sands of the streets, tracing thereon zigzags as fantastic and complicated as Arabian characters; and in the distance could be heard the noise of the pestle beating the *Kouss-Kouss*, a sound so regular and monotonous that it made a kind of silence, dying away in the heavy strata of the noonday atmosphere.

This tranquillity of overwhelmed nature seemed to exult over him, and had the effect of intensifying his grief. It depressed him as some physical suffering; it suffocated him as a winding-sheet of lead; all at once the whole country impressed him as a vast tomb.

He awoke from his deep sleep of five years, and there rose in his heart a great revolt against all things in the world.

Why had they taken him from his village, from his mother, to bury him, at the most beautiful time of his life, in this country of death!

What right had they to make him a spahi—half African—unhappy classification! A vagabond of the sword, forgotten by all, and now, his crown of sorrows, renounced by his betrothed!

He was filled with a terrible rage; he felt a desire to torture, to strangle, to crush someone in his powerful arms. He could not weep, though he felt that in that whole country he had not a friend, not a heart comrade to whom he might recount his sorrows. He was all alone, amid the heat, the sands, and the mighty silence.

VI.

Jean ran on to the barracks, and threw to the first man he saw the papers that had been entrusted to him ; then he rushed into the open air and began to walk swiftly and aimlessly—his way of stifling grief.

He crossed the bridge at Guet-n'dar and turned southward toward the point of Barbary ; as on that momentous night, four years before, when he had fled in anguish from the house of Cora.

But this time he was suffering the profound and deep despair of a man whose life was ruined.

For several hours he walked toward the south, losing sight of Saint Louis and the thatched roofs of the negro villages, and finally, heart-sick and foot-sore, he

sank down at the foot of a sand-hill that commanded a view of the sea.

He was confused and dazed by the burning heat of the sun, and as he gazed distractedly around him he discovered that he had never been on this spot before. The hill was bristling with strange tombstones, bearing inscriptions in the language of Maghreb, and bones that long ago had been unearthed by the jackals lay bleaching in the sun.

The absolute aridity of the surrounding country was here and there relieved by a few signs of verdure. Fresh, green garlands of rope-weed crept in and out of decayed skulls and entwined around the crumbling bones of arms and legs, now and then blossoming into clusters of brilliant scarlet flowers.

Near by, other funeral hills rose out of the smooth plains with lugubrious aspects, and on the sea-shore were great flocks

of pelicans of a pinkish-white color that assumed singular forms and uncouth dimensions in the twilight mirage.

The sun dipped into the ocean ; a fresh breeze rose ; Jean commenced to read his mother's letter once again :

Yesterday, my dear son, Peyral had a presentiment which greatly terrified us ; it was that you *would never return from Africa*. We are both old, and your poor mother begs you on her knees not to allow this news to keep you from being prudent, and that you will come home as soon as you had expected. If you do not, I would rather die at once, and so would Peyral.

Jean became convulsed with sobs ; he felt that his heart was broken, and all his rebellious nature was spent in tears.

VII.

Two days after this, all the marine boats that were needed for the expedition were grouped in the bend of the river near Pop-n'kior, north of Saint Louis.

The embarkment of the troops took place in sight of a vast concourse of people. The wives and children of the sharpshooters crowded on the beach, howling to the sun as if they had lost their senses. Moorish caravans, just arrived from the Soudan with their loads of incongruous baggage and their beautiful wives, formed a circle on the sands waiting to see them off.

About four o'clock, the flotilla which was to ascend the river as far as Dialdé, in Gallam, was loaded with its cargo of human beings, and set out on its journey under the heat of a fiery sun.

Saint Louis soon disappeared in the distance, its regular outlines becoming dim and indistinct, and finally faded away in pale-blue streaks on the yellow sands.

Wide and salubrious plains stretched out on each side of the river, and as far as the eye could see there were deserts, eternally warm, eternally gloomy. And this was but the entrance to that immense country forgotten of God—the vestibule to the vast solitudes of Africa.

Jean, with the other spahis, had embarked upon the *Falemé*, which sailed rapidly ahead, and was soon two days in advance.

Before his departure he had written a reply to the poor old Françoise. Upon reflection, he disdained to write to his betrothed; but in the letter to his mother he poured out his whole soul, and said all he could to comfort her and give her

hope and peace of mind. "After all," he wrote, "she was too rich for us, and we can easily find in France another young girl who will marry me, and we will so arrange it that we may all live together in the old house, so that we may not be separated from you. I have no other thought now than the joyful anticipation of seeing you, and in three months I will return. I swear to you that I will *never, never* leave you again."

This was really his intention, and every day he thought much of his old parents; but the idea of spending the rest of his days without Jeanne Méry threw a thick veil of mourning over the bright dreams of his return. He felt that he no longer had an object in life, and the future lay before him, shrouded in the deepest gloom.

By his side, on the deck of the *Falemé*, was Nyaor-fall, the tall black spahi, and

to him he confided his troubles, as he was his most faithful friend.

Nyaor scarcely understood these sentiments, as he had never loved. He possessed, it is true, under his thatched roof, three wives whom he had purchased, but he counted upon selling them as soon as they ceased to please him.

Nevertheless, he comprehended that his friend Jean was unhappy; so he smiled at him pleasantly, and in order to distract his mind he related some very ludicrous anecdotes of a certain race of negroes who sleep *standing*.

VIII.

The flotilla sailed up the river with all possible speed, anchoring each day at sunset, and resuming the route at day-break.

At the first French post they took on more black men and women and other baggage. At Dagana they rested for two days, and the *Falemé* received orders to continue her route alone to Podor, the last post before they entered the land of Gallam, where there were already assembled several companies of sharp-shooters.

The *Falemé* ascended the narrow yellow stream that separates the Moorish Sahara from that great mysterious continent inhabited by the blacks, and was soon lost in the interior.

Jean contemplated with deep melan-

choly the solitudes through which they were passing, following with his eye the ever-receding horizon, and the Senegal, that trailed behind them in the infinite distance like a sinuous ribbon.

To him there seemed to be a curse on all the land; and as the great plains unrolled before him, he was impressed with an indefinable fear, as if the earth was closing behind him, shutting off forever his return.

On the gloomy banks of the river bald-headed storks and large black vultures stalked gravely, casting shadows like those of human beings. Sometimes a curious monkey darted out of the mandrake thickets, startled at the sight of the vessel threading its way up the silent river; and now and then a fine white aigrette or a martin-fisher, with gorgeous plumage of blue and emerald, flew out of the reeds, awakening in its flight the lazy alliga-

tors sleeping in the mud on the banks of the river. On the southern bank, the side inhabited by the sons of Ham, numerous villages were scattered at intervals in the depths of the desert plains.

As they neared these habitations of men they could see from afar groups of gigantic fan-shaped palms, a kind of fetich tree that protects the towns. In the midst of the vast naked plains these palms remind one of giants keeping guard in the desert. Their trunks are of a reddish color, and are as smooth and straight as Byzantine columns. On the top of each tree is a meagre tuft of foliage, pointed like the beams of a star.

On approaching nearer such a group of palms, one never fails to discover a negro ant-hill—numbers of pointed gray huts massed together on the yellow sands.

Sometimes these African towns are

quite extensive. They are always surrounded by a *tatas*, a thick wall of mud and wood, which protects them from the invasion of their enemies, and from wild beasts.

A white flag floating from a roof a little elevated above the others indicates the residence of the king.

At the gates of these ramparts there appeared the sombre forms of old priests and chiefs, covered with amulets, their great black arms contrasting strangely with their long white robes.

They gazed with awe at the *Falemé* as she glided up the river, her guns and battalions ready to fire at the least hostile movement.

Why do these men dwell there in the depths of an arid, desolate country, spending their whole lives with no knowledge of the outside world? They know nothing of anything but the desert and the implacable sun.

On the Sahara side of the river there is the same look of desolation, the same dreary waste of sand.

Sometimes they saw in the distance dense clouds of smoke rising upward from the fires of herbs lighted by the Moors. The chains of red hills on the horizon, seen through this smoke, had the appearance of innumerable furnaces whose flames seemed reflected on the surface of great lakes, which, in this country of burning droughts and parched sands, are perpetually pictured in the never-ceasing mirage.

The landscape dappled and trembled in the intense heat. The scene changed as in a vision, and the eye grew weary in watching the panorama.

Sometimes there appeared on the banks men of a pure white race. They were bronzed and savage, but their features were regular and handsome, and

their long flowing hair gave them the appearance of Biblical prophets as they stood there in the sun with uncovered heads, clothed in long, dark-blue robes.

They were Moors of the tribe of Braknas and Trarzas—bandits, thieves, and robbers, the most worthless of all the African races.

IX.

The eastern breeze, like a powerful breath from the Sahara, rose by degrees, augmented in intensity in proportion to its distance from the sea. A dry wind, as hot as the air from a forge, blew from the desert, scattering over everything a fine powdered sand, and carrying along with it the burning drought of Beled-el-Ateuch.

Water had to be thrown continually on the canvas that sheltered the spahis.

As they approached Podor, the largest town on the river, the banks on the Sahara side became more animated. It was the entrance to the country of Douiäch, which has become enriched by the cattle raids made by the Moors on the black country. These Moors swim

across the Senegal in long caravans, driving before them in the water the stolen animals.

Encampments began to appear on the plains; tents made of camel's hair were stretched upon wooden poles, resembling the great wings of bats spread out on the sands, black and grotesque, in the heart of that yellow country—always uniformly yellow.

There were increased life and animation everywhere, and crowds of people thronged the banks of the river to watch them pass. The copper-colored Moorish women, their heads adorned with chaplets of coral, jogged along on little hump-backed cows, and capering behind them on the backs of restive calves were children, their heads covered with shaggy tufts of hair that resembled mane, and bodies as tawny and muscular as young satyrs.

X.

Podor is an important French post on the southern bank of the Senegal. There is a great fortress there that is cracked and blistered by the sun, for it is the hottest place on earth.

A long, almost shady street runs along the river, built up of ancient sombre-looking houses. On this street may be seen French traders, jaundiced by the fever and the enervating climate; also black and Moorish merchants, who crouch there on the sands, offering for sale ostrich feathers, amulets, ivory, and gold-dust.

Back of this European street lies the straw-thatched negro town, honey-combed with long narrow streets. It is surrounded by a thick wooden barricade, and is fortified like a citadel.

The evening after their arrival, Jean took a walk in company with his friend, Nyaor-fall. The sad songs and strange voices that floated from behind the walls, the unusual scenes, and the hot wind that burned in spite of night, filled the heart of Jean with a vague terror, and an inexpressible anguish, produced by homesickness and solitude, weighed upon his spirits. He had never suffered so—not even at the distant post of Diakhallémé.

Around Podor were fields of millet, brier-patches, stunted trees, and a few herbs. Across the river, on the Moorish side, lay the open desert. And there at the entrance of that painful route which loses itself in the sands as it trends northward, was a sign-post bearing the prophetic inscription, “The way to Algeria!”

XI.

When Jean rejoined his companions on the *Falemé*, it was five o'clock in the morning, and a dull-red sun was rising over the country of Douiäch. The *Falemé* was preparing to start. The negresses were already on deck, wrapped in their fantastic garments, and lying so close together that one could see nothing on the floor but a confused mass of stuff, above which were thrown many black arms encircled with bracelets.

As Jean passed among them, he felt himself suddenly held back; a pair of supple arms entwined themselves around him like serpents, and a woman clung to him, embracing him.

"T'Jean! T'Jean!" said a queer little voice, which he at once recognized.

“T’Jean, I have followed you, fearing that you might *gain Paradise* in the war. T’Jean, will you not look at your little son?” And the two black arms lifted above her a little brown baby.

“My son!” repeated Jean, with the brusqueness of a soldier, nevertheless with a tremor in his voice. “My son! What is it you are saying, Fatou-gaye?”

“Alas, it is true!” continued he, in a voice full of emotion, lowering his head to regard the child. “It is undoubtedly true, for the child is almost white!”

The child was the image of Jean, having inherited his rich dark complexion and large solemn eyes. Holding out its little hands to Jean, it frowned with an expression already grave and questioning, as if seeking to comprehend how the blood of a mountaineer of the Cévennes had become mingled with the impure blood of a black race.

Jean was overcome by some hidden mysterious power, and his heart was troubled. He stooped and embraced his little son with tenderness, and sentiments heretofore unknown penetrated the very depths of his soul.

The voice of Fatou-gaye awakened in him a crowd of slumbering echoes. It seemed to him that now they were bound together by ties too powerful for even separation to weaken.

And then, too, she had been faithful to him in her way; and now he felt so abandoned and forsaken by all. He permitted her to place around his neck an amulet, and he divided with her his rations for the day.

XII.

The vessel continued its course; the river ran more southward, and the country changed.

Groves began to appear on the banks of the river, and here and there were mimosas, gum trees, tamarinds, with their airy, graceful foliage, and green herbs scattered over grassy meadows.

It was no longer the flora of the tropics, but rather the delicate vegetation of a northern climate. Aside from the excessive heat and monotonous silence, there was nothing to remind one of the heart of Africa. It was more like the banks of some peaceful river of Europe. In those groves a Watteau shepherdess would not have been out of place.

Nevertheless, there were some negro

pastoral scenes which arrested the eye; some amorous African couples, bedecked with beads and trinkets, herding their lean oxen and goats, while near by were innumerable gray alligators, half plunged in the warm waters, asleep in the sun.

Fatou-gaye was smiling, with a singular look of joy in her eyes, for she saw that she was approaching the land of Gallam, her own country. There was only one thing to mar her bliss; that was, in passing the grassy marshes and stagnant pools bordered with mandrakes, her soul was filled with inquietude for fear of seeing protruding above the water the snout of an hippopotamus, the sight of which would be to her a sign of death.

What cunning, what perseverance, what insinuation she must have employed to obtain passage on the vessel upon which Jean had embarked!

Whence had she fled when she left the

house of Coura-n'diaye? to what covert had she flown to conceal herself till the birth of the child of the spahi?

But now she was happy; she was returning to Gallam, and he was with her—her dream was accomplished.

XIII.

Dialdé is situated at the confluence of the Senegal and a nameless river that flows from the south. It is a negro settlement of little importance, defended by a small block-house of French construction, which resembles the detached forts of the interior of Algeria.

It being the nearest point to the country of Boubakar-Segou, the French troops were to encamp there and reunite with the allied armies of Bambarras, in the midst of friendly tribes.

The flat country around the village had the same monotony and aridity that characterize the borders of the lower Senegal.

Nevertheless, there was some verdure, some clumps of trees and small forests,

which reminded one that the country of Gallam had been entered—the wooded regions of the centre of Africa.

XIV.

Some timid old women of the allied tribes brought information that they had seen upon the sands near Dialdé fresh foot-prints of a numerous troop of infantry, which could be none other than the army of the great black king.

For several hours the three spahis—Jean, Nyaor, and Sergeant Muller—had traversed the plains east of the encampment without seeing a human foot-print, or any trace of the passage of an army.

The sun revealed the foot-prints of every beast of Africa, from the big round hole scooped out by the heavy foot of the hippopotamus to the small delicate triangle left by the hoof of the light gazelle as it takes its nimblé course across the sands.

The sands, indurated by the winter

rains, preserve with perfect fidelity the marks left upon them by the inhabitants of the desert. One can see there the impress of the paws of the monkey, the great swinging footsteps of the giraffe, the tracks of lizards, of serpents, of lions, of jackals, and the prodigious boundings of the hunted deer.

What a terrible animation comes to these desert plains at night-fall! As long as the sun looks down upon them with its flaming eye, all is silent; but what imagination can picture the fearful orgies of that savage life!

As the spahis rode along, the game concealed in the bushes took a startled flight, and flying about in the range of their guns were red partridges, blue and red jackdaws, pheasants, gorgeous thrushes, and tremendous buzzards. But the spahis did not molest them, too engrossed in their search for the foot-prints of men.

Evening approached; dense vapors hung over the horizon; the sun was dull and heavy, with that immobility of aspect which the imagination gives to the antediluvian sunsets at an epoch when the atmosphere, charged with vital substances, suspended over the primitive world the monstrous germs of mammoth and plesiosaurus. At last, sinking behind mysterious vapors, it became livid and rayless, appearing through the vapors enlarged and distorted, and then suddenly it was extinguished.

Nyaor, who had been following Jean and Muller with his habitual indifference and silence, suddenly declared the reconnoissance was growing imprudent, and that his friends would be unnecessarily rash if they continued it.

Almost any surprise or attack was to be apprehended; besides, there were everywhere to be seen the fresh foot-prints of

lions. Their horses had already begun to smell the five claws so clearly defined on the sands, and trembled with fear.

So they turned their bridles, and were soon flying like the wind in the direction of the block-house. In the distance they could hear the terrible and cavernous voice which the Moors compare to thunder—the voice of the lion in chase. They were brave men, but the sound of that voice gave them a kind of vertigo and made them redouble their speed. Their fear was contagious, and their steeds bounded forward through the reeds and bushes, which lashed their knees and impeded their flight.

But they soon perceived the river which separated them from the encampment and the inhabited world. The block-house at Dialdé gleamed in the last red light of the sun as they swam the river and entered the camp.

XV.

Although twilight was the most melancholy hour of the day, it brought to this village an original and strange animation. There was a confused murmur of voices as the shepherds returned with their flocks; the warriors sharpened and bur-nished their prehistoric guns, and the women prepared the *Kouss-Kouss* for the army, all mingled with the bleating of goats and the plaintive howlings of the wolf-dogs.

Fatou-gaye sat at the entrance of the block-house with her infant in her arms, wearing the humble and suppliant air she had assumed since her last meeting with Jean.

And Jean, whose heart was sad and lonely, came and sat beside her, and took

his child upon his knee. Somehow he felt cheered and softened by the presence of his black family, and he was happy to find at Dialdé someone who loved him.

At a short distance from them the griots were chanting war-songs softly, in a sad falsetto, accompanied by their little guitars of two strings, which gave forth a sound like the shrill noise made by a grasshopper.

They chanted African airs that harmonized well with the desolation of the surrounding country, but which have a certain charm—an indescribable, monotonous rhythm.

Jean's little son was a sweet babe, though its expression was serious, and it rarely ever smiled. Fatou-gaye had arrayed it in a blue frock, with a necklace of coral, like other Jaloff infants; but she had not shorn off the little curls, as was customary with the children of that

country, and they already lay upon his brow in soft ringlets, which heightened its resemblance to Jean.

The spahi remained at the door of the block-house for a long time, playing with the little boy, and the dying light of day shone on this singular picture: Jean, in all his manly beauty and warlike bearing, holding in his arms the child with its tiny angelic form; Fatou-gaye on the ground beside them, gazing at them with eyes full of love and adoration; and behind them, in the shadows, the sinister black musicians.

Fatou-gaye was in ecstasy at being so near to Jean, and to know that she was forgiven; and she sat on the ground before him like a dog at the feet of its master.

Poor Jean! he was still a boy, notwithstanding his precocious physical development, which had given him a mature and serious manner, and he danced the little

child upon his knee with all the awkwardness of a soldier. There was a fresh young smile on his lips, but the child would not smile, though he put his little dimpled arms around the neck of his father; he laid his head upon his shoulder and regarded him with a look of deep gravity.

At night-fall Jean installed Fatou-gaye comfortably within the block-house, then gave her all the money he had left, which amounted to fifteen francs.

“Take this,” he said, “and to-morrow morning buy *Kouss-Kouss* for yourself and fresh milk for the little one.”

XVI.

He then took his way back to the encampment to learn the news, and later on to sleep.

In order to reach the tents of the spahis it was necessary for him to pass by the encampment of the allied tribes of Bambarras.

The night was transparent and luminous, and the buzzing of insects was almost deafening. In all the hollows of the sands and on every herb were thousands and thousands of crickets and grasshoppers, and it seemed as if the air was full of an infinite number of little bells and rattles, which at one moment swelled forth tumultuously, and after awhile would almost die away, as if the crickets had given the order to sing more softly.

Jean walked along abstractedly, wholly absorbed in his thoughts. He did not look ahead of him, and all at once he found himself encircled by a ring of whirling dancers, who sang softly and harmoniously as they glided around in a circle, a favorite dance of Bamarras.

The dancers were all tall men, clothed in long white robes, and on their heads were white turbans with black horns.

They floated so softly and slowly around him that it seemed to Jean as if it were a dance of the fairies there in the starlight. The only perceptible sound was the rustling of their flowing draperies, whose thousands of folds were spread out like the wings of great white birds. They all assumed different attitudes simultaneously, balancing themselves on the point of the toe, and swaying gently backward and forward.

The noise of the tam-tam was faint

and muffled in the distance, and the sad notes of the flutes and ivory trumpets seemed veiled and far away.

As they whirled around Jean they inclined their heads in sign of recognition, and smilingly whispered:

“T’Jean, T’Jean, enter the dance!”

Jean recognized nearly all of them, even in that strange raiment. They were the black spahis and sharp-shooters, who had assumed the white robe and uncouth head-dress of the *Temba-sembé* of their festivals.

They whirled around and around, keeping time to the weird, monotonous music, which seemed to thrill them as a magic incantation.

As they passed him, Jean nodded his head and smilingly called their names.

“Good evening, Niodagal! Good evening, Imobé-Fafandon! Good evening, Demba-Taco, and Samba-fall! Good

evening, tall Nyaor!" For Nyaor was there, the grandest of them all.

He hastened onward, and endeavored to disentangle himself from the long chain of dancers that coiled and uncoiled itself about him. The night, the dancers, the low faint music impressed him strangely, as if they belonged to another world.

But they repeated their invitation, "T'Jean, T'Jean, enter the dance!" floating around him like spirits, amusing themselves by keeping him entangled in the mystic circle, which widened as he walked along.

XVII.

As Jean lay under his tent that night, his brain was busy with plans for the future.

He determined to return at once to see his old parents—he would allow nothing to defer his departure; but he would return to Africa to find his son, for he felt that he really loved him with his whole heart, and he would never abandon him.

Near by, in the camps of the Bambaras, he could hear the voices of the griots singing their plaintive, consecrated war-songs, soothing the first dreams of the black warriors. They entreated them to be brave, and to load their carbines heavily on the day of the fight, which was soon to dawn upon them, for Boubakar-Segou was not far away.

What would he do at Saint Louis when he returned to find his little child?

Would he reënlist, or would he try his fortune in some other venturesome proceeding?

He might become a trader on the river. But no; he felt an invincible aversion for any occupation but that of the field and of arms.

At last the noises of life in the village of Dialdé had ceased, and the encampment was silent. Far away in the distance could be heard the roar of the lion, and that most lugubrious sound on earth—the yelping of the jackals. It was a funereal accompaniment to the dreams of the poor spahi.

Overcome with the fatigues and adventures of the day, Jean soon fell asleep, still dreaming of the future.

But in his dreams he could see the dancers whirling slowly around him, pass-

ing and repassing him with mute gestures and languishing attitudes, keeping time to that sweet, unearthly music.

“T’Jean, T’Jean, enter the dance!”

Their heads, which were inclined to salute him, seemed to bend beneath their heavy head-dress. They made horrible grimaces and assumed ghostly forms, and bending over him with a knowing air, upon their lips the smile of phantoms, they whispered softly:

“T’Jean, T’Jean, enter the dance!”

And just as he seemed about to yield to this weird invitation, he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

XVIII.

At three o'clock the morning of the great day, the day of the combat, all was in a state of agitation and excitement at the encampment at Dialdé. The spahis, sharpshooters, and allied troops were all preparing to march with their arms and munitions of war.

The Mahometan priests were repeating their long prayers and distributing talismans.

By order of the chiefs, the black warriors had loaded their carbines with lead almost to the muzzles, as they did on the days of all great battles; and it often happens, in the wars in black countries, the whole load is scattered at the first discharge.

They were to march in the direction of

the village of Djidiam, where, on the information of native spies, Boubakar-Segou was entrenched with his army behind the thick walls of mud and wood.

Djidiam was the strongest fortress of this almost legendary king, who was the terror of the surrounding country; a sort of myth, whose strength lay in his flight and concealment in the impenetrable recesses of that murderous country where he dwelt undiscovered.

That afternoon they proposed to camp under the great trees, not far from the enemy's quarters, in order to fall upon Djidiam at night, and set fire to the village, which would burn under the clear heavens like an *auto-dä-fé* of straw. Then they would return, victorious, to Saint Louis before the fatal fever had decimated their ranks.

During the night, Jean wrote a tender letter to his old parents, and sent it with

the other mail on the *Falemé*, which that evening would descend the river.

A little before sunrise, he embraced his infant, asleep on the arm of Fatou-gaye, then mounted his horse.

XIX.

Early in the morning, Fatou-gaye also started out, with her infant on her back.

She went in the direction of Nialoumbaé, a village of an allied tribe, where dwelt an old Mahometan priest who was famous in all the country around for fortune-telling and soothsaying.

She was conducted to the hut of the centenarian, whom she found reclining on a mat, as if dying, muttering prayers.

They had a long interview, and the priest gave her a small leather bag, which evidently contained something precious, for she concealed it carefully in her bosom.

He then gave the infant a beverage which put him into a deep sleep.

In payment, Fatou-gaye gave him three

large pieces of silver, the last franc of poor Jean. She then enveloped her little son, who seemed to sleep a magical sleep, in a blue embroidered cloth, and bearing him upon her back, she walked in the direction of the woods where the troops would encamp in the evening.

XX.

Seven o'clock in the morning. An obscure spot in the country of Diambour. On one side are grassy marshes filled with herbs and stagnant water, and low hills bound the horizon; on the opposite side, as far as the eye can see, are the great plains of Dialakar.

All is silent and desolate.

Jean, with ten or twelve other spahis in charge of an adjutant, have been sent out to reconnoitre.

In the air there was no presage of death, nothing funereal. The sun mounted tranquilly in the heavens. The herbs and bushes in the marshes still glittered with the dew of night, and butterflies with gorgeous wings flitted above the water-lilies that unfolded their snow-white blossoms on the pools of water.

The heat soon became oppressive, and the horses stretched out their necks to drink, sniffing the stagnant waters with dilated nostrils.

The spahis paused for a moment to hold council, and dismounted to moisten their hats and bathe their heated brows. Suddenly, in the distance they heard a sound like the noise of many drums beating simultaneously.

“The great tam-tams!” said Sergeant Muller, who had often seen war in the black country.

And instinctively those who had dismounted ran to their horses.

But a black head rose near them from the bushes; it was an old priest, who made a strange sign with his lean arm, as if a magic order addressed to the reeds of the marshes, and a shower of lead fell upon the spahis.

The weapons aimed deliberately from

the security of this ambushade took deadly effect. Five or six horses fell, mortally wounded, and others, surprised and affrighted, reared and plunged, trampling under foot their bleeding riders.

Jean was unhorsed, and fell to the ground with a ball in his breast.

At the same time, forty hostile heads emerged from the high bushes, and forty black demons reeking with mud arose, grinding their white teeth like enraged monkeys.

O, heroic combat, that a Homer might have sung, but which remains obscure forever, forgotten, like many another struggle in the far-distant Africa !

They performed prodigies of strength and valor, the poor spahis, in their last defense. The struggle inflamed them, as it ever does when men are courageous by nature and born brave. They sold their lives dearly; but a few years only will

elapse at Saint Louis ere they are forgotten. Who will perpetuate their names, the names of those who fell that day in the far-off country of Diambour, on the plains of Dialakar?

In the meantime, the noise of the tam-tam drew nearer and nearer, and suddenly the spahis, as if in a dream, saw passing over the hill a great black army of half-naked warriors, glittering with beads and trinkets, running in the direction of Dialdé in detached crowds. Enormous tam-tams, gongs of war, which four men could hardly drag along; lean horses of the desert, full of fire and fury, their harness plated with copper which gleamed in the blazing sun, their manes and tails as red as blood—all made the scene fantastic and demoniacal; an African nightmare, as fleeting as the wind!

Boubakar-Segou was passing by!

He was going to subdue the French columns.

They passed along without noticing the spahis, leaving them to the ambushed troops who had already overwhelmed them.

Some of the spahis pushed forward from the bushes on the edge of the water, and fled onward over the burning sands, but they were soon exhausted by the terrible heat. Not being able to reload their guns, they fought with their knives, kicked and upset their opponents with their feet, and scratched and bit them.

Jean was attacked by two black fiends, who seemed to be incensed and enraged at his superior strength. He threw them to the ground repeatedly in his fury, but they arose each time and confronted him with increased rage.

As he lay there, dazed and confused, grasping their oily black limbs with bleed-

ing hands, he witnessed the last terrible scenes: His dying comrades fallen around him; the great army of the black king in the distance, flying over the burning sands; at his side the handsome Muller, vomiting blood, the death-rattle already in his throat; and a little further on, the tall black form of Nyaor, who was endeavoring to open a way in the direction of Saldé, mowing through the crowd of black demons with terrific blows of his sabre.

Finally, Jean grew weaker, and succumbed to his opponents. They threw him on his back, holding him by his arms, and one of them pressed against his breast a great iron knife.

It was a moment of terrible anguish for Jean. There was no human succor near; his comrades had all fallen; he was alone and forsaken. The thick cloth of his red coat and the coarse linen of his

soldier's shirt resisted the entrance of the knife ; but the black men pressed it very hard, and Jean uttered a loud, hoarse cry as the blade, with a horrible grinding noise, plunged into his chest. Then they drew it out with both hands, and kicked his body from them ; and raising a shout of victory, they turned in the direction of the army, and in a moment had gone like the wind.

XXI.

The two armies met; it was a bloody battle, but it made little noise in France. Such combats, occurring in far-distant countries, pass unnoticed by the crowd, and only those who mourn the loss of a brother, son, or lover remember them.

The French troops were weakening, when, almost at the end of the action, Boubakar-Segou received a load of buck-shot in his right temple. The brains of the black king oozed out as white as milk, and he fell, surrounded by his priests, entangled in his long chaplet of amulets, the iron cymbals of war clashing furiously in his dying ears. His death was the signal for retreat to his followers, and they fled precipitately into the impenetrable country of the interior.

When the French troops returned to Saint Louis they carried with them the bloody head-band of the rebel chief. It was burned and riddled by bullets, and attached to it was a long string of talismans and embroidered bags containing mysterious powders, cabalistic figures, and prayers in the language of Maghreb.

The death of Boubakar-Segou had a considerable moral effect on the natives, and this combat was followed by the submission of most of the insurgent chiefs.

It was a victory, and on their return to Saint Louis there were several promotions and decorations; but the ranks of the poor spahis were sadly reduced.

XXII.

Left alone on the sands, with the dew of death gathering on his brow, poor Jean crawled painfully along till he reached a tamarind tree, and lying down in the shade of its foliage, waited to die.

His throat was agitated with convulsive movements, and he knew that his end was approaching. He suffered terribly from thirst, and the arid sands drank up the blood that flowed from his wounds.

He had strange visions. He saw familiar faces; the chain of the Cévennes, his beloved home in the purple shadows of the mountains. Once more he walked with his dear old mother, holding her hand, through the mossy paths, as in his childhood. O, for one caress from his mother! for the touch of her hand on his

brow ! O, for one draught of water from the limpid stream that ran through the forest, to cool his parched throat and burning brain !

Was this the end of all things ? Was he to die here, all alone, under the blazing sun on the desert sands ? Was he never to hear his mother's voice again—never to see her face ? He raised himself up, for he did not wish to die.

“ T'Jean, T'Jean, enter the dance ! ”

There seemed to float before his eyes, as if in a terrible whirlwind, the phantom dancers, mounting in rapid circles and quickly vanishing in the embrace of the blue ether.

Jean longed to follow them, but they floated away swiftly, like smoke before the wind.

Suddenly he felt that he was being lifted up as if on wings, and he thought it was the supreme moment of death. It

was only a contraction of the muscles, a horrible spasm of grief.

A jet of blood flowed from his mouth, and hissing against his temple he seemed to hear a voice :

“ T’Jean, T’Jean, enter the dance !”

At last he grew calmer, and sank down exhausted upon his bed of sand.

Memories of his childhood crowded through his brain, strangely vivid and clear. He heard the old songs with which his mother had lulled him to sleep in his little cradle ; suddenly the village clock sounded noisily in his ears, and then in the midst of the gloomy desert he seemed to hear the Angelus !

Tears rolled down his bronzed cheeks ; the prayers of his youth revisited his memory, and he prayed once more with the fervor of a little child. In his hands he held the image of the Virgin which his mother had placed around his neck !

He had the strength to carry it to his lips. He kissed it passionately, and with his whole soul he prayed to that mother of griefs to whom his mother knelt each evening.

Radiant dreams, illusions, and the forms of those who had long been dead, appeared to him; and then in the crushing silence of that mighty solitude, he murmured faintly, again and again, "Meet me in heaven! meet me in heaven!"

It was now past mid-day; Jean was suffering less.

The desert, under the intense heat of the tropical luminary, appeared to him as a great white furnace whose heat no longer burned him. His chest dilated as if to inhale more air, his mouth opened for the last time, and there, under the fierce, blazing light of the glowing sun, he passed away, gently, peacefully.

XXIII.

On Fatou-gaye's return from the village of the old priest, the women of the allied tribes told her that the combat was over. She hastened to the encampment, panting and exhausted, dragging her weary footsteps painfully over the burning sands.

On her back she bore her sleeping infant, still enveloped in the piece of blue cloth. She had carefully concealed in her bosom the mysterious leather bag given to her by the old priest. As she neared the encampment she saw the Mussulman Nyaor-fall, who regarded her gravely as she approached him.

In the language of his country she spoke to him three words:

“Where is he?”

And Nyaor with a mournful gesture extended his arm in the direction of the lonely plains of Dialakar.

“Yonder,” he said; “he has *gained Paradise.*”

XXIV.

All day long Fatou-gaye wandered about feverishly in the thickets on the sand, still carrying on her back her sleeping child. She advanced, returned, and sometimes ran about with the excited movement of a panther which has lost its young. She sounded the bushes, pushed aside the thorny briars, searching everywhere under the scorching sun.

At three o'clock, far away on the arid plains she perceived the dead body of a horse; then a red coat—then two—then three. It was the scene of the attack.

Here and there the light shadows of the tamarind and mimosa rested on the dry, parched earth, and afar off, across the barren, limitless waste, could be seen the silhouette of a village, its pointed roofs

clearly defined against the deep-blue of the horizon.

Fatou-gaye paused, trembling, terrified. She saw him lying there with outstretched arms, his mouth open, his face upturned to the burning sun. She repeated a kind of invocation, a pagan rite, touching the amulets suspended from her neck, speaking in a whisper; her eyes were haggard and bloodshot.

After awhile she saw coming toward her from the distant village a number of old women of the hostile tribes. These old negresses were hideously ugly, and as they approached the bodies of the spahis the trinkets and glass beads with which they were profusely adorned jingled noisily. They moved the bodies about with their feet, and grinning and chattering like monkeys, they violated the dead with insulting buffoonery.

They tore the gilt buttons from the gay

uniforms, decorating their woolly heads with them, and gathered up the steel spurs, caps, and belts.

Fatou-gaye, crouching like a cat ready to spring, was concealed among the bushes. When she saw them turn toward the body of Jean she bounded forward, uttering a cry like a wild animal, and cursed the women in an unknown tongue. Her child, awakening, clung terrified to the back of the enraged mother.

The old women were so frightened at the sight of her that they fled. They were already laden with spoils, so they moved off, thinking to return on the morrow.

Speaking words that Fatou-gaye could not comprehend, they would go a short distance and then return to taunt her, laughing ferociously and gesticulating like chimpanzees.

When Fatou-gaye was once more alone

she knelt by the side of Jean and called him by his name repeatedly, "T'Jean! T'Jean!" in a shrill voice that sounded in the solitude like the voice of an ancient priestess calling the dead. She crouched there under the implacable sun of Africa, her eyes fixed on the great sombre horizon, for she was afraid to look at the body of Jean.

Above her the vultures were flying boldly, beating the heavy air with their large black wings. They hovered over the dead bodies, but dared not touch them; they were too fresh.

Fatou-gaye saw the image of the Virgin in the hand of Jean, and she understood that he had died praying. She also had an image of the Virgin, and a scapulary, among the charms around her neck. At Saint Louis a Catholic priest had baptized her, but she had no faith in them.

So she took an amulet of leather, the one given to her long ago by her mother in the land of Gallam, and kissing it tenderly, for it was her favorite charm, she placed it around the neck of Jean.

Then she took her little child to strangle it; but not wishing to hear its cries, she filled its mouth with sand, and in a rage of grief and despair she dug a hole in the sand and buried it there, pressing it very hard until the vigorous little limbs stiffened and fell still and helpless. Then she threw herself upon the body of Jean.

Thus died the child of Jean Peyral. Mysterious Providence! Why was life given it? What did it come to find upon this earth, and whence did it return?

Fatou-gaye wept tears of blood, and her heart-rending groans resounded over the plains of Dialakar. At last she took from the leather bag she had obtained

from the old priest a bitter powder. She swallowed it, and her agony began.

For a long time she lay there struggling under the blazing sun, in horrible convulsions, clutching her throat with her fingers, and tearing her hair so gaily adorned with amber and coral.

And the vultures hovered above her, waiting to see her die.

XXV.

At sunset on the plains of Dialakar she lay extended on the body of Jean, clasping in her stiffened arms the body of her little child.

And the night descended warm and starry on those forms resting so peacefully there after their savage life—descended silently, mysteriously over all the gloomy land of Africa!

That same evening the nuptial cortège of Jeanne Méry passed before the house of the old Peyrals at the foot of the Cévennes.

XXVI.

APOTHEOSIS.

At first it was but a groan in the distance, at the extreme end of the horizon of the desert, then the lugubrious concert sounded nearer and nearer—the weird yelpings of the jackal, the sharp, fierce cries of the hyena.

Poor old mother! That human form vaguely defined in the dim starlight, lying there in the depths of that fearful solitude, mouth gaping, arms extended under the blue heavens, who is asleep there at the hour when all the savage beasts are awake and roaming, who will never rise again—poor old mother, poor old woman, it is your son!

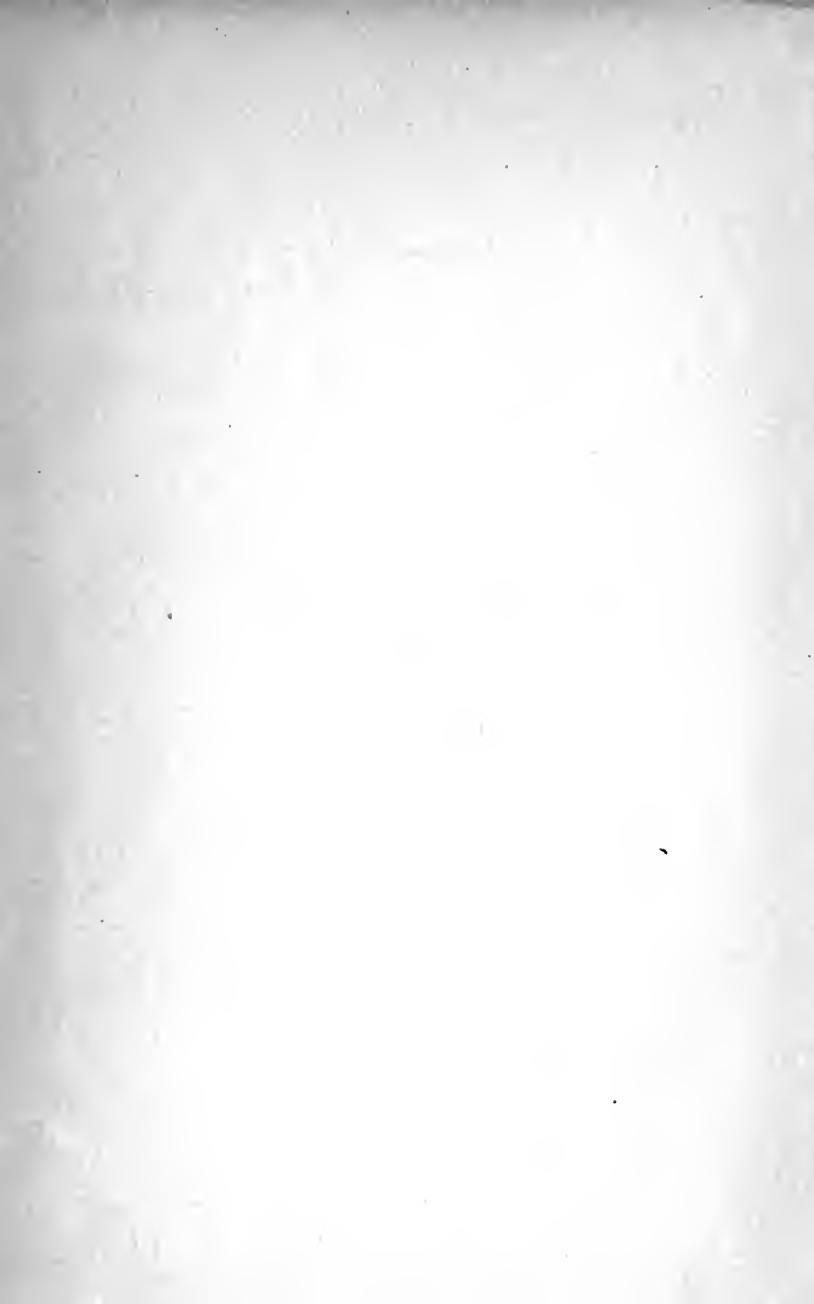
By the light of the stars the famished band, grazing the thickets and jumping

over the high bushes, rush upon the bodies of the spahis, and begin the repast desired by blind nature—the living in one form or another feeding upon the dead.

In his hand the man still held the image, the woman her charms of leather. Guard them well, O precious amulets!

To-morrow the vultures will continue the work of destruction; then their bones will be dragged over the sands by all the beasts of the desert, at the mercy of the winds and grasshoppers.

Old parents seated by your fireside in your humble cottage far away—old father bent with age, dreaming of your son, the handsome youth in the gay uniform—old mother who prays each evening for the absent one—wait for your son—await forever the coming of the spahi!



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