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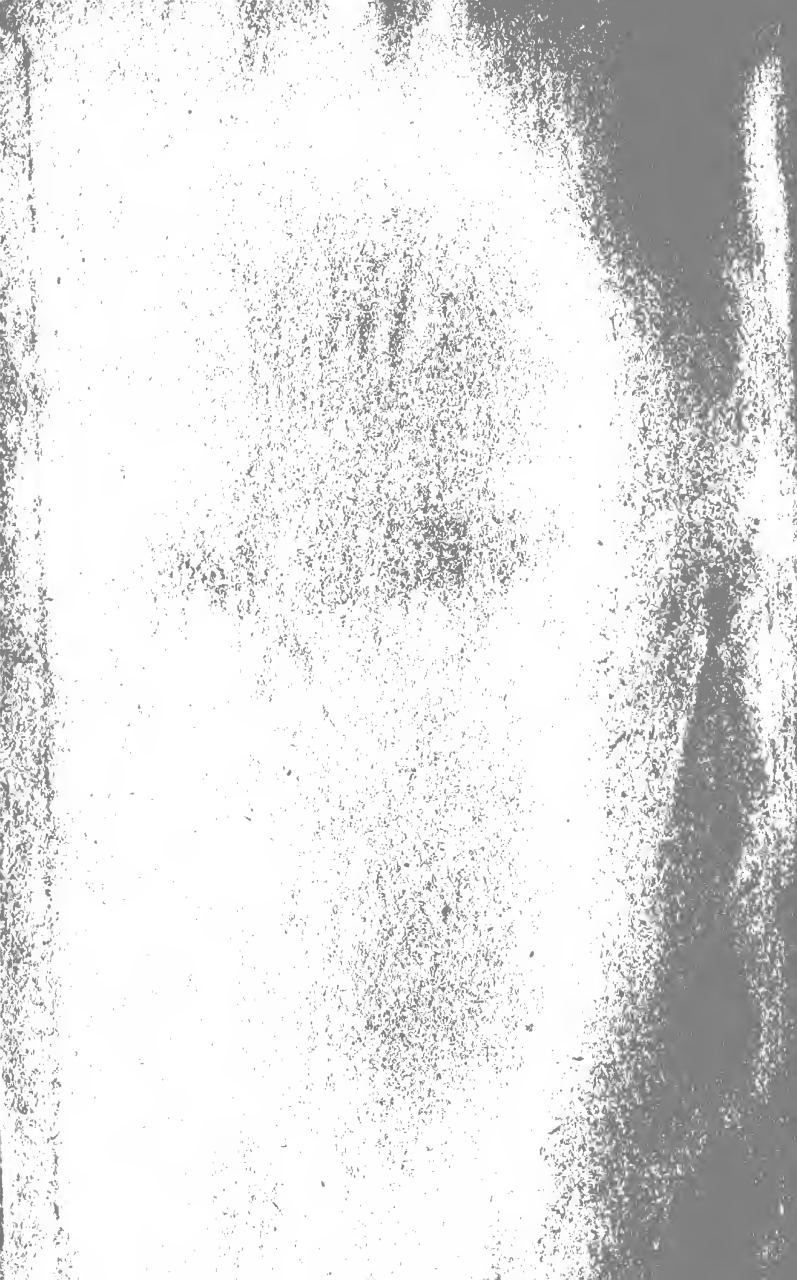
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EXPIATION

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BENTZON

EXPIATION

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH



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EXPIATION.

I.



THE Seine in its winding course was sparkling under the last rays of a bright April sun, when a young man stopped on the tow-path in front of the low arched gateway of a house that stood on the river bank not far from Paris. The house was rather commonplace in appearance, and neither elegant nor imposing ; but the lack of architectural ornament was more than supplied by a woodbine that was trained over its front, while at the sides some cherry trees shook their heads, white with their load of blossoms, as if in derision of the big trees in the neighboring park, which were as yet quite bald. The little terraced garden, a

mere basket of hyacinths and violets, was redolent of Spring ; it was filled with the twittering of birds and the buzzing of insects, while a hedge of privet and hawthorn sent its penetrating odor abroad ; altogether it was quite enough to touch the fancy of a young man of twenty.

Bernard—he knew no other than his baptismal name, and we will therefore designate him by that—Bernard was not much beyond this happy age. His face wore an expression of thoughtful gravity, which was tempered by that unspeakable charm of youth that lasts hardly longer than does the down upon the fruit. His complexion was as delicate and as changing as the complexion of a woman. The pallor, that the slightest emotion served to dissipate, the trifling stoop in the tall form, the rather slow and meditative gait, together formed an interesting contrast with the proud energy that was displayed in the glance of his deep, fearless eye. As he took off his hat he disclosed to view a noble forehead, but one on which melancholy had already cast a shade. A light breeze lifted his tawny locks, and the young man stopped to meet its refreshing caress, and, like a city man, to whom a country holiday is a rare event, he drew in with keen

relish, through ears and nostrils, the music and the perfumes of the fields.

For a long time he remained gazing on the river, glowing in the golden light that had been blazing in the western sky, but was now slowly fading. From one of the little willow-fringed islands that dot the bosom of the Seine, pleasant little clumps of trees, where one might expect to see the foliage part and disclose the smiling face of some shy, coquettish Gallic nymph, there came forth a row-boat with two persons in it—a fine-looking young fellow, who handled the oars, and a young girl, of whom all that was plainly distinguishable was a fluttering blue veil, in which the wandering dragon-flies entangled themselves. The sound of their laughter, the chorus of a barcarol, came echoing back from the shore; then, when they had turned a certain point, where they thought they were beyond the reach of inquisitive eyes, their heads gravitated together, the song was no longer heard, and for a second or so, the boat stood motionless under the willows.

A faint tinge of color rose to Bernard's cheeks as he unintentionally witnessed this scene. All the entrancing influences of this brightest time of

the year—the pleasant warmth of the air, the contagious gayety of the season, the occult sympathy with Nature working among her growing trees and flowers—were embodied for him in one single name that now escaped through his half-parted lips—Rose! It was hardly more than a sigh, and was at once repressed, as if the young man had even feared to betray his secret to solitude. He was much moved, and for an instant was silent; then, “Why,” said he, “should I condemn myself to a sterile life? All these things are mine as much as they are another’s. Who shall prevent me from enjoying them? I intend to live my life!”

He directed his steps toward the house and knocked at the small door. A woman-servant came running, and opened with a great show of surprise. “What! You here to-day, Monsieur Bernard? Upon my word, we were not expecting you. Are you having a vacation? A fine surprise it will be for Madame. . . . She is at church. But come in, come in!”

“Thank you,” replied the young man. “I will wait here under this arbor.” To tell the truth, he was glad to have a few minutes in which to prepare himself for an interview which he

knew would not be unattended by difficulties. "Go and attend to what you have to do, my good Mariette," he added, seeing that the old servant remained standing before him, for fear, as she said in her good-natured familiarity, that he might be lonely all by himself.

From the bench where he sat he commanded a view of the river, the plain, now green as a meadow beneath its newly sprouting crop of wheat, and the hills beyond with their vineyards hazy in the distance. This horizon, limited as it was, and the school where he had but just completed his studies, comprised all that Bernard knew or had seen of the world. As he reflected on this an irresistible desire seized him to extend his knowledge. It was like the instinct which impels the butterfly to burst the cocoon which imprisons its wings, the bird to take flight from the nest to which it will never return again, the craving after liberty that is implanted in the breasts of all young, strong things. The fiery Spring sunlight had, so to speak, intoxicated him; this sudden outbreak of a new life had disconcerted all his previous plans and resolutions; he saw them leave him as the last dead leaf, clinging to its branch, is borne away by the breeze that

causes the new buds to open. His meditations were interrupted by a well-known voice at his ear.

“There is no bad news, I hope?”

The person who addressed him thus was a woman who was still beautiful, though her prematurely gray hair and the simplicity of her dress made her look older than she actually was. The calm, restful serenity of her countenance gave evidence of a spotless life and an unruffled conscience. Still, however, deep down in her large, black eyes, there was a glint of enthusiasm which, beneath the devotee, revealed the heroine. It may have been the light of some consuming love that had been purified into charity through the means of some great sacrifice. Every great exclusive attachment leaves behind it a void, which God alone has the power to fill. It could not have been the late M. Désaubiers who was responsible for this void, for the poor man's whole existence had been nothing but an annoyance to every one who came in contact with him.

However that may be, his widow had, nearly twenty years ago, renounced the world, or at least that moderate portion of it which her small fortune and humble rank had ever allowed her to

enjoy. With but slender resources, she still always found it in her power to relieve those unfortunates who came to her for assistance. Her numerous beneficiaries made quite a large family, in which there had been more than one prodigal son, gratitude being a virtue that is not universal among human kind ; but she always waited patiently for these to return, and did not allow their misdeeds to work to the prejudice of the rest of her flock ; her cheerful optimism would not let her believe in the permanency of evil. How many times Bernard had been soothed and sustained by that motherly white hand that now rested on his shoulder, while her eyes seemed to read the trouble that lay in his heart with their loving, searching scrutiny. But it was impossible to answer that look otherwise than truthfully. So when Madame Désaubiers said : " There is no bad news, I hope ? " Bernard could not answer simply *yes* or *no*, the confession that he had to make being of too complex a character.

" I hardly know," said he, " what you will think about it. Only a little while ago I thought that I was coming here to get your advice, but now I feel that my mind is made up, and that I shall have to make you a plain statement of the case."

“What a serious way of introducing it!” Taking a seat beside him on the bench, she controlled her impatience by tightening her clasp on the prayer-book, which she held in her hand, and waited for him to speak; then, as he did not proceed, “Ah!” said she, “it has been in my mind for some time, that you were concealing a misfortune from me—or a fault.”

“Neither the one nor the other,” replied Bernard, plucking up his courage. “All there is about it, is that I cannot enter the theological school.”

Both were silent, he glad that he had, at last, made a breast of it, Madame Désaubiers, evidently vexed, “Why!” she inquired, “what obstacle has arisen? It was your own wish; you requested it.”

“I was not old enough to understand that the exercise of these lofty virtues calls for more thought than I have at my command. Without any constraint you always seemed to prefer that I should select this calling, rather than I selected it for myself. In a word, my excuse for my mistake is, that notwithstanding all your goodness to me, I was unhappy; I thought that I was condemned to a life of perpetual isolation. As it is now, I

do not know what career to select; but one thing I am certain of, I should make a bad priest, and the obstacle lies in myself."

"What your superiors tell me does not agree with this sudden failure of your resolution," remarked Madame Désaubiers, "and I am sorry to see you leave so straight and safe a road without, I am afraid, giving the matter sufficient consideration. We shall have to try and find another one," she continued, with a sigh of resignation. "You will find more than one way of employing your talents, but the world is pitiless for those who face it without the arms and passwords that are exacted by custom; it respects no mystery and is careless of susceptibilities. There are trials in store for you, my poor child, that God would certainly have spared you had you chosen to embrace his service. Think of your exceptional position in society, that it pains me to have to speak to you of!"

"I have never forgotten it," interrupted Bernard, with deep feeling. "I know that I have nothing to expect from the future, and that for the present, I have nothing, not even a name; that I have received by way of charity, that instruction, which I very likely shall not be per-

mitted to make use of, to make for myself a career that will be to my liking. Pardon me, my friend, my benefactress," he exclaimed, suddenly curbing himself, struck by the change from severity to deepest grief expressed on Madame Désaubiers' countenance ; " the charity which I alluded to so ungratefully, should have been sacred to me, since it came to me through your intervention, but I cannot help detesting the tyranny of this unknown father, who would first do all that he could to stifle my miserable existence, and then would shut me up behind the doors of a church or a convent."

" You misunderstand him," said Madame Désaubiers sharply ; " you attribute to him intentions which he never had. He was entirely ignorant of the dream with which I have deluded myself ; it is on me that your reproaches must fall ; he does not know now, and has never known anything at all in regard to you."

" Yes, I understand that he furnished you with means to do a work of charity, about which he himself was quite indifferent. My only obligation therefore is to you ; you sat by the bedside of my poor mother, and comforted her in her last moments, dying, as no doubt she did, of grief

and shame. Oh, that I could but recall her features! Had she only lived!—But alas! what could I effect toward making any one happy!”

“And do you count my happiness as of no importance?” asked Madame Désaubiers. “You will insure it to me,” continued the good woman, as he kissed her with the affection of a son, “by being happy yourself.”

Again she cast her scrutinizing glance upon him. “What is the main reason,” she inquired, “for your changing your mind as to taking orders, a step to which you were impelled, as you once confessed to me, rather by a feeling of sadness than by obedience? How long is it since you ceased feeling sad enough to carry out this suicide, as you call it, but which I had always regarded as a calling of your own selection? How long have you felt yourself unequal to the virtues demanded by eternal celibacy?”

The young man gave a start; Madame Désaubiers, in the kindness of her heart, had changed the course of the inquiry, but the explanations that he was to make in reply to her new questions gave him no less trouble than the old.

“For two years perhaps,” he said in a very low

voice, not feeling brave enough to confess more than a part of the truth.

“It was two years ago that Madame Aymès and her daughter spent their vacation with us,” Madame Désaubiers let fall carelessly, “but your secrets are your own.”

Bernard cast his eyes down, then quickly raising them again :

“No,” he exclaimed, “I will conceal nothing from you. I love her. In the beginning I loved her as the first of my play-fellows, who showed me any kindness, who never hurt my feelings by asking inconsiderate questions or getting off brutal witticisms at my expense. I never told you what I have had to suffer from my school-mates in this respect, before I even knew the meaning of the word shame ! And *she* was always so even-tempered, so amiable, so good-hearted ! I used to wait impatiently for the time to come when I was to meet her at your house, I felt so peaceful and contented where she was ; then suddenly, when I met her one vacation time, it was all changed. In place of the little girl, who was in my thoughts during every day of our long separation, I found a woman whom I hardly dared speak to. But to make up for this deprivation,

how I watched her, how I admired her! Her tender care for her mother filled me with respect, mingled with my feeling of adoration, for she is” Here Bernard looked inquiringly at Madame Désaubiers, who could not help smiling.

“Is she beautiful, do you think?”

“Certainly not; she is not even pretty.”

“Well, I don’t pretend to know anything about it,” continued Bernard, “but she was the first one who ever gave me an idea of what beauty is. I shall never forget the day when I saw her for the first time as she is now, or rather as she has been in my eyes since that time, and I confess that it would be very delightful to me to think that no one else could ever see her in the same light that I do; that the impression might remain mine and mine alone.

“You were here with your embroidery, under this same arbor where we are sitting now; Rose was reading aloud, and I was watching her. It was in the height of summer and about mid-day; the shadows from the trembling leaves chased each other over her face, as it was bent over her book. Madame Aymès asked for a skein of silk, which she had left in the drawing-room, and be-

fore I had fully understood Rose had thrown aside her book, and was running toward the house. I was ashamed of my slowness of apprehension, as well as of my want of politeness. I tried to stop Rose, who was already at a distance; I followed her. We raced like two children, she ahead and looking back at me with a laughing challenge in her eyes, scarcely touching the gravel with her flying feet, now disappearing behind some shrubbery to reappear on the other side, her every movement marked by an airy grace that is beyond description. Daphne, Atlanta, Galatea, all the light-footed heroines of the metamorphoses were personified in her. Suddenly a still more alluring dream took possession of my fancy ; it seemed to me that the happiness of all my future life was ahead of me, and that I was pursuing it ; a mad desire to seize it, and hold it in my grasp, lent wings to my feet. I caught up with Rose and stayed her with my eager hand ; for a second I felt her trembling against my heart, which was beating as if it would break, but immediately the realization of my desire was succeeded by an unconquerable terror. During the pursuit I had been laying up a store of eloquent words that I was anxious to disburthen myself of,

without having any very clear idea of what I was going to say, and now that I had caught her I could not get out a word; in reply to her astonished look I could with difficulty stammer out some ineffectual words of excuse, which seemed to divert her exceedingly. Ever since that time the same picture has been my companion by day and by night, presenting itself as the only end, the supreme reward, of whatever I may undertake. I would like to become wealthy and distinguished for her sake, and I do not understand how I could have been so near renouncing all prospects of future happiness in Rose's love, which seemed to me beyond my reach, until the day when I clasped it in my arms at the same time as Rose herself."

"Yes," replied Madame Désaubiers thoughtfully, "Rose is worthy of a place in your affections and also of being the reward of your undertakings. But the idea of a reward presupposes an effort, and that you have not made so far. We must endeavor to deserve everything in this world, and we must wait; it is for the best, for often we do not know our own wishes, and Providence wisely defers the realization, knowing that man to-day is not the same that

he was yesterday. Eclogues are not repeated, and while I would not do you injustice, I fear that in point of constancy you will be neither better nor worse than the rest of mankind."

"There are women to whom it would be impossible to be inconstant!"

"I have heard that same expression from lips that were as truthful as yours, which afterward uttered the same vows to other ears; they have forgotten, but I have remembered."

"And who could have forgotten you?" exclaimed Bernard, with all the deep sympathy that lovers always feel in hearing of a love affair.

"It does not make much difference now. All that I want to say is, that perhaps Rose some of these days will not seem to you the only woman in the world worth living for. Have you ever spoken to her of the feelings you entertain toward her?"

"I could not have dared."

"Have you any reason for thinking that she understands them, or that she shares them?"

"She has never given me reason to think that she has any other feeling toward me, than a sincere and kindly friendship," replied the young man with a sigh.

“Very well; do not let the matter go any farther. You would neither of you be justified in contracting an engagement yet awhile. Rose has her mother to take care of, and you have your work, which may some day enable you to offer her comfort, if not a fortune. I know what you are going to say ; that if you had Rose’s word it would give you courage and patience, but you could not obtain it without disturbing her peace of mind; and suppose, after all, her heart holds no sentiment stronger than a sisterly love? You need not alarm yourself, my dear child ; I have no reason for believing one way or the other. You must hope, and if this hope, indefinite and remote as it is, cannot sustain your courage, the only reason is that you do not love as you say you do. ”

This language, at once firm and enthusiastic, did not fail to produce its due effect upon Bernard. Their talk was prolonged until evening under the little arbor, and then, when night came on, by lamp-light in the little drawing-room, where a thousand plans for the future were taken up and discussed one by one. It was decided that, to begin with, teaching offered Bernard an immediate resource, though but a slender one, and

that he might content himself with this while waiting for something better.

II.



OUR best actions always have some alloy of selfishness. When, some years before the time of our story, Madame Désaubiers had asked the privilege of protecting an orphan child that was threatened with abandonment, her charity, which was such a nobly distinctive feature of her character, was not the only inspiring motive. At this time she had just passed through the decisive crisis of her life, she had made that sacrifice that is the most trying one that a woman can make, that of a great passion, the only one of her life, one of that description that, if it carries us into the region of storms, also takes us into the land of enchantment. Death seemed easier to her than to descend from so great a height ;

still, she did not allow even her love to blind her judgment. She knew that if she yielded she would forthwith lose all the respect of her admirer, one of those cynical men who are eager in pursuit as long as there is opposition, but, as soon as their passion is gratified, cast the object remorselessly to one side. Against being numbered among the forgotten, or at least placed on the list with those whose conquest had been rather more difficult, her only alternative was resistance. Of a mind as lofty as it was pure, she aimed at occupying a place in this worn-out heart such as no one except herself had ever occupied.

Many another woman, even those high in station, would have gladly accepted what she rejected. Madame Désaubiers felt the attraction, but she triumphed over it. She did not wish to make herself disagreeable by reason of her scruples, her exactions, her complainings, her jealousy, and already she was conscious of a bent in that direction. She felt that she would become irksome to him, and that he would soon tire of her, for she knew nothing of the objects and interests of a man who, by birth and by ability, held a position among the very foremost of the earth. Chance had introduced them to each

other while on a journey together ; it was probable that when they separated it would be to never meet again. All these things coincided, we may believe, in fortifying Madame Désaubiers' good resolution. However that may be, she succeeded in avoiding an entanglement, and gave the pleasure of an honest friendship to the man who, until then, had been the least capable of all men of wasting his time in Platonic sublimities. "It would be a pity," he soon began to think "to take away the halo that is so becoming to the face of this admirable little *bourgeoise*." The feeling of pique that he had experienced at his first repulse gave way before the novelty of the situation ; he found pleasure in her conversation, even without making love to her. As she came to question him about his far-off country, his adventurous but ill-spent youth, his travels, which had carried him to every court of Europe, Madame Désaubiers obtained from him confessions that he never had the slightest idea of making even to himself. As a result of these conversations, so tender in essentials, so circumspect in form, his cynical precepts and worldly maxims were for the nonce laid aside, and beneath his outer shell of perverse waywardness

there appeared another being, better, almost natural, in character, whose existence he had known nothing of until now. One evening, notwithstanding the feeling of pride which commanded him to be silent in regard to such an unpleasant recollection, he mentioned the sad consequences that had resulted from one of his love affairs with a poor girl in humble circumstances.

“And you did nothing to repair the wrong?” timidly asked Madame Désaubiers.

“The only reparation that I could make was to give the girl a dowry!”

“And you know nothing as to what happened the poor thing afterward?”

“How should I know?”

“But what became of him, the child? Your own flesh and blood.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and from his disdainful lips let fall a merciless expression: “There are no children - except those born in marriage!”

Conscience is just as likely as not to conceal remorse beneath cruel or cynical words, and the conscience of this particular man was more undecipherable than any other. Madame Désau-

biers, therefore, was not without hope of awakening it, and shortly afterward she thought that she had succeeded. When the man, whom she had compelled to yield her his esteem, was about to leave France, he handed her a large sum of money for the poor, so that she might act vicariously for him in saving his soul, he said. The gift and the confession, falling together as they did, set our love-lorn devotee thinking. She came to the conclusion that she had a mission; that she was intrusted with a legacy, which she received in silence. Without delay she started inquiries as to the whereabouts of the child, and took all the steps necessary to the accomplishment of a labor which, in her fond hopes, was to be a bond of union between her and the absent. The sum received for the alleviation of general distress was applied to the education of little Bernard.

Soon this little waif was all that remained to her to remind her of her short-lived love. The man whom she had idolized to such an extent that she could even overlook his vices, had now attained such a lofty position that he was inaccessible to common mortals; now and again Madame Désaubiers saw his name mentioned

in the newspapers among the diplomatic correspondence ; ambition seemed to have got the better of this Don Juan's love of pleasure. How could he find time in his busy life for trivial pursuits? "My influence is at work," thought Madame Désaubiers. "The day will come when those more ennobling pursuits in which he now finds his pleasure will also pall on him ; when, satiated with fame and honors, he will regret that he has not a child worthy of him to perpetuate his name ; then—who knows?" She looked at Bernard and noted with joy his increasing resemblance to his father. The boy was well endowed with qualities both of head and heart, and she made a mental vow that she would spare no severity toward him, if that were required, to fit him for a high position. Could there be any better reward for her old-time sacrifice than to compel the father to recognize the intervention of Providence, and, at the same time, secure for the child the worldly position from which he had been debarred by our unjust social system?

Madame Désaubiers thought not, and hoped that God would recompense her in this way.

While she was deluding herself with these

idle speculations, she received a letter which showed their emptiness. It was a stiff, awkwardly framed letter, for it would puzzle the most ingenious of men to tell the woman whom he once loved that he is about to be married and not feel some embarrassment. He dwelt at length on the reasons of expediency that urged him to the step, particularly on the duty that was incumbent on him of keeping the family name alive; but what mattered it to her? She only knew that he was to be married. She could have shed bitter tears in thinking how hopeless Bernard's fate was likely to be after this. What was she to do with this poor soul that was thus outlawed from society and deprived of all family ties in the name of morality, whom his own father could not assist without prejudice to his legitimate affections? She sought advice in prayer and was pleased when Bernard, prompted by her wishes, evinced a disposition to study for the church; how her plans had been upset by her pupil's rejection of them at this late day we have already seen.

When he at last left her, after a long discussion, with her approbation of his newly formed plans, Madame Désaubiers, greatly annoyed by

the misunderstanding into which she had fallen, resolved to leave matters in stronger hands than hers, and entrust the direction of events to God. The turn which they were taking, moreover, was not repugnant to a natural predilection of her sex; second only to the pleasure of being loved, there is nothing that affords a woman keener delight than to be the confidant of the love of others. Bernard, she said to herself, had made a happy selection of the object on which to fix his affections. Strengthened, as she had been, by her brave struggle with adversity, Rose Aymès would be an assistant to him, rather than a hindrance or a burthen. An absolute forgetfulness of self, united to a deep-seated idea of duty, formed her distinguishing characteristics. From her earliest days she had learned to rely on her own efforts, without, however, valuing them too highly, and this is the best moral training that a human being can receive, although it is not generally applied to women, whose inferiority may perhaps be accounted for by this reason. Her mother had been Madame Dèsaubiers' friend at boarding-school, and was the widow of an officer who had met an honorable death in battle while still young; her slender

pension would not have supported her had not Rose supplemented it by the product of her unceasing daily labor. The idea of marriage, or of making herself attractive to young men, had never entered her head; it is true that if she had been told in so many words that she was to be an old maid, her feelings would have been shocked, but she never gave the matter a thought. Her sole object was her mother; to provide food for her for the day, and to smooth away from her face the brooding care for the morrow, a shadow that had rested there and been a cause of sorrow to her from her earliest childhood, and the effort that she was compelled to make to attain this end, lowly as it was, appeared to absorb her every faculty, to the exclusion of all other matters.

III.



ADAME AYMES and her daughter had a little garret apartment in a house in the Luxembourg quarter, where everything indicated their poverty, as well as the elegance of their tastes. The faded, moth-eaten furniture was perfectly clean. A few pieces, remnants of days when they had been better off, contrasted with the nakedness of the work-room, where from morning until evening Rose plied her trade of painting little pictures on enamel. She had her daily bread to gain, a care which engrosses the attention of so many artists of the humbler rank. Bernard was accustomed to go there to spend some of the few leisure moments that were allowed him from his new and rather distasteful duties. "When," he would say to himself, looking at Rose, "Oh! when shall I have it in my power to stop the activity of that slender hand, to bring back the fresh

color of youth to that cheek ; to say to her, in a word, rest !”

She evidently would be glad to see him, and without interrupting her work, would motion him to a chair by her side with a pleasant nod of her head. Sometimes she would lay down her brushes to attend to some household duty, which she would do without any false shame, with a modest dignity that was all her own, and that prevented any action of hers from ever appearing unworthy. As she worked she would laugh and talk. It was wonderful that her mother's perpetual whining had not destroyed her faculty of being amused and entertained. Under their repeated reverses, Madame Aymès had given way to a kind of unhealthy apathy, whereas the same trials had only served to stimulate Rose's power of nervous resistance. Things of the smallest consequence appeared to the elder lady in a doleful or terrific light. She spent her time in lamenting the past and bewailing the future, while she took delight in multiplying imaginary troubles in her daughter's path, instead of helping her to clear away those which already existed there in greater number than they should have done. With all this, however, she was very fond of

Rose. Her disposition to melancholy had been aggravated by severe illness in early life. But Rose took everything cheerfully, and allowed nothing to disturb the serenity which she had put on like a shield. Her judgment was sound and she abounded in resources. She had a way of looking things in the face that was at once firm and humorous ; and she had the faculty of discerning at a glance what was possible or reasonable, and acting accordingly, without more trouble to herself than if the matter in hand had been merely some whim of fancy. She acknowledged to herself, however, that she had one cherished wish : to devote herself seriously to the study of art, in which she had, so far, under the stress of circumstances, received just sufficient instruction to earn a scanty living from it.

“ The main thing, in the first place,” she said to Bernard one evening, as her mother sat sleeping in her chair with her knitting in her hand, “ is to try and place myself on a footing of independence. Shall I ever attain that independence? Shall I ever rise, as I feel that I have it in me to do? Shall I ever become a painter, or must I always remain what I am, a mere mechanic, or little better? ”

She pushed away from her, rather resentfully, the basket which she was ornamenting with figures in arabesque.

“Talent enobles whatever it touches, and you are showing a great deal of it in these worthless trifles. You will attain success, even by the very thorny path which you are obliged to follow, and which I would so gladly make smooth for you if it were in my power.”

“Thank you ; but do not flatter. I am not aiming at success, but at perfection, and I shall never reach it, going on in this way. I have a great secret,” said she, lowering her voice : “I have almost finished a flower-piece for the exposition. I have not told mother about it ; I expect that it will be rejected, and she would feel too badly. I shall not allow myself to be discouraged. I will make another effort.”

“You are over-taxing your strength.”

“Oh ! If I could only be successful ! It seems to me that I could wish for nothing beyond that.”

“Nothing ?” said the young man interrogatively.”

She reflected a moment, and answered, as she resumed her painting, “Nothing !”

“Have you never thought that you might marry some day?”

“Nobody ever marries a poor girl, so they say.”

“A person like you is not poor. Whatever her fortune may be, she brings with it more than any one can give in return.”

“What you mean, I suppose, is that she will always be able to supply her own wants?”

“I mean nothing of the sort,” replied Bernard, with emphasis. “When I marry, my wife must be willing to be dependent on me for everything.”

“You are selfish,” said Rose, laughingly. “I shall insist on my husband allowing me to make good use of my time and be of assistance to him.”

“If I am selfish, you are proud, Rose.”

“Oh! no, I am not, for I shall be very glad to accept at his hands the greatest of all favors, only let him suffer me to do my work after my own fashion.”

“And what kind of a man do you think he will be, this husband who will come and set your genius free?”

“Who thinks? Who has time to dream?” exclaimed Rose, joyously. “But when the time comes, I will give the matter serious consideration, I assure you.”

“I suppose you will consult your friends as well? You would not scorn my advice, for instance?”

“That would be ungrateful. You have always treated me kindly.”

“Then it is a promise,” said Bernard in a voice that trembled with emotion. “You agree never to bestow your hand on any one without first telling me?”

Rose looked over toward her mother; her eyes were still closed in the most confiding, the sincerest of slumbers.

“What an idea,” she replied, blushing, without knowing why she did so.

“Then you won’t promise?”

“Oh yes; it is a bargain; I won’t marry without your consent. I scarcely think that I shall have to come to you, however; who would ever want to have me?”

Bernard came very near speaking his mind that evening, and Madame Aymès’ awakening, happening as it did, just at this point, perhaps was timely. After this time, his visits were less frequent; in the pleasure of their increasing intimacy, in the strong desire that he felt of assuring himself of the possession of a treasure that



he had gazed on so often and so closely that he had come to covet it, he was fearful that he might not be true to the promise which he had given Madame Désaubiers. The two young people, however, met quite frequently at this lady's house in the country, and as she looked at them from her window, walking side by side along the trim little garden paths, with their borders of box, she reflected that whatever the future might have in store for Bernard, he certainly could have no better mentor for the present moment.

In fact, there was a renewal of those innocent Sunday interviews that he used to look forward to as a compensation for the fatigues and trials of all the week. In the intervals, too, Rose's image was present with him continually. This was so far from interfering with his studies that it kept him at work until late at night. The position he had accepted, it is unnecessary to say, was only a stepping-stone to something better, and in his waking dreams he saw Rose smiling to him from the heights which were yet for him to gain, standing by his side in time of peril, causing him now and then to blush for follies which the best of young men cannot always entirely avoid, and inspiring him with scorn for the sneers

of some old companions, who had dubbed him *the Seminarist*.

If Bernard had found a guardian in Rose, Rose had found happiness through Bernard. Her mother noticed a change in her that she could not account for. Madame Désaubiers was clearer of vision, and understood why it was that Dame Wisdom, as she called her, was growing prettier ; she knew what it is that brings the sunshine to eyes that before were dull, what causes the blood to course more rapidly beneath the transparent skin and show itself in the mantling cheek, what adds grace and dignity to the bearing and beauty to the features. Madame Désaubiers now understood why it was that Bernard had thought her charming ; she had been so in his eyes before any one else had discovered it, or rather, perhaps, she was indebted to him for this unexpected beauty, more radiant than any other, which defies conventional rules of criticism and is only the ingenuous outward expression of an inward state of well-being. Her artistic talent, too, was developing under the impulse of new hopes. A few days after that evening when Bernard had made her promise that she would not dispose of herself without first consult-

ing him, he received a letter from Rose, the only one she had ever written him. "I have something to tell you," said she, "that is better than the finest marriage; my picture has been accepted at the Salon."

It was a short note, written in a large, childish hand, and had none of the polite expressions or commonplace amenities that result from practice of the epistolary style. Rose seldom had occasion to write, and could not boast of any elegance in the art. In order that her joy might be complete, she had desired to share it with a friend.

Three simple words, however, the very last ones: "I am yours," carried the young man away into a world of blissful dreams.

The flower-piece received some notice at the Exposition and was sold for a good price. Rose could now look forward to the time when she might be able to give up her make-shift of painting fans and bon-bon boxes; in the mean time her skill in manufacturing these baubles, her delicate taste, her nicety of coloring, her correct drawing, made quite a demand for them among the shop-keepers. Day by day her situation was improving.

The case was not the same with Bernard,

who, weary of the irksome and ill-paid work that he had accepted provisorily, could see no definite career before him. Brought up with a view to the church, and with a good solid basis of instruction, outside, however, of the university routine where any career lies open to a man, provided he has the due number of diplomas, he had devoted himself to philology and had cultivated literature without profit so far : any one who respects his pen cannot hope to live. Many places were mentioned to him that he might have filled creditably, but not one of them was given to him. In the Autumn of this year a promising offer came to him unexpectedly ; a great foreign nobleman, Count Volonzoff, wanted a preceptor for his son, to accompany him in his travels, which were made necessary by the state of the boy's health.

“It will be hard to find the right man,” he wrote from Italy. “A mere book-worm would not answer. We need a man really distinguished for his learning, who, while making due allowance for the physical weakness of his pupil, shall be able to impart to his keen intelligence the aliment which it requires in a judicious manner. Moreover, he must be a man of feeling, for he

will have to do with a mind that is not quite right, and he will have to face an irremediable calamity. He must be prepared for this. I know that I am asking a great deal : conscience, devotion, sensibility. They are qualities that I, for my part, have never placed any dependence upon, but I want to believe in their existence to-day, for the welfare of my son is at stake." M. Volonzoff's attorney knew Bernard. "Accept," he said to him. "You will have an opportunity to travel, which every young man ought to avail himself of when it is presented to him. You will improve your manners by contact with persons of refinement. Your intelligence will open and bear fruit, while here it will be crushed down, and finally destroyed by your daily recurring struggle with want. You will be well cared for by the Count, who, I may tell you, is an extremely kind-hearted man. And you will have plenty of leisure. Your pupil will require the services of his physician much more than those of his preceptor. He is said to be a very unattractive invalid, but you will become attached to him through compassion. You are good-hearted and—don't deny it—a little romantic. These two qualities are often counted

as defects, but they will be of service to you here. Besides, you are not entering on a contract that cannot be cancelled. Go and pass the winter under Italian orange trees. Perhaps you will then make up your mind to stay longer. The salary is extremely liberal."

Bernard was aware of all these advantages, but the reverse of the medal appealed to him still more strongly. He would have to part from Rose. When he first mentioned this distressing subject to her, they were walking together at Madame Désaubiers'. He was slowly strolling on the bank of the Seine, under the yellowing trees, idly pushing away with his foot the dead leaves that strewed their path. The harvests were all in, including the vintage. Here and there, from the closely shorn fields, a little curl of smoke arose, gray on a gray sky. Rose turned very pale, but after a moment's hesitation, during which she seemed to be choking down her feelings, she answered: "You must listen to the dictates of reason and obey."

"Even if it goes directly opposite to my feelings?"

There was a renewal of silence.

"So then you advise me to go away?" said

Bernard, in a tone that was almost one of reproach.

She turned her head away. He felt hurt by her unconcerned way of taking it, and did not see that her eyes were suffused with tears. At length Rose murmured :

“You will have a chance to see the world—”

The change in her voice made him start ; her efforts had been unavailing ; the tears were coming down.

“I shall find nothing in the world so dear as what I am leaving here,” said he, taking her hand with sudden warmth, “and as it is for your sake that I am going away, so I shall return to you.”

As if bereft of her senses, the young girl scarcely dared to believe her ears. Bernard said nothing more. Perhaps he had said too much as it was, only he retained her hand in his. They both had stopped, their eyes fixed on the water, which ran by in its silent course. To them it seemed to reflect the brightest, purest blue of spring, instead of October’s leaden sky, and to quiver with all the emotions which were agitating their own breasts. For the following moments they felt no need of speaking nor even of

thinking ; the present was all sufficient for them. The leaves that had been rustling but an instant since were quiet. The wind also held its breath for a space.

“ Rose ! ” said Bernard, softly.

She looked at him through tears that were more joyful than smiles. No vows were spoken. What would they have served ?

Madame Aymès, who was behind them with Madame Désaubiers, here joined them. Rose asked her mother to take her arm for the remainder of the walk, and Bernard, profiting by his ensuing tête-à-tête with Madame Désaubiers, without further preface, announced his intention of taking a tutor’s position abroad. At the name of Count Volonzoff Madame Désaubiers drew back as if she had been struck. She made him repeat it a second time.

“ Impossible ! ” she cried.

“ You are acquainted with the name ? ” asked Bernard, also very much surprised.

“ How should I know it ? ” she said, hesitating.

“ Where, then, is the impossibility ? ”

“ You will subject yourself to an intolerable restraint. Preceptor ! Why, the position is not far removed from that of a domestic.”

“ I am promised the greatest consideration. If they attempt to tyrannize, I can easily show that I am a free man by giving leg bail.”

“ But Rose ! ”

“ Do not rob me of my courage,” said Bernard, mournfully. “ It will be better for both her and me that we should be separated until the time comes when we can be united.”

Madame Désaubiers raised her hands toward Heaven, irresolutely, as if distracted by doubts and fears ; then, letting them fall again, “ Thy will be done, my God ! ” she mentally ejaculated.

Two weeks afterward Bernaad took his departure for Italy.

IV.

BERNARD TO MADAME DÉSAUBIERS.

SESTRI, Oct. 29th.



THE few lines that I sent Rose upon my arrival here, in order that you both might know that the journey had been accomplished in safety, must have left you hungry for more details. Take them, then. I will try to give them in due order, so as to omit nothing. And in the first place, I am as contented as could be expected. Above all I am pleased with the country; not that Sestri is the finest place along this wonderful Corniche road, that fairly dazzled me for two days with its beauty. Here the country is dry. Not a drop of that rain which was coming down in torrents when I left you has fallen to wash the pebbles in the Polcevera, and you can walk dry shod in the very bed of the stream. Too much dust, too many rocks. But then they have a way of turn-

ing the rocks into gardens by means of a revised edition of Armida's art ; and if trees obstinately refuse to grow there, very well—they paint them on the hard stone in such a way as to deceive the eye, and this fantastic kind of vegetation has a merit of its own ; it reconciles us to the practice of lying. And then we can afford to overlook their drought and their execrably bad taste, for we have the Mediterranean, its deep, transparent blue meeting the tender blue of the sky, bearing on its bosom, like so many stately swans, a fleet of vessels that are making sail toward France. Then, toward the left, in the distance, is outlined the splendid amphitheatre of the city of palaces, with its forts and its ramparts climbing up the steep rock ; its marble porticos, the spires and domes of its hundred churches, its peerless harbor with its forest of masts, the whole confused and blended together by the effect of distance, like a mirage. How Rose would delight in these beauties of form and color ; fit subjects for her brush to interpret. I wish that I might have both you and her, whom I love so well, here to share my enjoyment.

Among the villas whose blooming terraces

descend to the margin of the sea, that of the Count is one of the most elegant. His gardens are full of mystery and enchantment, and make one think of Tasso's. Everything in them is calculated to deceive the senses; artificial caverns, fountains spouting forth their streams in unnatural and distorted shapes, make-believe ruins that on one side present the appearance of a feudal castle, and on the other, a thatched cottage, a gilded bark floating on a lake that fills as if by virtue of an enchanter's wand; all in imitation of the famous Villa Pallavicini, which is not far from here. The house is in the same style; it is painted pink, like a coquettish woman, and its magnificent staircase, lined with orange trees, gives it a charming appearance. I modestly slipped in through one of the small entrance ways, after having seen my trunk safely mounted on the sturdy shoulders of one of the numerous porters, who are always on hand to supply the needs of travelers. One of the higher servants—a kind of steward—met me with excuses; they had not expected me so soon, but my apartment was ready; would it please me to retire to it? I was very glad to have an opportunity of ridding myself of the dust of travel, so I was conducted

with much ceremony to a chamber so large and so elaborately decorated, that I have not as yet succeeded in making myself feel at home in it. Scarcely had I changed my clothing when I heard a tap at my door. On opening there appeared before me a tall, well-made man of distinguished appearance. His lofty forehead was destitute of hair, the delicate regularity of his features announced his high birth, he was inclined to paleness, his resolute, firm lips, while they showed that they were accustomed to command, parted in a charming smile. It was the Count. With the greatest politeness he enquired if I had been furnished with everything for my comfort, then taking a seat with an air of unassuming good nature, which, as I afterward discovered, by no means prevents him from making every one feel the immeasurable distance that there is between himself and other mortals, he proceeded, in a conversational tone, to put me through a kind of examination. In doing this, his questions displayed much judgment. Whether his opinion of me was favorable or the reverse, I could not tell ; he allowed no sign to escape him. When his tongue had ceased its utterances, he continued to question me with

his eye, and I can give no idea in words of the power that lay in that glance. Unless when aroused, his eyes are dark gray, and convey to you an idea of disdainful indifference; there is no fire in them and they have a deadened look, like those of a wild animal composing himself to rest; in conversation they light up with an expression of cold, clear intelligence, which causes other people a most disagreeable feeling of inferiority, and at once freezes up any disposition toward enthusiasm or gush. What is the use? this look of his seems to say; there is nothing that we can discuss that is worth the heat of an argument. Still, the Count is always ready enough to argue, and he keeps his conversational claws sharp in this way, as we sometimes draw a sword that has been consigned to the scabbard and fence a little with it to keep it from growing rusty. But I am anticipating. Toward me his manner was one of exquisite courtesy. The undefined feeling of scorn and distrust that mankind in general, I suppose, inspire him with, is concealed beneath the cloak of this superficial and irresistible charm of his, for my part, however, I should prefer more kindness of heart. He can make his smile, his

manners, his language very captivating when he sets out to do so, but beneath it all there can be noticed by a close observer that he is acting from a set determination, and he makes one wish that he would let his mask fall and show us a natural human countenance, whether it be grave or gay, nay, even disagreeable. I must acknowledge, however, that he allowed the mask to fall in speaking of his son; the measured tones of his voice vibrated with a mournful inflection.

“ I will make you acquainted with your pupil,” said he. “ Monsieur X. has doubtless spoken to you of him, but I must again beg you to guard yourself against any expression of surprise, if you find him unlike other children; he would not fail to notice it, and it would add an additional pang to all the suffering which we are vainly endeavoring to spare him.”

Before I could reply, he raised a curtain that hung before a door, and I immediately found myself in the presence of young Dimitri, as he is called.

A misshapen little creature was reclining on a couch near an open window. Judging from his form, as he lay under the luxurious covering

that concealed it, he might be a child six or seven years old, but his face was wrinkled, sallow and faded, and his cheek bones were prominent. The latter defect, which is to be found among most all the Slavonian types, is also noticeable to a certain extent in his father, but modified by the harmony of the other features, to which it adds an expression of firmness that is almost leonine, while in the case of the boy it adds to the grotesque, repulsive ugliness of a face that might pass for that of a malevolent genie. The only expression visible on his countenance, as I looked on it, was one of the most sulky ennui. He was playing at dominos upon a low table that stood between him and a very light complexioned, spectacled young man in black, who, as we drew near, arose from his chair, and remained standing in an attitude of severe obsequiousness. The boy, without otherwise stirring, turned upon me a glance in which I deciphered the dread of that compassion which strangers are accustomed to extend to him, and which is extremely repugnant to him. I felt that the Count was also watching me, actuated by the same feeling, and that he was anxious to see how I would pass through the ordeal. I drew near

and extended my hand with a smiling face. Before giving me his own, the child cast a meaning glance upon his poor, lean, long, knotted fingers, and then placed them regretfully in mine, at the same time saluting me with an inclination of his enormously large head, which, with its shock of yellow hair, certainly has much to do with his grotesque appearance.

“We will leave you to become acquainted with each other,” said the Count, nodding affectionately to his son. “Are you coming, doctor?”

The young man of the spectacles bowed and retired with his employer, and I was left alone with my queer pupil. As it would have been rather difficult to engage him in conversation, I made up my mind to take up the game of dominos that had been interrupted by my entrance. When I proposed this to him, not prefacing my offer by any remarks:

“It will be of no use, sir,” he replied; “I always win. You can see that Doctor Scharf has already nearly, if not quite, lost the game.”

“I don’t think that you will get the better of me so easily,” said I, as I laid down a piece.

“We’ll see!”

I had no trouble in winning the first game,

although it was already half lost. He played badly, and was inattentive ; still my success seemed to astonish him, while at the same time it afforded him pleasure.

“ That is something like,” he exclaimed. “ Monsieur Scharf thinks that I do’nt see that he loses on purpose.”

From the commencement of our acquaintance, he had a higher esteem for me than for the doctor. I resolved to follow up my advantage, and beat him another game, although he applied himself more closely, feeling that the contest was in earnest.

“ Really,” said I, “ you are old enough to play a better game than you do.”

This struck him as being very funny ; he smiled as a little East Indian despot might have done when some one had ventured to be familiar.

“ How old do you think I am ? ”

“ Possibly you are ten.”

“ Yes, I am ten years past. But you are the first one who ever took me to be as old as I actually am.”

“ You must be pretty well up in your studies ? ” I continued, determined to treat him just as I would treat any other child.

“No,” said he with a mournful shake of the head. “I hardly know a thing, though for the last three years I have had instructors in every city where we have spent the winter: Rome, Naples, Florence.”

I interrupted him to say that he was very fortunate to have been able to visit such delightful places.

“You think that I am fortunate? Really? And have you never travelled? Why not?”

“Because I am poor.”

You will understand, my dear friends, that I made this confession as to my poverty with great reluctance, for poverty ceases to be respectable when stripped of its cloak of dignified reserve, but in order to make the evils of the poor child's life appear more endurable to him, I had to bring to his notice misfortune in another form. My efforts at consolation, however, proved unavailing.

“Poor!” he repeated, slowly, as if he failed to catch the meaning of the word. “Poor!” and here his accent betrayed a feeling of envy. “I have often seen poor people; they could walk and run, they were strong and healthy. When we came here from Genoa, there was a little boy

who followed our carriage, running on his hands and turning somersaults. How I would have liked to change places with him ! But no one would care to change places with me."

As our conversation seemed to be running into a rather dangerous groove, I changed it by asking him what his masters had taught him.

"A little history—but I can't endure history ! I cannot read the stories of battles, or of activity of any kind, without thinking how helpless I am, and that I am unlike other people and shall never be able to achieve anything. Then I studied Latin a while, but that gave me the headache and bored me besides. I am very easily bored," said he, watching me out of the corner of his eye.

"I am quite sure that we shall get along together without boring each other," said I in an off-hand manner.

At this my pupil uttered a little exclamation expressive of doubt, almost of defiance, but I had an answer ready. Passing into the adjoining room, I took from my trunk an herbarium and a few mineral specimens. You have seen them and know that they are no great treasures, but never did a fairy's store of wonders produce

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a greater effect. These poor remains of common-place plants, that had been gathered in our walks as souvenirs, rather than as specimens of any value, were the first that the poor little sick boy had ever seen preserved in this manner. He is passionately fond of flowers, and the idea that their frail lives might be prolonged was one that appealed strongly to his imagination. I had to explain to him that a penknife, a magnifying glass and a few sheets of coarse, gray paper were all that was required to work this miracle, and then proceeded to analyze the different parts of the flower, demonstrating the structure of those which I displayed before him, telling him their names and whence they came, and giving detailed information upon each specimen. All scientific jargon and pedantic nomenclature were carefully eliminated from this first lesson in botany. There is an excellent principle in education which I endeavor to keep constantly before me: that to instruct children, you have only to see that they have a clear perception of what you place before their eyes. I intend that this child shall find natural objects so interesting as to induce forgetfulness of self, or if not, then patience and resignation. He seems already to

have been very much impressed by the thought that the plants which have most the healing in them are not the brightest or most beautiful.

"We will collect a magnificent herbarium in the Alps, where I am to pass the summer," he joyfully said to me. "I have always hated them so, but now I shall like them better."

"What, the Alps?"

"Why, yes. Can't you understand how one wants to climb the mountains when they stand there so temptingly before you? Here, on the other hand, you are shut in by the sea; the world seems to end at Sestri, and I am not tormented by dreams of mountain-climbing, from which I awake only to find myself a prisoner in my bed."

"Never mind; you shall climb mountains some time. We will go together, and you shall make up for lost time."

He shrugged his shoulders with an impatient, scornful movement.

"Do you think that you can make me feel better by telling me what is untrue, like my old nurse, who was always telling me unlikely stories? If you could trust what she said, there was nothing beyond my strength, and for a long

time I believed her. I saw myself on horseback going to the wars, or riding forth to discover strange countries. And while she was telling me all those things, she knew that I would never get well. Servants lie to flatter one, and I will not have them about me any longer."

"I shall not flatter you, but you must remember that if man cannot cure your malady, God is all-powerful."

"God?" Words cannot express the look of rebellion and satanic hatred that contracted his childish features. "God is cruel and unjust. What have I done that he should treat me thus?"

His blasphemy ended in tears. I confess that I was frightened. I gave confused utterance to some common-places about this life being a period of probation for the life to come, which is our true life.

"I shall never go to heaven. You do not know me; you would never imagine how bad I am. I beat my attendants when I have a chance, I torture my dog; only a few days ago I pulled his ears with red-hot pincers."—Of course, I gave expression to my indignation.—"I did it because the doctor had burned me, so as to cure me of the illness which God had afflicted

me with. When I inflict suffering on my servants and on dumb animals, I, too, seem to be a God, and to treat them as He treated me, and revenge myself for my sufferings."

You see that I have a strange pupil to deal with ; there will be many conflicts between us, and I will not fail from time to time to tell you of events as they occur.

"And are you in the habit of exposing your evil thoughts in this way, and boasting of them?" I asked him.

"No, Doctor Scharf allows me to speak nothing but German, and I don't know four words of that language. I speak French more fluently, because my father and I always use it in conversation, but I never speak of such things to my father, because it would grieve him."

"You love him very much, then?"

"He loves me dearly ! It is unfortunate that we are never together for any length of time. He is always sad when he is by me."

"I suppose that your mother is with you more than he is?"

"You do not know how much she has to occupy her time. And then she cannot bear the excitement of strong emotions ; she is nervous ;

extremely nervous, she says she is." The child spoke in a questioning tone, as if to ask me the meaning of the phrase.

"Suppose," I asked, "we commence another game of dominos?"

"No," he replied, checking a yawn, "I am tired; I would rather take a nap."

"Sleep, then," said I, as I smoothed his pillows, while he followed my movements through his half closed eyes, in which, or at least I thought so, there appeared the dawning gleam of a newly awakened sympathy. There was a mingling of cunning and hardness yet to be detected in his glance, however, but soon under the calming influence of slumber, every expression departed from his wan features except that of suffering. I felt myself drawn toward him by an unspeakable feeling of pity, which was almost tenderness. He certainly is entirely unlike other children, but, hidden in the depths of every soul, and still more so when that soul is young, there is a chord that can be made to vibrate. Let us try to find it.

I went out upon the balcony and endeavored to quiet my perturbed feelings by a survey of the landscape. Soon there came rolling into the

courtyard an open carriage, from which three persons alighted a veiled lady, most graceful in carriage and elegant in dress, another lady, much older than the first, and a young man, who, with his load of parasols and fans, struck me as being the beau-ideal of the Cicisbeo. The newcomers disappeared within the villa; soon I heard the opening of a door behind me, and then the sound of a female voice, addressing some one with all kinds of caressing phrases in a language which I took to be Russian. These ill-timed endearments were addressed to poor Dimitri, who, to judge from his groans, found the process of awakening a disagreeable one. Then the same voice, this time in Italian, called over the names of a number of sweetmeats as they were placed one by one on the covering of the bed.

“I hope that you will like them?”

“Oh, yes; I shall like them very well. But just think, mamma, I have not been bored to-day; my new teacher is here.”

“Very well. I suppose you will soon come to hate him, like all the rest.”

“No, indeed; he plays a good game of dominos, and he showed me an herbarium. Do you know what an herbarium is, mamma?”

“ A collection of dead plants, I suppose.”

“ And each one with its name attached to it. I never saw anything so pretty.”

“ What a strange taste ! You know you will not have live roses in your room.”

“ You forget that I cannot bear their odor,” sadly replied the child. It appeared to me that the lady was deficient in maternal instinct.

“ What kind of a man is this famous teacher of yours ? ”

“ Oh ! he is very nice,” replied Dimitri with emphasis ; “ he is a great deal better than Doctor Scharf.”

Unfortunately the sound of the dinner bell at this juncture interrupted my pupil’s flattering criticism ; there was the rustle of a silk dress, and then the noise of a closing door told me that the child was alone again. As I came out from my place of concealment, where I had remained through a feeling of foolish diffidence, I heard him sigh :

“ Now I shall not be able to sleep any more.”

Five minutes afterward, in reply to the summons of the great bell, I presented myself in the drawing room, a spacious apartment with lofty marble columns and adorned with frescos,

where the Count presented me to his guests, the Marchioness Fossombrone and her son. They are the owners of one of the most magnificent palaces in Genoa. As Madame Volonzoff had called on them in the morning and had brought them back with her to dine, this fact seemed to me to be evidence that there was a certain degree of intimacy between the two families, but Italian manners are so free from ceremony that after all the acquaintance may have been only a casual one. The Marchioness, majestic in her embonpoint and with very regular, though somewhat retreating features, resembles nothing so much as an old Melpomene ; she toys continually with her fan, and beneath the costly lace of her head-dress, keeps rolling a pair of very fine eyes, whose glances gained for her in her youth that reputation for gallantry, which she still wears proudly, like a crown. On this side of the Alps, an adventure or so does not hurt a great lady if she be only good-natured and unaffected.

The Marquis, as is so often the case with his countrymen, is something between an Antinoiis and a hairdresser ; his shoulders are too broad, his voice is too resounding, his beard is too black and handsome ; he throws too much ardor

into his glance and too much eagerness into his smile ; above all, he displays too many diamonds on his shirt-front, and the flower on the lappel of his coat is too full blown. He may be set down as being the type, *par excellence*, of the tenor and the cicisbeo.

In the unconstrained manner that is said to characterize Italian gentlemen of birth, he at once began by asking me a thousand trifling questions about my country, at the same time giving utterance to a thousand inflated eulogiums of his own. He was cut short by the appearance of Madame Volonzoff ; he at once changed the subject, and in his admiration of the toilette which that lady displayed for our gratification, he soon reached the end of his stock of superlatives. I shall not attempt to describe this toilette ; it would be impossible. Its slightest details harmonized so completely with the beauty which it served to adorn, that it would have been impossible to think of the countess dressed in any other way. You must not ask me, either, to detail the particulars of her beauty, which has nothing in common with the ancient marbles that Marchioness Fossombrone recalls to recollection. Hers is one of those animated

faces, whose expression is constantly changing and affording you a glimpse of a different being from the woman you were but now looking at. Her hair, arranged with a negligence that gives token of the highest art, is neither black nor golden, but rather of that color which the poet sings of, that of the cedar that has been stripped of its bark. She can be blonde or brunette, as the fancy may impel ; on the evening I speak of she was blonde. To judge from the age of her son, she could not be less than twenty-six years old, but her fresh complexion and her slender waist give her the appearance of a young girl. When I tell you that she is of Polish origin, it is unnecessary to speak of the nobility and grace that characterize her bearing ; her mother was a native of the country where every woman is a queen.

Although Madame Volonzoff is in every respect such a charming person, still, for little Dimitri's sake, I would have preferred that she had been a different kind of woman, and the prejudice that I felt against her before I had even seen her, grows stronger, notwithstanding the favor by which she distinguishes me. Her sole object seems to be to please, and her every

effort is devoted to that end. So far I have not been able to form an opinion as to her understanding. The dinner was preceded by a course of cold side-dishes and fiery beverages, taken standing ; during the course of the meal itself, which was elegantly served in Russian style, the conversation ran entirely on entertainments and music, adapting itself, doubtless, to the taste of the Marchioness and her good-looking son, who are incapable of taking an interest in any more serious topic. I learned that Genoa still rivals Venice in the splendor of her carnival display, although attended with less disorder ; the old tomb-like palaces shake off their dust for the occasion, like the nuns in the opera of *Robert le Diable*, sedan chairs plough their way through the crowds on the narrow streets and leave mysterious dominos at marble staircases ; the usual motley crowd, officers in resplendent uniforms, guelphs, ghibellines, abbés, pirates, courtiers of the sixteenth century, goddesses, princesses costumed after *Véronèse's* pictures. Last year the Marchioness appeared as a Doge's wife, in a costume that was absolutely historically correct, and attracted a great deal of notice ; she proposes to give a masked ball this season

that will be celebrated by all the newspapers of Italy. At this announcement Madame Volonzoff clapped her hands : " I will go as a Roussalka," she cried. Marquis Andrea has never read Pouchkine, and was forced to ask what is a Roussalka. When it was explained to him, the idea of seeing the Countess transformed into a water nymph seemed to strike him as a very agreeable one.

" Will you be able to get the exact costume for the part ? " asked Madame Fossombrone with her characteristic artlessness.

The Count spoke up negligently : " We are all aware that these northern sirens use their long locks, which constitute their only raiment, to strangle their lovers with, but I fancy that my wife will see fit to add a few reeds, at least, to this primitive toilette."

" Oh ! " replied the Countess, laughing, " there will be a little green gauze besides, and then a great many diamonds to represent drops of water, you know, and it will all come from Paris."

When we rose from table I tried to make my escape, but the Countess graciously insisted that I should come with them to listen to some music.

We accordingly returned to the drawing-room, where M. Volonzoff ensconced himself in a corner with Doctor Scharf, and commenced an argument on Kant's Philosophy. The German was blind to the fact that his adversary was only diverting himself at his expense, and supported his obscure theories with a great display of erudition and with all possible seriousness, bringing up ponderous arguments to refute a cloud of paradoxes; it were like a squadron of heavy cavalry charging a swarm of bees. I was amused, and smiled involuntarily; this the Doctor misinterpreted, and screwed up his face in pity at the lack of intelligence which prevented me from following the discussion, while an intelligent glance from the Russian showed that he was aware that I entered into the spirit of the joke.

While this was going on, Countess Annette, as she is called among her friends, was sipping her coffee, nestled among the cushions of a great divan that fills the embrasure of a window. Madame de Fossombrone was fanning herself vigorously, and her son was plying his vocation of lady's man, a vocation that seemed to contain less refinement than my novel reading had led

me to expect. He had seated himself behind the lady of his thoughts, and from where I sat, I could see his eyes gleaming beneath his Olympian brows and his dark complexion glowing like a charcoal fire beneath the blacksmith's bellows, while his whispered impertinences were received without any display of anger. The husband did not appear to give the matter the slightest attention. Is this the result of polite custom? It is scarcely possible that it can result from indifference. Is it not rather to be attributed to his cosmopolitan experience, which understands the disposition of the different races better than the people understand themselves, and places its true value on that impressionable southern nature that is apt to blaze up and go out with the rapidity of a fire of dry straw? The expression of the Italian countenance affords to the bystander no possible clue to the subject of conversation. While uttering the merest common-places about the weather, one would think that these sons of the south were either devoting themselves, heart and soul, to the lady, or else threatening to stab her.

"You promised us some music," suddenly said the Count.

His wife obediently arose, and going to the piano, which stood in a recess in the wall—these immense apartments always seem bare and half furnished—opened it and played the initial bars of the duo "*Mira la bianca luna.*"

I had a pretty good idea who the tenor was to be, and he took his place at the instrument without hesitation. Through the unshuttered windows the white autumnal moonlight came in and silvered the columns and statues, giving a poetical light to this portion of the room, the lamps having been removed to the piano. To give M. de Fossombrone his due, the coxcomb is a great artist, but what shall I say of Madame Volonzoff's voice, with its flexibility and great register!

She paid no attention to the compliments of the Marchioness, who could not find words adequate to express her ecstasy, but turning to the doctor, she said :

"Now, scorner, come here and play me an accompaniment. Perhaps you think I did not notice the provoking air of inattention that you put on just now while I was singing ; you seem to think that your Beethoven is the only composer in the world. I have known many Italians

to be sincerely enthusiastic over German music, but I never knew a German who could listen to Italian music without showing his contempt for it."

The doctor parried her thrusts as well as he could, "Oh, Countess," he said, no doubt going back to some old dispute, "it is ever so long since you put my patriotic prejudices to rout, but I beg that you will spare me, and not compel me to admire your Verdi's newfangled emptiness."

"You will like Verdi if I desire it," said she, tapping his shoulder with her fan with a charming air of command. In the look which he gave her in reply, I thought I could discern a little spite, tempered by other emotions.

"Now we will try and convert the Marquis to the worship of the German divinities. Listen, Marquis, and let us have your criticism; I am going to give you a Polish movement."

You are aware that Gounod in his opera of *Faust*, has successfully adapted in certain portions, characteristic Polish themes, and it was one of these airs that we now listened to, executed in a masterly manner. When it was concluded the Countess, addressing me, said :

“This is for you, Mr. Frenchman.” And she sang a Bohemian song. This is the only music that affords the Count any pleasure; he drew near and said to her :

“That is perfection.”

Addressing me, she enquired : “How did you like it, sir?” In her avidity for praise, it seems that no voice is of so small account as to be beneath her notice; she insists on gathering them all in.

“It seemed,” I replied, “as if I was listening to the Roussalka that we were talking about a while ago.”

In fact, the song, while untrammelled by the laws of harmony as understood in civilized countries, carries one away by some indescribable, intoxicating, mysterious charm of its own. She smiled, and more than ever made me think of the Roussalka. The Marquis and the Doctor were dumb. Leaving them under the spell of fascination, I returned to my room and tried to read, but was interrupted from time to time by the groans that came from my pupil’s chamber and by the whisperings of the old nurse, endeavoring to quiet him and dispel the insomnia that continually waits on him. In fitful gusts,

through the doors that had been left open below there came to me the strains of the piano, the notes sharp and brilliant as a display of fireworks.

It is sad to notice the contrast between the pitiable condition of the boy and the unreflecting gayety of the mother; it has inspired me with an invincible dislike for her. After an evening so filled with new impressions, I feel the need of strengthening myself by communing in the spirit at least with my guardian angels in France. The cosmopolitanism, if I may say so, of this household, and the absence of home feeling, have produced an unpleasant disturbance in my thoughts; as I write, a delicious peace comes back to me. I seem to be restored to my native land, with its familiar customs in all their pureness, truth and simplicity, and my heart flies to you as to a port of refuge.

I shall keep this letter open until to-morrow.

28th OCTOBER.

This morning I devoted to an exploration of the terraces, which wind upward, growing narrower as they ascend, something like a conical sea-shell in form, and are covered with flower gardens of great beauty and variety of design.

The first stair-case that I took brought me into a plantation of camphor-trees and other exotic laurels, and there I found Doctor Scharf, taking his morning walk, with a volume of Humboldt in his hand. Although apparently engrossed in his book, he recognized me and saluted me in French. I replied to him in German.

“ Ah ! you speak my native tongue, sir ? ”

“ I am slightly acquainted with all languages. ”

“ Really ? So you have philologists at Paris ? The talent will be of use to you here, for as you will already have observed, our villa is a tower of Babel in miniature. Still, however, French predominates, as it does in all Russian families of distinction. Strange, that this people, which assimilates so much, has nothing that it can call its own, not even a language. ”

“ Still they have a literature. ”

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders and glanced at his volume of Humboldt, as if calling on it to bear witness to the absurdity of such a proposition ; then he continued :

“ You also are an early riser, I see, and I congratulate you on it. How sweet, and at the same time, how melancholy is the perfume exhaled by these flowers, the last of the year ! Of

all the hours of the day this is my favorite, but until you came, I had no one to share my liking with me. Nature has no attraction for any one here. The freshness of the morning is wasted, for the curtains are kept closely drawn until noon," and M. Scharf, as he spoke, pointed to the front of the villa. "It is very true that they sit up until two o'clock in the morning, amusing themselves with cards, cigarettes, and what they are pleased to call music."

"But is not the Countess a very good musician?" I ventured to ask.

"You had an opportunity of judging last night."

"But I make no pretensions to being a judge, and I know that I am not hard to please."

"Well, she certainly has a good voice, and some natural taste, but she is lacking in culture; she thinks that everything comes to her by intuition, so she sings as she does everything else, right or wrong, hit or miss, without discernment, study or conviction."

With a cunning which does not form part of my character, but which circumstances made imperative, I was resolved that he should talk freely, for when we are in strange waters we

must know the shoals if we would avoid shipwreck.

“For a person of such kind disposition,” I said to him, “you seem to be severe.”

“Kindness, sir, is a quality of no great importance. We are talking of art, and, perhaps, I carry my worship of it to too great length. As I feel, it is impiety toward Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, those divinities of my native land, truly God-like in art, to treat their immortal works as we would treat what one of my countrymen calls Rossini’s melodious butterflies. Ah! If you could only hear my little sisters! There is conscience, feeling and purity for you! They are in Germany, thank God, while I, for my sins, am compelled to be in Italy.”

The Doctor’s childhood was passed in Prussian Silesia, and he conducted his studies in Berlin, but that unreasoning feeling that makes us consider the nook where we were born, no matter how forbidding it may be, the most beautiful spot of earth, is at once so touching and so deserving of our respect, that I was silent upon the question of his regrets.

“It is a long time since you left your country?” I asked.

“I have been an inmate of this household since I left it. I was not rich enough to devote myself exclusively to science, as it was my wish to do, and as it is my intention to do when my time of exile shall be over, and, on the other hand, there were many difficulties in the way of my stepping immediately into practice as a physician. While matters stood thus, Count Volonzoff begged me to remain with his son, to whom I was able to afford relief in one of his acute attacks at the time when the family were passing through Berlin. He tempted me with a large salary, but the motive that chiefly swayed me was humanity, together with the desire to study a case of which, fortunately, there are but few examples.”

“What is the nature of this horrible disease?”

“You have seen the poor child. Nature, always compassionate, has mercifully decreed that he shall not live; he will not survive his fifteenth year, even if he reaches that age. Still, I have never dared to entirely deprive his parents of hope. Who could have the heart to do so? An only son!”

“But what could have been the cause of such a calamity?”

“The Count maintains that his wife is respon-

sible for it. During the time of her pregnancy, she persisted in adhering to the wild manner of living that she is so addicted to, regardless of advice, heedless of what might happen. She was nearly killed by a fall from her horse ; contrary to all expectation, she recovered, but the child paid the penalty of her imprudence. That, at least, is the story that they tell. I hardly know, for my own part, what to believe. Even had there been no accident, Count Volonzoff's child would likely have been stunted and sickly. These aristocratic families, that are eaten up by ulcers, physical as well as moral, still flatter themselves with the belief that they can produce strong and healthy children !

“It is said that when the Count married, it was when he was no longer in his early youth, a youth that had been spent in all kinds of excesses. Be that as it may, his pride must suffer cruelly from such an affliction.”

“And his feelings still more, I should imagine.”

“Oh ! As for feelings, I doubt very much if he has any, though, no doubt, he has a heart to perform its proper muscular action. When you shall have heard him, as I have, treat with the utmost contempt duty, virtue, everything

that is good and true, justifying in cold blood the very worst and basest social and political institutions, pleasantly excusing vice on the ground that the standard of morality differs at different times and among different races and in different climates, and saying that he, for his part, is a citizen of the world, you will admit, I think, that he is endowed with a magnificent intellect, but that as regards natural feeling, he is entirely deficient in it. And to think what a source of torture to him his vanity must be ! That the heir to a name that is inscribed in the velvet book should be reduced to such a state ! The Count is inconsolable. After allowing himself for years to be deceived by false hopes, after having consulted the high-priests of science, and then having had recourse to all the quacks of Europe, he has at last been compelled to admit that fate dared to oppose him and was even stronger than he. Then came the sudden, unrelenting abandonment of every thing that he had been striving for in life ; he gave up a brilliant career, because its splendor would attract public attention to him and to his affairs. He could not endure the disgrace of being commiserated after having been admired and envied. He renounced his country. You will tell me that

this was not a sacrifice, for the Russians are to be found in every quarter of the world, except their own country; but he does not travel for his own pleasure; his object is to withdraw his son, poor sufferer that he is, from the gaze of the public.

“He is taken to the mountains for the summer, to warmer climates for the winter. This year the beauty of the location decided our coming here, though the Countess was very much opposed to the selection. She likes to go from one great city to another and pose as queen over the festivities that are held there. That you can understand.”

“That I can understand?” I repeated, almost beside myself with indignation. “Do you mean to say that it is possible that this mother——”

“My dear sir,” the Doctor interrupted, in the peremptory and dogmatic manner which is characteristic of him, “I came from a country where to be a mother of a family means to be a model for her sex. In our country the mother of a child afflicted like Dimitri Volonzoff would be constantly at his bedside, watching over him and praying for him; but we are here discussing Countess Annette. She is of the world, worldly;

she is fond of what people generally are fond of. She would have adorned one of those pretty babies that you can trick out with ribbons and lace until they look like a big handsome doll ; if she had had a son who was very strong, gay and intelligent, perhaps she might have been proud enough of him to pardon him for making her seem a little older ; but the sight of suffering entirely upsets her delicate nerves, and the sight of anything disagreeable frightens her. After her fashion, she makes a display of her courage and devotion two or three times a day by paying a visit to this deformed creature, in whom she can see nothing to remind her of herself. It humiliates her to think that he is flesh of her flesh, and then, although conscience is among the least developed of her faculties, the sight of him causes her a certain feeling of remorse which she endeavors to stifle, for it is natural for us to bear ill-will toward those whom we have injured ; moreover the birth of the child marked the beginning, not of a misunderstanding between her and her husband : the good-breeding that regulates their intercourse acts as a bar against those quarrels and recriminations which divide the homes of common people : but of a coldness,

which women like her, accustomed to be idolized, do not take kindly to."

"From what you tell me, I should think that she must incur the hatred of every one."

The Doctor shook his head, "No one can hate the Countess." And he took a few steps, his eyes cast down as if he were counting the grains of sand in the path. "She is a coquette," he resumed, "and coquettes can be neither wives nor mothers. You have had experience of them in France!"

"I know no women in my country except those who are worthy of the highest respect," I replied, nettled by this slur of his.

"Very good! That is what I call real gallantry. But you are so young, likely you have never gone away from the family circle, outside of which there is nothing but deception."

I remembered my resolution to be uncommunicative on this subject, and shut off his questions by answering stiffly :

"I have no family."

His expression softened, without affecting me materially.

"If that is the case," said he, "I am happier than you." And he proceeded to give me a de-

tailed and lengthy account of his family, beginning with his venerable parents and ending with such a formidable array of brothers and sisters that, however great his stock of affection may be, he must at times be troubled to find sufficient to go around. "How I pity you," he added, "that you have no one whom you can love!"

"What is to prevent me," I replied, "from forming an attachment for this pupil whom Providence has thrown in my way, as there seems to be no better object?"

"Good heavens!" cried Scharf, abruptly forsaking the sentimental tone, "you know nothing of this little crippled tiger. Give up such an idea; you would never succeed in taming him. For three years I have been caring for him the best I know how, and he can't bear the sight of me."

But every one conquers with the weapons that are given him, and I don't believe that M. Scharf has selected the best method in looking upon this poor child simply as something to be observed and operated on in the interest of science. It would not be so bad if he thought there was any prospect of effecting a cure.

At this moment a little boy in a silk blouse

and kid boots came up to us with a request for the doctor to go to his patient, who had just awakened.

“Come here, Fédor,” said the German, “and show us how your master treats his foster-brother.”

Féдор put back the hair that hung down on each side of his chubby little face, and displayed his cheek marked with stripes from the blows of a riding-whip.

“What do you say to that? What do you think of our interesting little martyr’s method of expressing his gratitude to those who serve him?”

“Why did you let him beat you?” I asked, indignantly.

“Ah! You are going still further, and intend preaching the rights of man to this breed of serfs who have been brought up to love the lash? The labors of Hercules would have an attraction for you. I wish you luck!”

We separated thereupon. The conversation that we had had together did not seem to have engendered any very strong marked sympathy.

It seems to me that this very learned young man expatiates with considerable complacency, taking into consideration how short a time we

have been acquainted, upon the inmost details of his virtuous home, that he professes to systematically decry and deride everything which does not come from Berlin, and that the severity with which he denounces the Countess betrays the fact that he is in love with her. As far as the Count is concerned, I would wager that the worst that he can be reproached with is his disposition to quiz, of which I had a sample last night. Perhaps the Doctor, after a night's reflection, has been able to see that the attack on Kant was only a feint, designed to show the superiority of champagne and wit over beer and pure reason. And even if the poor little tiger did raise his claws and give him a scratch or two, should he not have tried to gain his affection, knowing as he does better than any one else does what he has to suffer? I look upon him as a disagreeable pedant, and a feeling of rivalry comes over me, with a desire to beat him in the difficult game we are playing.

My letter has assumed the proportions of a volume. It is my intention to send you regularly the daily account of my impressions and my discoveries, taking special pains, be it understood, to mail my letters with my own hand, for

among such a crowd of servants there is always the risk of something happening that ought not to, and perhaps my portraits might not prove pleasing to the sitters, should they chance to fall into their hands.

Rose Aymès was at Madame Désaubiers' when this letter arrived. It was read by the two ladies in common.

"How far away from us he is," murmured the young girl when the reading was finished. In speaking thus, she was not thinking of mere physical distance. A little later she retired to her room and abandoned herself unconstrainedly to the feeling of sadness which oppressed her. The reason of her sadness she could not explain even to herself. Were the news bad? No, certainly they were not.

Madame Désaubiers read and re-read many times with a heavy heart these long pages that had come to them from Italy. They awoke in her remembrances that the struggles of twenty years, as she had to confess to herself, had been powerless to conquer. Many a vague fear, too, and many a scruple, such as would have hardly been expected to exist in so well disciplined and

such a firmly Christian mind, added their disturbing influences and drove sleep from her pillow that night.

She was very reticent in her reply to Bernard, and her letter abounded in mysterious hints. "You are very young," she said, "and have very little acquaintance with the world, to live in a household where there are so many conflicting interests to be conciliated. Maintain the strictest silence concerning your past toward all curious enquirers, even should their enquiries seem to be dictated by good-natured motives; shroud yourself in the reserve that you displayed toward that German, though you will probably find it more difficult to maintain that attitude should the investigations come from feminine sources.

"The name of one of the persons that you speak of once came into my life in connection with circumstances that caused me great suffering. I look with great dread upon the prospect of my being recalled to the recollection of this person. Be prudent, then, for your old friend's sake, as well as for your own, and to be on the safe side, send all your letters to the address of Mariette—Madame Hubert."

V.



IN a few weeks Bernard had succeeded in gaining the affections of his pupil. "This spoiled child shall know what it is to be happy," he had said, and although the pledge seemed a rash one to make, he had been able to make it good. He was the constant companion of Dimitri, who, under certain aspects, seemed to be his senior, thanks to the satiety produced by an unlimited command of money and what it will buy, and his own invincible selfish and domineering habits. Thus was justified Dr. Scharf's saying: "Russians are only elderly children, and their children are little old men."

Little by little the tastes of this small hot-house abortion were modified and directed toward natural objects, ingeniously disguised under the garb of amusements suited to his age. How-



ever desirous he might be for acquiring information, he was incapable of sustained application. A regular course of study, with its formal preparation, would have frightened him, but his freakish intelligence was not proof against the wonders of Creation as exhibited in the shape of stones and flowers. These were the allies that Bernard produced to assist him in his work. An insect, a grain of sand, a bit of moss, served for a text for long talks that were entertaining while they were instructive.

More than once, in those days, the Countess was attracted by the unaccustomed sound of laughter on the terrace, where her son had been carried for the benefit of the sunlight. She took her seat there, so that she might learn, if she could, what this prescription was that seemed to cure ennui. "Oh! if only I could avail myself of it!" she sighed.

In reckoning Bernard up, the sum and substance of her judgement was that he was far too good-looking to be a botanist and sick child's nurse, and the expression of this opinion cost the young Frenchman many a black look from M. de Fossombrone, while Dr. Scharf redoubled his hypocritical attentions. The latter was im-

placable toward Bernard's success ; he could not even pardon the change in Dimitri, who, he said in his emphatic manner, seemed to have acquired a new soul. There were no more of those dismal wailings and fierce bursts of rage which had formerly terrified all the household. Scharf had preached and philosophized in vain to reach this end ; he had vainly appealed to the nobler feelings, which were entirely wanting in the child, to his reason, to his piety ; the idea never occurred to him of utilizing his bad passions, as Bernard did, above all, bringing into play Dimitri's most glaring defect, an unconquerable pride, and by its means inculcating resignation under the guise of stoicism.

“ You can be a man if you will ; it depends entirely upon yourself,” he kept repeating to him on every occasion. And this quality of manhood, which the blundering kindness of his attendants had led him to believe consisted in nothing but physical strength and activity, had now, since he knew that he could gain it in its best acceptation in spite of circumstances, became the object of the little invalid's highest ambition. Dimitri loved to command ; Bernard allowed him to do so, provided he first learned

to command himself, and Fédor got no more beatings. Alms-giving was associated in his mind with the egotistical pleasure of doing as he saw grown people do, and as his new-born liberality brought around all the ragged little blackguards of Sestri, who had formerly fled before him in terror, the consoling illusion took possession of him, that since they no longer ran away from him, he could not be so repulsive as he had been. In fact, his ugliness did decrease from day to day, in proportion as the expression of hate disappeared from his features, just as his physical health improved as his sensitive nerves became calmer through his exercising the only heroism that lay in his power, that which consists in knowing how to endure suffering.

By thus withdrawing his attention from his own personality and encouraging an interest in things foreign to himself, Bernard had accomplished a great work; he infused into it all the enthusiasm, the passionate devotion, the ardent desire of doing good that in years gone by had impelled him toward the priesthood. His influence over this creature, whom it might almost be said he had created, was boundless,

almost magnetic in its nature ; neither did it destroy the familiarity which had sprung up between them at first sight through the interchange of new impressions.

“ You must call me Dima, as my parents do,” the boy said to him one day ; “ strangers never call me by that name.”

“ Very well,” the master answered ; “ I will do so, provided you call me Bernard.”

It was the love and confidence, rather than the respect of this poor little dwarfed intellect, that had to be gained, an intellect that had hitherto remained a sealed book for every one. The progress in this direction for a long time constituted the staple topic of the letters to Madame Désaubiers.

“ Our intimacy has become closer still,” wrote Bernard, “ since I have charged myself with many cares that until now the servants, upon whom the little tyrant vents his spite, have acquitted themselves perfunctorily. Dima had always felt very keenly the repugnance that his infirmities caused the people who took money for serving him, although they did their best to conceal this feeling. He spoke of it to me:

“ While what *you* do for me,” he said, “ is

done from choice, from the goodness of your heart, so that I am willing to be your debtor for it, but I hated the others for being strong, and for the services they rendered me.'

"He insists that I shall promise never to leave him. His great argument is this: 'Perhaps I shall not live very long.'

"Last night, having arisen to see if my pupil was asleep, he seized my hand in both his and gave it a rapid kiss. It was the first caress that I had received from him; he is very chary of bestowing them, and I wished that his mother might have received this one, for it would have been to her as a recompense for many a trouble; however, she knows nothing, either of the trouble or the reward."

Sometimes, also, Bernard in his letters, of which we give detached fragments, spoke of the increasing kindness manifested by M. Volonzoff:

"I want to make him understand that there are services that cannot be paid for with money, and which make even as great a man as he is a debtor to a poor devil like me. Speaking seriously, I would like to have him give me credit for the honesty of my intentions. I feel that I have aroused in him a kind of sympathetic curiosity.

“Dima has doubtless told him that I am doing some work for my own account, and that while I watch over him at night I occupy my time in writing, and the Count endeavors to discover what my plans are for the future and see if he cannot forward them. He seems to be constantly saying : ‘Let me be of assistance to you.’ However, when the conversation turns upon myself and my affairs, I always manage to bring it back to some topic of general interest, which I treat with the greatest freedom, thereby, perhaps, running the risk of offending the autocrat. But no, to have the courage of one’s opinions seems to please him, though he is incapable of it himself. I suppose that, like most Russians of high rank, he has never had any great incentive to activity beyond his fortune and his ambition ; when discussing general interests he is cold and unimpassioned, although he can talk admirably upon such subjects, as well as on all others. In the conversation of others, he appreciates very highly candor, moral independence, and above all what he calls originality, being entirely disgusted with that spirit of imitation which forms the mortal evil of his country.

“M. Scharf’s judgement of him was based on

their reciprocal relations. The Count detests any webby display of science, and more than anything else he detests the everlasting harangues on German unity that the Doctor always indulges in as soon as the conversation turns on politics ; none the less has he acquired a fund of information by his rapid and cursory reading ; there is no subject on which he is entirely ignorant. Unfortunately, the information that he has acquired, has failed to penetrate his conscience and his heart, and so he is destitute of that faith without which our actions are of no avail.

“ I notice many contrasts between his theories and his actions, so that it seems to me that this sceptic might be deluded by a designing person.

“ His preference for me will cause many to envy me, and will likely cause me some enemies. He said to me the other day, with one of those sighs that escape him whenever he speaks of what Dima might have been if he had been strong :

“ ‘ I could have wished for no other guide than you for the future Count Volonzoff ; my desire would have been that he might have been like you in every respect.’

“ This was after a discussion in which I feared

that I had exceeded the bounds of the deference that was his due. I cannot tell you how flattering is the distinction between the exquisite politeness that he uses in his intercourse with every one, and the personal interest that he evinces for me.

“‘My father loves you,’ Dima often says to me, with an air of pleasure.”

* * * *

“You ask me how I stand with the other inhabitants of the villa. The Countess treats me with the indifference of a finished coquette, as she does every one else unless she desires to be complimented on her beauty. When she is getting up proverbs and charades, she comes to me with an appeal to my intelligence; when she contemplates adding to her collections some of those apocryphal objects that the Italian curiosity venders designate as Florentine metal-work, old Venetian glass, or Lucca della Robbia Faience, the appeal is made to my good taste. She dotes on bric-a-brac. Sometimes, too, whether I will or no, she enlists me to take part in her game of croquet, her favorite out-door pastime, and this is the only

opportunity we ever have of being together in the morning. Generally speaking, I see but very little of her; she runs away on excursions whenever and wherever the fancy seizes her. Her last one was to Monaco, and was made on the spur of the moment. The *diligence* chanced to pass; she jumped in, laughing, and devoted three of her precious days to breaking the bank down there; it seems, however, that an actress from Paris snatched away the laurels from her in this exploit. She came back with empty pockets, but with a fine collection of rather doubtful anecdotes, which she tells very drolly, to the delectation of her little court, which is not distinguished for elegance of manners or purity of taste. These provincial Italians are wanting in tact, and the Russians who stop here to pay their respects to their handsome country-woman appear to be no better than they, except that they maintain a certain affectation; their self-conceit is none the less repulsive for being slightly veiled. It should be said that Countess Annette keeps the track open for the crowd of admirers, among whom M. de Fossonbrone, to use the turf slang which prevails here, is a good first. Such conduct in a country

less indulgent than this, would give rise to scandal, and another husband than the Count would not endure it with impunity, but there are men whom nothing can make ridiculous. M. de Volonzoff is such a man. He apparently considers that his honor is not endangered and passes over his wife's freaks without either approving or condemning them. I suspect that in her heart this attitude of his is displeasing to her.

"While recently discussing with me the frequenters of her drawing-room, she said, 'Princess K. is a happy woman.'

"I enquired what this enviable felicity of Madame K.'s could consist in, a woman with blanched features, a wit so thick that it can be aroused only by the interest of the gaming table, and an apoplectic old husband, a regular wild boar in uniform. The uniform, it is true, was left behind at St. Petersburg, but the stiffness of his corpulent form still gives evidence of the tightly buckled sword belt. I remembered that the General was said to place his servants and his wife on an equal footing by the brutality with which he treated them.

"'No doubt that he is repulsive and ridiculous,' she answered, 'but that is of small conse-

quence ; perhaps he beats her, but he loves her, or anyway he did love her at one time. Just think ; she was a widow and had no settled intention of marrying. He came to her with a pistol in his hand and swore that he would blow his brains out, unless she gave a favorable answer to his suit.'

“‘It is very much to be deplored by us, who have to receive his visits, that she did not let him carry out his intention,’ said the Count, who was standing near. He cannot endure to be compared with this hair-brained hero. The attitude that he assumes toward the mad scenes that take place at the villa is that of a person who has doggedly resigned himself to see to the end a bad piece played by bad actors. Does it cause him suffering ? I can’t help thinking that it does, for the retirement to which he has condemned himself in the prime of life is not compensated by the repose of his own fireside, or rather there is nothing here that is at all like family life, with its community of joys and griefs ; that this is so is the unpardonable fault of this worldly little actress, who is neither wife nor mother.”

* * * * *

“I am more than ever inclined to think that Scharf is in love, although he studiously conceals his sentiments under a breastplate of German impenetrability which he prides himself upon.

“‘See how the moths scorch their wings in the lamplight,’” said he, retreating to his dark corner, like a bird of night.

“It is true that the Countess never failed to call him forth again with some of those charming compliments which she lavishes on everybody. His response shows that he mistrusts her, but I have caught his blue eyes sending out singularly ardent glances, and his mouth, the corners of which are drawn closely by his habit of self-repression, indicates as much sensuality as it does hardness. I suspect that he places great value upon his pedantic authority, and that his ideas of virtue coincide with those that some philosopher held upon knowledge, that he would have none of it unless he could use it to make a display with; it is of assistance to him in his calling and he makes skilful use of it. Scharf at the same time despises, fears, and courts Madame Volonzoff, but what characterizes him beyond all else is his prudence; he wants to retain a position that pays him well, and would not com-

promise his prospects for a mere trifle. It is said that the Countess' favors do not exceed the bounds of a mild flirtation."

* * * * *

"I suppose that as Rose can only work on the portrait which she promised me at stray moments, and as she has less and less leisure time, I shall have to wait a long time for it. Dear, good child! I admire and respect her more and more when I think how usefully she fills up her life, and compare her course with that of others, who squander what little intellect they have in a fruitless pursuit of pleasure. Tell her, I beg you, how lonely I feel, so far away from her."

VI.

BERNARD'S letters continued in this strain up to the middle of January, when all at once they began to be shorter and more infrequent. This change, it is to be observed, coincided with the still greater change which at this time occurred in the habits of Countess Annette.

She had suddenly pulled up in her headlong pursuit of pleasure, and no one could assign a reason for her conduct. She said that the country was uncongenial to her, that hunting, the only pleasure possible in the wintry days, was out of the question, that it was colder than in Russia, and she was no longer to be seen on horseback or driving her pony chaise on the Genoa road. Taking advantage of a too ardent demonstration on the part of M. de Fossombrone she requested him, with unwonted severity, to

make his visits less frequent, and almost ceased altogether to receive him. A long journey which the Count was compelled to take on urgent business served her as a pretext for this, although the presence or the absence of her husband had never until now had much to do with influencing her sayings and doings. She told Bernard that the fact was that she was horribly weary of her stupid surroundings; she was eaten up with *ennui*, and wanted to try some new method of curing it; could he not lend her some books, and even give her a few lessons in French when he had nothing better to do? She ridiculed her St. Petersburg jargon, and made excuses for her accent, as if those soft, drawling inflections had not contributed one of her attractions. Bernard shied at the mention of the lessons, but he could not well refuse to lend the books, although he took care to select the driest and heaviest so that she might the more quickly tire of her whim. Unluckily the result was not as he wished; she read them, or at any rate, guessed at their contents sufficiently to be able to talk about them and keep him longer than was agreeable to him at the side of her little embroidery frame, whose only use was to allow a daintily shod little foot

to peep out from beneath her skirt, and the slender hand which held the needle to remain poised in an attitude to compel admiration. While his eye was thus riveted on the flashing of her rings and the movements of her slipper, he was astonished to find that this woman, whom he had set down as a nonentity and absolutely frivolous, doubtless because she strictly obeyed that law of politeness which decrees that no one shall seem to know more than his guests, had the capacity of thinking, listening and talking. She had a smattering of instruction, although what she had acquired lacked arrangement in her mind, and a seeming resolve to divest herself of all common sense, impelled her frequently to look on serious things under a comic aspect and to treat trifles with gravity.

It would have been difficult to say how much of this was natural with her and how much the effect of that assimilation, which comes so easy to women, and especially to women of her country; the light woof, however, of which she threw the threads so dexterously, was shaded with touches of natural feeling, with sprightliness, even sometimes with melancholy. What had at first been a bore to Bernard, imperceptibly be-

came a pleasure ; then an absolute necessity. He felt impatient for the time to come when she should curl herself up in her easy chair as gracefully as a kitten, and begin to give him her impressions and ask his explanations on what she had been reading, always giving the preference to the subject of love, some trace of which her quick analysis would not have failed to discover in solution in the dullness of sermons.

To be a good talker is not a German accomplishment. Scharf did not excel in this line, and accordingly held it in light esteem. He was too heavy to rise on the wings of wit, and to touch lightly a hundred subjects in the course of a half-hour's talk was something quite beyond him.

As he could not shine, he was accustomed to beat a retreat and await the Countess' summons, when she stood in need of a cavalier to attend her in her walks. But it was soon observable that she began to shorten her walks with the Doctor, pretending either that she was tired or that the weather was bad, while the clearness of the sky and her sudden desire for exercise, seemed to smile on the pedestrian excursions which this whimsical young woman indulged in in company with Bernard. One day she had

taken his arm to ascend with her light, sure step the rocky heights that overlook the sea :

“You are an author,” said she ; “now don’t tell me you are not. For two weeks I have shown a firmness that I never thought was in me by receiving those great big books that you gave me. Do you know why I did it? It was that I might be able to get hold of yours.”

“I have never written a book,” said Bernard, blushing.

“Oh ! it may not be printed ; perhaps it is not finished. That makes no difference. You must let me see a few leaves of it, even if nothing more than a poor little sonnet. Unless,” she said, suddenly becoming serious, “you don’t consider me worthy of such confidence, and you are one of those people who, having once formed a poor opinion of any one, can never change it.”

“It would be presumptuous in me,” replied the young man, much embarrassed, “to form an opinion upon you, Madame.”

“There is no dispute that you are well-bred ; even if you were not, you could not have given me any other answer. But I can tell the difference between politeness and sincerity. At the very beginning I noticed that you had taken a

dislike to me, or rather, if you prefer to have it expressed that way, that I shocked your ideas of respectability."

"Admitting such an impossibility to be a fact, you surely would never have condescended to notice it."

"You are mistaken, sir ; I only disregard the hostility of bad people and the recriminations of the foolish. You are not to be counted as belonging to either camp, and I should feel flattered if you would consent to take your place among my friends. If it is not asking too much, give me the proof of reconciliation—or of your confidence, since you say there is no reconciliation necessary—and grant me the favor that I ask for."

Bernard bowed. During the whole of the walk that they had taken together, she had been adroitly urging him on to confidences, to which he had replied very guardedly ; she doubtless hoped to learn more from his pen than she could from his lips ; he was provoked rather than flattered, by this idle curiosity that took him for its object. However, upon their return that same evening, he yielded to her wish without hesitation, though not without repugnance. He ex-

perienced a secret feeling of enjoyment at the disappointment which the Countess would meet with ; the pages where she expected to find sonnets inspired by her beautiful eyes, or revelations which would satisfy her curiosity in regard to his past life, were filled with sketches of character, very frank and unreserved, no doubt, but interesting only from a psychological point of view. There were bits of reflection and scattered fragments, like the sketches that a painter uses in preparing to paint his great picture. It was the introduction of a solitary, thoughtful mind, at once elevated and severe, turned upon itself and seeking its sustenance in regions quite beyond the ken of Countess Annette. There was material there for more than one book, but as yet uncoordinated and wanting in dramatic movement and the indispensable qualities of shape and symmetry. To reduce the interest to the lowest point, Bernard cut out all the pages where love was mentioned in any shape ; the image of Rose was veiled with religious delicacy. As he placed his mutilated journal on Countess Annette's little table, among the bon-bons, flowers and thousand knick-knacks that she liked to see about her, the young man thought of de

Mosset's parrot, who received " a bean displayed in tissue paper, like a bon-bon made."

At the first glance she recognized the manuscript among the other books and seized it as if it had been her prey, crying, "You may keep the rest." Then Bernard felt himself trembling a little, as if this feminine criticism was of the slightest importance in the world to him. He excused himself to himself for his ridiculous emotion by saying that she was merely the first of that great public with which he was to have relations.

Annette, however, proffered no opinion, neither was she lavish with that hyperbole of admiration which is common among the Russians, and which would be too much even for an author's vanity. Several days passed during which she spoke no word; at last, one evening, he came upon her in the little nook which she had constructed with screens for her own private retreat at the far end of the great drawing-room. His manuscript was on her knee, and she seemed to be meditating. At his approach, she slowly raised her eyes, suffused with tears; without wiping them away, she said, "See what you have done!"

Before Bernard, taken by surprise and greatly

moved by this unexpected and apparently involuntary tribute, could find a word in reply, she continued :

“ Take that chair. I do not intend to say anything about your talent ; I don't even know if you have any, and my opinion would carry no weight with it. What impressed me, let me tell you to my mortification, was that I did not think that there existed in all the world such a noble character as I met with in your book. Do not laugh. I asked myself the question, what would become of this soul in this world that I know so well, where the best and noblest go to ruin ; into whose hands it would fall, for sooner or later it will find some one to claim it. It always ends that way ; we love, and then our virtues are forgotten, and our faults, perhaps, redeemed. To what purpose do we live, if not for this ? ”

· Bernard hardly knew what to think. Annette seemed to pay no attention to him ; she sat watching the fire.

“ I could write a book,” she said, “ if I could only hold a pen, and a curious one it would be. I thought of it as I was reading yours. What a contrast there would be between yours and mine ! On the one hand goodness, intelligence, strong

principles and a youth devoted to religion and study ; on the other, a pandemonium that you cannot form an idea of, created by myself and whose torments I am still condemned to suffer."

"It's a very merry pandemonium, anyhow," Bernard could not refrain from interjecting.

She glanced at him reproachfully and then began to laugh :

"Yes ; it is true that the people here are fond of amusement, and I, too, like pleasure. Countess Annette, the little fool, only needs a few toys and some rags to make her happy, so that we shall have to find a more interesting heroine for the novel or the drama that is to be evolved from the inspiration of your Epic here" —she passed without transition from enthusiasm to irony— "which was not written for me, it is true ; but then I like everything that is new and out of the common. To return to our heroine ; she was a friend of mine, and as I do not give her name, I shall not be indiscreet if I tell you her story. When, for the first time in my life, I have thought of one thing for a whole hour, it would be a sin and a shame to let my reflections and my recollections fade away without imparting them to any one. Perhaps you

will be able to utilize them some time if you continue your analysis of the human heart, though I warn you that they will make a less innocent book than that little blue covered one of yours."

Bernard was not very anxious to hear the Countess' story, but he was there, shut in by the silken leaves of the screen; moreover an unaccountable languor prevented him from moving away from the presence of the beautiful silky hair, the rosy hand, the undulating, graceful form which bent toward him and almost touched him at every moment. The expressive modulations of her voice came to him as one in a dream.

"The childhood of my friend, whom we will call Sacha, if you will, was passed far away from great cities, and as she became old enough to assume the burthen of responsibility, she became absolute mistress of a lordly residence, whose geographical position it is needless that I should precisely mention. The only remaining member of her family was a grandfather, under the formative influence of whose example she had grown up to be a little tyrant. Harsh and severe with every one besides, he was the

obedient slave of this slender child, whom he feared to crush with his great hands every time that he gave her a caress, for he was a giant, a colossus. Sacha was the only one who dared to take the brandy bottle away from him after dinner. When younger he had been a great hunter and a great drinker, but now that by reason of his corpulence he could no longer mount his horse, or hardly even leave his easy-chair, he indemnified himself by drinking double rations. A priest of the Greek Church, who was one of the household, kept him company in these bouts and taught little Sacha to say her prayers before the holy images; his instruction supplemented that of the nurses who had taken care of her from her infancy, fine-looking creatures generally, recruited by the old master from among his peasantry. In this rustic harem were storytellers who would not have cast discredit on those of the Arabian Nights; from them my friend acquired all the popular legends and superstitions, forming them into a kind of special and occult religion, in which the horoscope played an important part.

“Before the little one was ten years old, she was constantly running over the cards in her

search for that emperor, beautiful as the day, whom the women had promised her for a husband. The Gypsies, who sometimes came and lighted their fires and put up their tents in the neighborhood, inspired Sacha with a taste for music. On one occasion she did not stop at singing the songs of the Bohemians. Weary with her long waiting for the prince who was to come and carry her off, a fierce desire for liberty seized her, and she determined to follow the wandering band out on the steppe. The vagabond was caught and chained up, or in other words, an English governess was secured to direct her education. You can't imagine what a sorry figure the poor English girl cut at the coarse table, surrounded by a crew of hangers-on, who, attracted from the neighboring villages by the enticing odor of abundant victual (may kind heaven preserve you from an acquaintance with our country hashes and meat pies!), came and settled down in swarms like flies, guzzling, drinking and exhaling their sooty odors, until they fell flat upon the ground.

“Sacha presided at these orgies, and now and then condescended to dance, like Salome before Herod, when the dessert was on the table. She

demanded no one's head as the reward of her attractions, but admiration was a necessity to her ; she had to have it, no matter from what quarter it came. The pleasing incense, no matter how coarsely mingled with tobacco smoke, went to her head and intoxicated her, but she did not allow this effect to appear ; on the contrary, she maintained the disdainful indifference of a queen. The English governess was so outraged by these strange proceedings that she handed in her resignation, a step which pleased everybody, for her red nose and her puritanic severity of contour had made her no friends in the house. She was succeeded by a Parisian ; a kind of milliner, a wide-awake woman of ambitious disposition, who was so little careful to observe the retiring manners which the village beauties, it is due to them to say, had always maintained in the old barracks, that it became necessary to discharge her. Her abbreviated stay, however, was not entirely without results. It put Sacha on the track of the French eighteenth century romances, with which one of her great uncles, a disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau and confidential officer of the Empress Catherine, had enriched the shelves of their otherwise scanty library.

“Then there came a string of poor girls from the different nations of Europe, and each one contributed her stone to that composite structure that was entitled Sacha’s education. She learned to speak several languages, but could not spell her own correctly.

“She had reached her fifteenth year, when her grandfather died in a fit of rage, brought on by the efforts of one of his sisters, while on a visit to him from St. Petersburg, to introduce modern innovations upon his estate. After the funeral ceremonies, this lady took charge of the orphan and carried her away with her.

“At St. Petersburg there was a change, but it was not for the better. A clique of fashionable old women took the little savage in hand and attempted to tame her. All the artifices of coquetry were regularly instilled into her mind as so many principles to be observed. The Lord knows how little need she had of instruction of this kind! The most risky questions were discussed in her presence with the cold cynicism that is born of experience. All the gossip, all the scandal, all the intrigues of fashionable life in the great city, were commented on in her hearing. She was initiated into that strategy of love which has for

its beginning the conquest of a husband, she was taught the use of rouge, she was supplied a whole arsenal of fictitious sentiment, she was taught to hatch plots, to set traps, to calculate effects, to make herself mistress of the situation, and, above all, to lie without blushing.

“ There is a picture which represents a young witch being washed and combed for the Sabbath by the older hags, a fearful crew of veterans in the devilish art. It always brought to my mind Sacha’s initiation into polite society.

“ As soon as the time of mourning had expired she was introduced to society by the relative who had assumed charge of her, an old dowager, whose snow-white hair had been dyed yellow, who preserved the manners of a frisky young matron, and every evening repaired her ruins so as to exhibit them in half a dozen drawing-rooms in succession. She was always attended by an intrepid band of courtiers, whose number was augmented to a legion when the dazzling Sacha appeared at her side. Sacha created a sensation at once ; mothers of marriageable daughters showed their envy when they spoke of her, and from the very day of her presentation at court, she became the target for feminine calumny;

which is, in my opinion, the greatest triumph that a woman can achieve. It was told in the newspapers how she could manage an unbroken horse with the skill of the Cossack amazons, and how she skated with the grace and vigor of a man. Every head was turned by the remnant of uncultivated barbarism which Sacha had been allowed to preserve, in order to place the seal of individuality upon her newly acquired notoriety. The heaviest swells among the young men, in the most gorgeous of uniforms, and with the most resounding titles, threw themselves at her feet, but Sacha was quick to see the ridiculous side of everything, and was much addicted to caricature; attentions which would have raised other young girls to the seventh heaven of felicity only made her laugh. The suitors who were brought before her for her approval were certainly splendid dancers and very nice to flirt with, but when it came to choosing a husband, she wanted a man, one who would command her and whom she must respect and obey, not a dude nor a dandy. These ideas were original and eccentric, but they were Sacha's own. No one knew that she held them, no one would have thought of advising her in this direction, even when she came to make

her choice, which, moreover, caused surprise to no one. It was quite natural that she should select a husband much older than herself, since the sacrifice was fully counterbalanced by his high rank and eminent position at court. Every one thought that she had married for ambition, and congratulated her accordingly, while her motives were altogether the opposite. Even her husband failed to do her justice. It flattered his vanity to have carried off the young and beautiful rich heiress, the crowning ornament of the season, over the heads of his younger rivals ; it was a supreme success, a glorious event in his career. He never required from his wife qualities that he had never expected to find in her, but he applied himself resolutely to satisfy every desire of her worldly imagination. To change her into a reasonable, reasoning woman would have seemed to him a miracle that he had not sufficient presumption to undertake, and still I declare to you that the miracle was not impossible. If he could have but thought so, if he had cared to make the experiment, Sacha would have been whatever he cared to make her. But he had not married for the sake of educating a little girl, and so Sacha remained what she had always been ; she remembered the

early lessons in evil that she had received, and practiced them.

“Sensation must be deadened by some means or other, and as real passion was wanting, she needed the counterfeit article by which she saw herself surrounded on every side. What can I say? She was angry and sore at the unruffled composure with which her husband acceded to her every caprice, and hoped to arouse his jealousy. Of course, she was the subject of many a scandalous story, but still she behaved much more discreetly than did the majority of her associates, as her husband knew very well. I often wondered if he thought any more of her for it. He doubtless thought that a coquette is too heartless to feel real passion, and perhaps he also reckoned on the pride of a woman who set too high a value upon herself to derogate easily. He would disinterestedly place before her his sufficiently broad code of morality, in which she was at liberty to look for his words of advice and by which she was to shape her conduct.—‘Too much importance,’ he would say, ‘is attached to the language of gallantry; after all, every word has only its own specific meaning, and all will go well, provided that the woman whose wits

are sharpened in the contest will only select her interlocutor from those who know enough to answer in the same spirit that she talks to them. The main thing is to assure yourself beforehand that he is too much a man of the world to take trifling for serious business.'

"Sacha found that he was right. Only once, in selecting her admirers, did she make the mistake of departing from that commonplace type who are incapable of any violent emotion, and on that account fitted for their rôle. It was at the time when she was endeavoring to form a *salon* that should be distinguished by something more earnest than the usual frivolity; a certain artist of distinction, upon whom she depended to impart a flavor of genius to her assemblies, responded to her advances in such a manner that she was obliged to ring for her servants. He thereupon took occasion to openly calumniate her, and in consequence became acquainted with the point of her husband's sword, who, on this occasion, as well as on several others, nobly defended the honor of a foolish woman, who perhaps deserved to be spoken ill of. It was, however, as she very well knew, nothing but the question of honor which

influenced his action. There was never a scene caused by outbreking jealousy; hardly was there even a taunting word."

"Why," here Bernørd tried to interrupt, "did she not endeavor to conquer his esteem?"

But this reflection did not shape itself in words, or if it did, they were uttered so low that the Countess did not hear them.

"At length," she continued, "Sacha gave up in despair; she could no longer rely even on those pleasures in which she so long had sought a factitious forgetfulness; before her youth should entirely depart from her, she wanted to know what real love was. Yet a few years and that talisman of beauty, without which a woman is as nothing, would have forever left her; she felt that she had not made the best use that she could of this great gift. She must hasten to make the most of life while she had it in her power. But when she would have descended from the pedestal where she had stood to receive the worship of her adorers, Sacha was horrified to find that she experienced only a feeling of disgust toward those who professed to be her worshippers. Could it be possible that the race of heroes of romance was

extinct, or had this race never existed save in the imagination of novel writers and the empty brains of fools? It was a bitter regret to her that she could not twine a wreath of roses around the head of some rustic clown or other, as so many women have done since the time of Titania, and close her eyes upon the ass' ears and whatever other infirmity, moral or physical, there might be. Notwithstanding her first unfortunate experience, which I have told you of, it occurred to her that perhaps she would be more successful in her quest outside her own society, but as she could not very well go and hunt for this unattainable bird, it was very evident that she must wait for the bird to come to her. And so Sacha was likely to wait until her hair should turn gray, was likely to die without having once tasted the only supreme joy that life affords."

"Then your friend Sacha had no children?" enquired Bernard, in a tone that approached rudeness.

She turned upon him with a movement of impatience: "Do you think that a child can fill the place of every other interest, and that all the activities of a woman's life are to be circum-

scribed by her duties as a nurse and as a house-keeper?"

"Her duties as a mother call for obedience," gravely replied Bernard.

Annette sighed. "I read in your eyes," said she, "a reproach that is leveled at another person than Sacha. Do not be too hasty in your judgment, or rather take pains to hear both sides of the case. Dima's mother should have been a sister of charity. I am utterly useless at a sick-bed. I pity him, I weep, all that I can do is unavailing and foolish. If, too, his trouble were one that there is any hope of his recovering from——"

"Do you mean to say that we tire of the spectacle of human suffering, or that by long beholding it we become hardened to it?"

"You are too severe. It is true that I am wanting in duty toward my son, since at this very moment I am keeping you away from him, when you might be doing him some good and directing your affection for him into a useful channel. Pardon the length of my uninteresting tale. Leave me and go to the child."

"No; I would rather learn what was the fate of that unhappy woman."

"You pity her? Perhaps you are right. The

last time that I saw her, she was in an extremely critical condition. He, whom she had been awaiting so long, who was to incarnate her young dreams, the lover predicted by the horoscope, had at last descended from fairy-land, I suppose; so much at variance with his condition were his face and his deserving, so wrapped in mystery was his origin.

“Although the ideas of we Russians are more liberal than is generally supposed, I was somewhat surprised that Sacha’s aristocratic prejudices—for who is free from prejudice?—had not been a safeguard to keep her from being captivated by a man of apparently obscure birth; but Sacha, who has most every kind of knowledge at her finger-ends, mythology among the rest, asked me if Apollo had lost his divinity at the time when his misfortune had made him a shepherd? You need not let this pretentious comparison sway you to the inference that her shepherd is any way like Apollo, who, after all, was of an insipid kind of beauty, something after the style of Fossombrone, I suppose.”—Here the Countess gave way to laughter.—“No, think of him rather as one of those handsome pages, that princesses and chatelaines used to fall in

love with in old times, and who used to die at the feet of Parisina, or in the arms of Francesca—" she looked at Bernard through her half-closed eyes with a smile that made him shiver—"for there is no need to tell you that the end of such adventures is always a poniard stroke, or something of that nature. Still, our story may have a less tragic ending; we will try and discover the *dénouement* at some other time, if you wish."

When Bernard tried to arise, he had to shake off a stupor that seemed like drunkenness.

"But tell me first," said the Countess, stopping him, "do you think that Sacha can ever be loved as she loves?"

"Her love will be repaid to her a thousand fold," he replied, hardly knowing what he said. "Women like that have no heart, only a depraved curiosity."

"I thank you in her behalf," replied Annette, laughing.

As he retired with his blood boiling in his veins, this sound of laughter, expressive at once of emotion and triumph, rang in his ears, and the perfume that the Countess habitually used seemed to follow him, subtle and lasting as a love charm.

VII.



“WHAT can be the matter with her?” enquired Scharf, after the reunion of the party at dinner. Madame Volonzoff had scarcely opened her lips during the whole evening, and the absent-minded way in which she fitfully transixed her embroidery with her needle betrayed a preoccupation, which rendered her insensible to what was going on around her. The most astounding of all the symptoms was that she had not changed her dress. Bernard remembered having expressed his admiration of the good taste of this dress, it being plainer than those which she generally wore. Was it by chance, or was it intentionally that she still had it on?

When, it was evident to the two young men that she intended to persevere in this unwonted silence, and that politeness commanded them to withdraw, the Countess did nothing to retain

them ; she waited until the Doctor had passed the door-sill, then, as Bernard was about to follow, she summoned him to her side. He turned and advanced a few steps in her direction.

“ I have been thinking over our conversation of this morning,” said she. “ Do you really think that I ought to devote more of my time to Dima?”

“ Your own heart, Madame, should be a better adviser for you in this case than I can be.”

“ But you would approve of my doing so?”

“ Madame, most certainly !”

“ Very well !”

She looked at him submissively, with an expression that he had never seen on her face before, and she gave him her hand ; as he was about to take it in his usual respectful manner, she of her own accord raised it to his lips. She had often allowed him to kiss her hand before, but it had never caused him such mental disturbance as now.

When, that night, after the story of Sacha's education and trials had served to excuse a thousand fold Madame Volonzoff's conduct, Bernard at last fell into a troubled slumber, he dreamed that he was tossing in the little gilded boat on the artificial river in the park, which had now be-

come a raging torrent. The Countess was at the tiller, her hair flying in disorder. As he lay at her feet, he called her by the familiar name of Sacha. The little boat turned around and around, whirled along by the current, while a female form upon the shore, dimly visible through the mist, seemed to be making signals of distress. As he looked he seemed to recognize Rose, and turned away his head. Annette's hair, blown around him by the wind, enveloped him in a perfumed caress which by degrees changed to keenest torture ; he seemed to be strangling, he tried to cry out, but was voiceless; all around him the roar of the seething waters kept continuously increasing in volume. He heard the straining and creaking of the boat's timbers; the dark pleasure of such a death filled his mind, at the same moment he heard a voice that seemed to shatter his reason, crying : " You are mine ! "

When he at last awoke from the horrors and delights of this night-mare, he was handed a package from France, a few lines from Madame Désaubiers accompanying the portrait that he had been waiting for so long and so impatiently, and which, now that it had come to hand, brought with it an emotion that was very like remorse.

Her excess of modesty had prevented the artist from doing herself full justice. Rose seemed to have grown thinner. Hard work and constant mental strain never make a woman more beautiful physically, whatever effect they may have on her moral nature. To a stranger it would have seemed an exquisite work of art, rather than the picture of a pretty woman, and for the space of a second Bernard looked at it with the eyes of a stranger, whereas twenty-four hours earlier he would have gone down on his knees before the ivory tablet that was at once the handiwork and the image of Rose. It is true that tears soon came and washed away the involuntary crime. He thought of the hours that she had taken from her needed rest in order to devote them to him, he thought of the memories and fond hopes that had accompanied every stroke of her brush, and of her modest blush that had enhanced her beauty as she pictured to herself his joy when he should receive this portrait. There was her sweet, patient smile, her naturally curling hair, refusing to be confined, and escaping over her broad, white forehead, the well-worn black dress that she had worn the day he went away, unrelieved, save by a single blue ribbon which he had begged

from her, or rather which she had offered him, anticipating the dearest wish of his heart. The poor child was not one of those coquettes who think that their favors are more highly valued because they have to be prayed for. And Rose's picture was not the only thing that he beheld within the frame. There suddenly came back to him, as in a mirror, the little work-room where her sisterly words had made clear to him her goodness and her depth of feeling; the sad, complaining mother, object of her tender care; Madame Désaubiers' garden, and the little stream in whose murmurings had been lost the words that he then looked upon as a betrothal, although, after all no definite promise had been exchanged between them, absolutely none. Why was it that he breathed more freely as he thought of this, as if his affections were relieved from a load that was bearing them down and were impatient to take wing and settle in another quarter? He stubbornly recalled them again to Rose, and in the process of this invocation became so insensible to what was passing that he failed to hear some one knocking at his door. At least Scharf afterward said that he had knocked several times, quite loudly; what is certain is, that having made

his entry, he stealthily approached Bernard, who started and quickly shut the portrait in its case when he saw the watchful face peering over his shoulder.

"Excuse me," said the Doctor, smiling. "I am intruding. I have interrupted a tête-à-tête with your betrothed."

"I don't understand you," Bernard shortly replied.

"Heavens! Can I have made a mistake? You seemed to be so completely absorbed in the contemplation of that young lady. . . Pardon me! What an interesting face! Will you allow me to look at it again?" And explaining to Bernard the cause, or the pretext of his visit, the Doctor applied himself to a scrutinizing examination of the picture. "What wonderful depth of expression! I would wager that this person has talent that no obstacle can check the development of. And what feminine sweetness withal! That is a woman who, when she loves, will make her love her religion, and he would be a wretch who should show himself unworthy of such a love. She is your betrothed! Why could you not have told me so at first? I am glad to know that you have such a guardian angel."

“Do you think that I am in danger? Who is there that I require to be guarded against?”

“Against your own self, perhaps; and against Circe.”

“You talk in riddles.”

“You do not care to understand. As you will. I will admit, if you force me to, that when the Countess administers her poisons to a man as young as you, and a Frenchman to boot, the effect is to deprive him of reason.”

“I was expecting this conclusion. Now let fly your arrow against French frivolity and French gallantry, as you always do.”

“I am not an expert with the bow, and should make a bad hand at shooting with it, but I can give you some good advice. I say that a young man and a Frenchman might be excused if he allowed himself to be fooled by tricks which have turned heads that are, to say the least, as level as his own.”

“Doctor Scharf’s, for example.”

“For my part,” seriously replied the Doctor, “I have a mistress compared with whom all others in the world are as nothing. Her name is Science, and she soothes the imagination, which on the other hand, is unduly excited by the pur-

suits of literature, which I take to be your favorite occupation, my dear sir. Moreover, I have none of those physical advantages which attract women."

Bernard could not help smiling, for he knew that the Doctor was almost as vain of his well-knit form, set off as it was by the delicate complexion of a young girl, as he was of his mental acquirements and his stern morality.

"Besides," pursued Scharf, with ill-disguised vindictiveness, "no one has ever done me the distinguished honor of closing the doors of a house, which were formerly used to stand open to all comers, so as to enjoy undisturbed the pleasure of my society."

"How do you interpret a caprice that is like so many others that have preceded it?"

"It is not for me to give the interpretation. If you had not interrupted me at every word, you would have known that you are everywhere regarded as the Countess' lover."

"Her lover!"

"Don't get excited. It is hardly necessary to say that such an idea could only have emanated from Italians, who are democratic, like all artists, in whose eyes personal beauty is of as much ac-

count as a patent of nobility ; or from that bare-faced Princess K., who always selects such handsome little secretaries for her husband. But we know very well that certain favors are to be attributed only to the dearth of the moment, that the doctor or the tutor are used as make-shifts for an evening and have really nothing to boast of. That is how I explained matters yesterday to those good people from Genoa, who maintain that there is a scandal ; haven't you noticed that Fossombrone—he no longer gets any invitations here, by the way, and his visits are less frequent, and he is no longer the greatest singer in the world—haven't you noticed that that great ninny Fossombrone, whenever he comes here, has hard work to keep himself from cutting your throat ? We will let these cast-off gallants talk as they please, and we will show the Countess that we have no inclination to one day swell their number."

"You may be assured that, as far as I am concerned, there will never be any necessity of showing the Countess anything of the kind," said Bernard, keeping himself in countenance by putting away Rose's portrait at the bottom of a little casket, where Scharf, near-sighted as he was,

could distinguish perfectly a bundle of letters tied up with a blue ribbon.

“In any case, the remembrance of that sweet child would be your defence, I suppose. Again, pardon me ; I feel a sincere interest in you.”

Smarting under the Doctor's insinuations, Bernard entered his pupil's chamber. The Countess was there ; it seemed to him that he was relentlessly pursued by a phantom that was implacably bent on destroying his peace, and his strength came back to him, as it always does come back to us in the presence of great peril. He instantly resolved to steel himself against those wiles which had disgusted him when they were directed against others, and which were now concentrated upon him alone with the object of making him their victim. But the system of defence which he had planned for himself in his inexperience was disarranged by an unforeseen change of tactics on the part of the enemy ; he did not encounter the foe whom he expected to meet ; he only saw a watchful mother at the bedside of her son, tenderly and thoughtfully caring for him, awkward, it is true, about many things that were new to her experience, but apparently trying to atone for past neglect by her present

zeal. Certainly the change had been a very sudden one. Had he any right, however, to doubt its sincerity? Moreover, had he the honest desire of looking clearly at their reciprocal relations? From this time, Madame Volonzoff made it a point to pass many hours each day at Dima's bedside. The child's puzzled glance, falling now upon his mother, and now upon Bernard, seemed to enquire the reason of so great a change, but as it was to his advantage he soon became accustomed to it. Conversation and reading were carried on at his side, apparently to divert and please him. If Annette was base enough to convert the most sacred of all feelings, maternal love, into a lie and a snare, the trick was well laid and cunningly concealed, but in her attitude and her whole personality there was an indescribable expression of tenderness and humility, if I may say so, which exerted upon him, on whom she seemed to have no designs, a charm far greater than he had ever known before.

She watched his countenance, consulted him with her eye without speaking, anticipated his wishes, soothing him with the most delicious of all flatteries, that which induces in a very young, inartificial man, the belief that he decides all

the doings of a woman older than himself, who had previously been remarkable for imperiousness and strength of will. When by chance she met his eyes, she would turn her own away, and then Bernard would experience a thrill of pleasure. The presence of the child, which seemed to render their tête-à-tête safe and was its justification as well, while at the same time giving them a means of escape from Scharf's prying inquisition; the dream of freeing from the miserable, childish interests which had hitherto possessed it, a soul created, as he believed, for nobler objects; Annette's reserve, which increased day by day, and which had dissipated not only her accustomed bold manner, but also her familiar ways toward himself: all these considerations contributed at once to reassure Bernard and to lure him on to his destruction.

The effect upon the feelings of an early love, disguised under the form of ideal tenderness, is very misleading; it requires more than man's strength to go scot-free under such circumstances. Life slipped away deliciously at Annette's side, so changed as she was from her old self, and so captivating in the new part she was now playing. Bernard was as heedless of the

present as the opium-eater, or as the plant which keeps its face turned toward the sun as it rises and sinks, and little by little all his moral energy was exhausted in this condition of beatitude, this *Nirvand*. She was conscious of it, and tightened the bonds which Delilah bequeathed to her likes. At this time, as she was nearing the goal of her ambition, she no longer felt ennui; with an eager curiosity that was somewhat like passion, she counted the stormy beatings of this fresh and impressionable heart. She had reigned until she was tired; now she was a little, trembling creature, and she found a piquant pleasure in her abdication. Bernard looked to Rose for the support which Scharf had foreseen he would need; a thousand times he read her letters, a thousand times did he invoke her portrait. Why did the letters always seem cold? Why did the portrait always seem to look at him with mute, sad eyes, vainly reproaching him? It ended by his locking away in the casket, once for all, these poor relics that were powerless to save him. If he could have but also locked away the remembrances that haunted him without helping or strengthening him! What is the past under the

enchantment of the present? What was an angel like Rose compared with a woman like Countess Annette? Perhaps he still continued to worship one upon the purest alter of his inmost thoughts, but he belonged body and soul to the other.

VIII.

BERNARD could not have told how long this new phase of his existence lasted. He was aroused from the agreeable stupor which was daily enfolding him more and more closely, and the delights of which made him think that there was nothing to be wished for beyond, by the sudden resurrection of the mad Countess in her old nature. The change was sudden and accompanied by a kind of delirium.

It was the height of carnival. A note of invitation reminded Madame Volonzoff of the ball that she had promised to honor with her presence in the character of Roussalka. The costume had arrived from Paris, and the case in which it was contained still remained unopened; Annette had said to Bernard with a smile,—her smile, that concealed so much and was so eloquent with a hidden meaning :

“You know that I do not intend to go.”

So she thought all the morning. She did not make her appearance at all in her son's room that afternoon, and remained in the great drawing-room, which was almost always deserted now, but where the Doctor kept her company on this occasion. When evening came, she dined by herself in her apartment.

“You are not eating, Monsieur Bernard,” said Scharf, who seemed to be in high spirits. “Fortunately they always have magnificent suppers at the Palace Fossombrone.”

“But I am not going to the ball.”

“Why not? I am going, and I am a serious-minded man. . . . at least you are pleased to so designate me.”

“And in what kind of a case do you propose to pack away this seriousness of yours?”

“What do you think of my going as Clown, or as Punch? A Venetian domino is suited to all ages and to all professions. You don't show much curiosity. I would not miss seeing the Countess make her *entrée* for anything in the world.”

“So she will go?”

“Did you ever doubt it? You know very little about women. Their firmest resolutions

yield before a new costume and the imperious necessity of showing themselves in public."

That capped the climax. The day that he had just got through had seemed to Bernard a century. He had been constantly listening for the sound of a footstep, which, light as it was, his ear could always distinguish when it sounded at the end of the long gallery. Even Dima had noticed how sad and absent-minded he was. "What is the matter?" he asked, with tender anxiety. "Have you received bad news from your friends at home? Won't you tell me what troubles you? I am sure that I always tell you everything. And perhaps I might comfort you, as you always comfort me. Would you rather tell mamma? Why don't she come to-day?"

He was conscious of an undefined feeling of impatience under these innocent questions. Abandoning his quest for information, Dima contented himself with watching him whom he called his master, but who to-day was only a poor child as wretched as himself, as he gave way to the flood of bitter thoughts, his head leaning against the marble of the chimney-piece, his joined hands clasping his knee. Suddenly the rustling of a dress as it swept the stone pavement outside

brought him to an erect position. He changed color and arose with a beating heart, frightened at the strength of his emotions.

“Ah! there comes mamma!” cried Dima, clapping his hands.

The door opened, and the Countess advanced with a rapid step toward her son, apparently unconscious of Bernard's presence. She was wrapped in a great, dark-colored mantle, lined with fur, and all of her that was visible was her head and face. Her hair this evening was of that peculiar red that Titian has so often depicted, though never so rich and abundant and so artistically arranged as hers.

Her face, that seemed to be on fire beneath its coating of rouge, her eyes, inordinately lengthened and blackened by the pencil, gave her a strange expression, that somehow reminded one of the proud, disdainful anger of a goddess; perhaps she had aimed at this effect as suitable to the fantastic character that she had selected for herself. Like the Roussalka bursting from the shades of night, by a rapid movement she caused the satin folds of her mantle to fall on the floor at her feet. What was disclosed was not a costume, using the

word in its usual acceptation. There were knots and bows, spangles, shells, reeds, drops of crystal, golden and silver shells, billows of shimmering silk defining the form which it made a pretence of concealing ; in a word, it was the get-up of a fairy, but the fine proportions and the lofty bearing of its wearer went far toward lessening the effect of its immodesty and its uncouth taste.

Dima uttered an exclamation of astonishment, rather than of admiration, covering his face with his hands as if he were dazzled :

“It is beautiful,” said he, “but it is not mamma !”

“Mamma is a Roussalka this evening. Adieu! You need not kiss me, you will disarrange my hair ; I am going to the ball.”

“You are going to the ball? But you are not going dressed like that, are you?”

The child's exclamation expressed so much terror that Bernard breathlessly waited to see what effect would follow. He imagined that he caught her blushing a little beneath her paint, and she hurriedly picked up her outer covering from the floor and placed it around her shoulders.

“You foolish fellow!” said she, “it is the

fashion ; all ladies dress like this for the carnival fêtes. You have seen me disguised many a time, haven't you ?”

“ Yes, but never so much as now,” stammered the child, with averted eyes.

The mother just touched with her painted lips the cheek which the boy did not venture to offer her lest he might do some damage to the so-called toilette, then casting a strange look of defiance toward Bernard, who stood motionless, she left the room.

He slowly fell back into the seat which he had left upon her entrance, at a loss to understand how it was that he had not thrown himself at her feet to pray her to have pity on him, or that he had not prevented her from going at any risk, even if he had to kill her. He thought that he would follow her ; it seemed as if a new nature, whose violence he could not restrain, had taken possession of his being. Annette and the Roussalka were two distinct images in his mind ; for the latter he felt only scorn and fierce desire, but the former, the *woman*, who had appeared to him during the few days that he now called his life-time, he felt that he could not resign himself to lose

and he would have brought her back and saved her. Suddenly, when his madness was at its height, he remembered that Dima was by. He was mindful of the child to whom he had formerly taught those virtues that he himself valued so little that he could forget them in a minute, who now saw him giving way to a despair of which he could not tell the cause. He mechanically went and sat upon the side of the bed and spoke to the boy.

“Be silent, I beg you,” Dima interrupted, putting his arm around Bernard's neck ; “remember what you said to me once when I ran away and hid myself to cry : ‘Shed your tears in my presence, if you love me.’ I know that a man never cries, but don't pretend to seem cheerful when you are grieved.”

Bernard received in silence the embrace of the only friend who could extend his pity to him, as being too innocent to guess his secret ; and then the tone of Dima's voice, changed by emotion, had reminded him of the mother's : it was a recollection of her. The bitterness that filled his heart overflowed in one of the infrequent and burning tears that are unknown to childhood.

He made no effort to sleep that night. He walked his room to and fro, now picturing in imagination with all the torments of hopeless jealousy everything that was passing at the Palace Fossombrone, and the insolent admiration of which Annette was the object, now trying to account for the sudden change that had taken place in her, and why it was that this change had caused him such mortal despair. Was it possible that he was in love? Could he be in love with her? Was this love, this terrible, unrecognizable sensation, with its delirium like that of fever? He pressed his heavy head, where the ideas seemed to be whirling in inextricable chaos, against the cool glass of the window. The stars were glittering like great diamonds set in the black vault of heaven; the white railings of the terrace and the shadows of the pines, spread out like parasols, were clearly defined; the pool reflected the cold rays of the wintry moon in its unruffled mirror. This contrast of the calm severity of nature, sleeping in somber nakedness, with the ferment of the poor heart that was no longer under his control, might have impressed Bernard; but then we are not prone to philosophize while we are smarting under the lash of suffering.

Through the window it seemed as if there was nothing visible except the long galleries of the Palace Fossombrone, where the allegorical figures on the walls seemed to live and breathe in the dazzling light from the chandeliers, in the intoxicating odor of hot-house plants, while by hundreds characters from history and romance, of all times and all countries, jostled each other in grand disorder at *her* feet, around *her*, for *her* delight and amusement. The fête was at the height of its splendor, the music played in delirious time, the waltzers floated by on wings, the senses were excited to a point of exaltation ; every one seemed to be imbued with the spirit of her costume. For was she not a born Roussalka, deceitful and cruel siren ? The tongues of the mothers were loosened, no consideration restrained their words ; what whispered avowals was she receiving, and what reply was she making ? How quickly she had forgotten him, and those hours of delicious friendship, during which he had thought that he had learned to know her ! And all the time she had been playing with him. To what end ?

Unable to remain longer in his room with such thoughts for companions, he stopped in his me-

chanical walk, lighted a fresh cigar at one of the expiring candles and descended to the terrace, where at least he would no longer hear the eternal tick-tack of the clock as it measured the slow-paced hours of her absence. The night air did really exert a calming influence. He remained a few minutes without thinking, all his faculties benumbed and inoperative. But this relief from extreme tension, this appearance of repose, was not of long duration. The sound of wheels again made his blood boil in his veins. But it could not be she as yet. She would not return before morning. The sound drew nearer, however; the great gate creaked as it swung upon its hinges. He entered the house, determined that she should not have the pleasure of witnessing the agitation that she had been the cause of. To return so early, her stay at the ball must have been very short. What motive could have induced her to return? In his astonishment, the Countess came up with him in the vestibule. She uttered a low cry as she saw him.

“What, still up? It is really not so very late, though, but the evening seemed long to me because I was dreadfully bored.”

Bernard stammered out some kind of a confused

explanation about his having been to the library for a book.

Listening to him with an incredulous air, she went up the marble staircase, preceding him by two or three steps. Suddenly she turned and confronted him with a frown upon her face ; her expression was troubled and sad. The rouge had fallen from her face ; the marble statue beneath them, filling his post of torch bearer, was not whiter than she was under the shadow of her hood. She had twisted her lace handkerchief in her nervous fingers until it was torn to shreds.

“Listen,” said she, in a low voice, but dwelling upon every word with solemn emphasis ; “since you are here, I wish to know. . . . Tell me, is it true that you left behind you in France a young girl whom you love and whom you are engaged to marry ?”

So, what he had taken for scorn and cruelty was jealous anger and revenge, and this was her way of confessing it.

Everything seemed to Bernard to be whirling before his eyes ; he reeled and steadied himself against the baluster, which appeared to recede from him. He could never understand how it was that in this moment of surprise and nameless

rapture he could enunciate the words: "I love you. I have never loved any one but you!" His very soul came to his lips, as it were, in spite of himself, and he could not recognize the voice, that told him of it. A triumphant motion of the head, that meant, there was no mistaking its meaning: "At last!" had escaped the Countess. She bent over toward the young man, who saw her face close to his and felt her warm, sweet breath upon his cheek. He stretched out his arm, but as he suddenly drew it back, she said aloud:

"Till to-morrow."

A chambermaid, awaiting the Countess, had appeared at the head of the staircase. The door of a neighboring apartment closed, and Bernard, alone on the deserted staircase, might have fancied that it had all been a dream.

The next morning, as he descended these same stairs, he met M. Volonzoff, who gave him a cordial shake of the hand. M. Volonzoff had not returned unexpectedly; he had been expected for several days, but Bernard had given no thought either to his return or to anything that had no bearing upon his great happiness.

The sight of Annette's husband troubled him. The liking that he had formerly felt for the

Count, however, like all the warm feelings that he had experienced up to this time, was now overmastered by that fever of the imagination and the senses, to which the severe way of life of his youth and his want of experience in adventures of this description, rendered him so much the more liable; but he dreaded that clear insight which he had already had occasion to see in operation, and which was never at fault when it was called upon. Under such circumstances, he wondered at and envied the imperturbable self-control that a woman of the world can maintain when she is brought face to face with the most delicate situation.

At the breakfast table Annette gaily scolded her husband for not having returned in time for the Fossombrone ball, as he had promised he would do. She gave him a comic description of the festivities which he had missed, and rallied Scharf upon his mysterious appearance in a Venetian domino. Thanks to her rattle, Bernard's silence passed unnoticed. As they left the table, M. Volonzoff amicably took the young man's arm and carried him off to talk about his son.

"I might have got home yesterday," said he, "if I had not stopped at Dresden to see a spe-

cialist whom Scharf is in correspondence with. All that can be done now is to let nature take her course. That is the ultimatum which I bring home with me, and a discouraging one it is too, isn't it? For it is a declaration from the most skilful doctors that they can do nothing further in the case. Well, in spite of all that, when I saw my poor boy again, I regained a little of my confidence. Perhaps there is no progress visible to you, who have been constantly at his side, but it is different with me after having been away two months. He is better, and we are indebted to you for it. You have done for him what no one else has succeeded in doing, and how he feels it! How he speaks of you! Really I ought to be jealous!"

This last word, perhaps the only one that had reached Bernard's ear, engrossed, as he was, in other thoughts, caused him to start; he thought that his secret was discovered, and yet he displayed a kind of unconcern in arriving at a resolution as to his course. "In such a case as this," he said to himself, "a duel generally follows. It will be better to die thus for her than to live a long life." Suddenly the thought of his inferior, dependent position struck him like the sharp lash

of a whip across the face. "Would he fight me?" The prospect that he would be discharged seemed much more probable, and all the galling pride that was in him filled him with hatred for the man who, but a moment ago, had been telling him of his gratitude and his friendship.

IX.



LITTLE after this time Bernard broke the last link that connected him with the past by writing Madame Désaubiers a letter, which he could never read in after days without a feeling of shame. The letter was long, but was written in vague terms. He thanked her for the advice which she had given him and gave her credit for its wisdom ; she had surely done well in dissuading him from one of those premature engagements to which young people sacrifice their freedom before they have a chance to enjoy this most precious of all gifts. Experience alone enables us to read our own heart clearly, and to distinguish between friendship and real love. If, before his departure, he had asked Rose for her hand, the idea of recalling his promise would never have occurred to him, but as no such demand had been expressed in words, he

trusted that sisterly affection would succeed those dreams which had doubtless deluded him alone, as Rose had never admitted that there was any hope of their realization.

Bernard's pen travelled more slowly here, for through this oblivion of the past that was invading his faculties more and more every day, he seemed to hear the echo of his own words, spoken by the side of the Seine: "In all the world I shall find nothing so dear as what I am leaving here—I shall return to you." But then the pain of separation is responsible for many a silly speech. He had loved Rose, and he loved her now, but not in a way to conflict with a passion that was stronger than his will. Was not this convincing proof that he had made a blunder when he ceased to look upon her as a sister? Fortified by this reasoning, he took up his pen again, for although he could not admit that there was any formal betrothal between himself and Rose, he was anxious to avoid any misunderstanding. The language, the letters of this child had been those of a friend, but what could he say about the gift of her portrait, or the remembrance of her tears? He knew that her loyalty was sufficient to make

her reject any proposition of marriage if she had reason to fear that it would bring to him any tinge of grief or disappointment ; it would be better that she should know the change that had been wrought in him by time, by the course of events, above all by his own reflections, and Madame Désaubiers was the only one to whom could be entrusted so delicate a mission.

To make his bad action easier for him, Bernard heaped falsehoods on the top of sophisms; the letter was burned and rewritten several times before he was satisfied with it. He was angry with himself, and consequently hard and unjust. What was the use of all this consideration? She, too, must have mistaken the nature of her feelings toward him. Love was the intoxication which he drank in at Annette's eyes, that irresistible force which brought them together in spite of everything. Rose did not love him so much as she loved her mother, so much as she loved her art ; he knew that she was too strong and self-contained to suffer long or deeply. In a word, she was an obstacle that was to be avoided or destroyed by calumny, in order that he might be spared remorse.

He felt a sense of relief when he had got his letter off, and when he next saw Annette experienced tumultuous delight in telling her that he was hers alone. It was hardly necessary for him to say so in words, his actions proved it so well. Only virgin hearts are capable of such a passion, that blazes up in a day and consumes everything outside of itself. Annette had sufficient experience to understand it, and showed great relish for a romance the like of which she had never read before. That she might enjoy it at her ease and lose no portion of it, she now employed every device that she had formerly used in awakening his love in restraining it within sentimental and platonic limits. She used her boundless power over him to prolong the timid ecstasies of a pure love. The sweet precocious Italian spring-time was also favorable to this project. Over the distant palaces of Genoa were spread the beautiful transparent tints of azure and pink that are reflected to and fro from sea and sky ; the mountain ranges rose from the opal waters of the gulf, forming a girdle for the prospect whose minutest indentation the purity of the atmosphere made visible at great distance; the fresh verdure of the gardens, where the loves

of Albano might have dwelt, was variegated by the most beautiful flowers. The surroundings and the season could not have been more favorable for an idyl. Their interviews, though innocent, were attended with precaution, for mystery and the dramatic element were dear to Annette's heart. Possibly this prudence was not altogether assumed, perhaps it had become really necessary. M. Volonzoff's surprise at this new-born liking of hers for a quiet life exceeded that which any of her previous caprices had ever aroused in him ; this conversion appeared to him more dangerous than the various mad fancies that he had so long been acquainted with. The Count had not a very favorable opinion of women ; he thought that the Orientals did very wisely in keeping them under lock and key, but in the absence of a barred and grated harem, it was his opinion that a numerous troop of admirers served as well as anything else for a guard. But his Célimène had abdicated ; her court, upon the vigilance of which he had relied, had been dismissed ; it appeared to him to be a bad sign. Henceforth Bernard felt that he was watched. He could not indulge in the reveries and abstractions that lovers are so addicted to without being

conscious of a penetrating gaze fixed upon him, accompanied by a kind of scrutinizing pity. The doctor, too, kept his eye on him pretty faithfully, and his attitude expressed distrust, almost open hostility.

One evening, when M. Volonzoff had gone to Genoa to dine with Fossombrone, leaving his wife at home suffering with a pretended headache, she thought that she recognized Scharf in a dark form that flitted rapidly beneath the balcony where she was sitting, not alone. He had withdrawn a few minutes before, under the pretence of some work that had to be done; then Annette had left her piano to come and sit by Bernard and look at the stars, discoursing the while, in a voice full of promises for the future, upon the folly of squandering one's happiness too rapidly, there being possibly more pleasure in anticipation than in possession. The Countess was now and then pleased to embroil herself in far-fetched paradoxes and subtleties that would have been worthy of Scudéry. Suddenly she exclaimed: "There is some one listening!" and closed the window, while Bernard, without the loss of a second, hurriedly mounted the stairs to the Doctor's room, where he found that

gentleman deep among his books. On his return to the drawing-room, he found M. Volonzoff there, chatting pleasantly.

This immovable calmness and good humor was humiliating to Bernard. Had there been a danger to meet, it would have quieted his conscience and would even perhaps have been an additional inducement for him to persevere, but thus to betray with impunity a man whose guest he was, and who was his friend, was one of those cowardly actions to which youth, generous even in the midst of its follies, can never resign itself without a feeling of shame. Still, his letter to Madame Désaubiers had in a measure checked this feeling, for even if he were guilty, he had redeemed his fault, in this quarter at least, by his frankness. Her answer to his letter came at last; he had dreaded it, while he anxiously awaited it. It struck him like a thunderbolt.

“The painful charge which you place in my hands to execute, my child, is useless. Rose was aware before you were that you love her no more. For a long time I have seen the tears gather in her eyes whenever she speaks of your future, and resolutely parts it from her own. Remember that we have always read your letters together.

We have seen their tone gradually change, without your being conscious of it, perhaps. Without speaking of it to each other, we found in them something more than you thought you had written. Rose was the first to discover the truth concealed under your reticence, for she loves you as no one will ever love you again. Deny everything, if you will, but do not deny her love, even if it has become a burden to you, and above all, beware of attempting to convince the poor girl that you were the victim of an illusion, when you appeared to share it. She will suffer less, thinking you faithless. Do not tell her that you wish to give her back her liberty ; the changes of her heart are not for you to control ; moreover, she does not complain, and she accuses no one. Neither will I weary you with reproaches or advice. My letter has another object, entirely foreign to Rose.

“I have to ask your forgiveness. Perhaps with the best intentions of doing good, I shall have only succeeded in doing you an injury. Bernard, if I had said to you, when a chance that seemed to me providential so unexpectedly decided your future : ‘ You will live beneath the roof of your own father, you will meet him in your daily intercourse,’ would you have ac-

cepted that dependent position with Count Volonzoff? The feeling of uncertainty which has beset me since I sent you away has become a burthen too heavy for endurance. At first I flattered myself that my inspiration to be silent was a good one: God had decreed that you should come together; unconsciously to you both, blood would speak, in him as well as in you, and nature would assert her rights. So ready are we to believe that which we desire!

“Again, pardon me! I know not what feeling of dread suddenly came and mingled with these hopes and gained the upper hand, with all the strength of a presentment. Perhaps I ought to continue silent; but I cannot; I should seem to be an accomplice in a crime. It is not always easy, my child, to know the right. We lose our guiding star when we have once departed from the way of truth. With bitter repentance I acknowledge this, and I tender you, by my tardy confession, the only assistance that I have it in my power to give you. God grant that it may be the means of showing you the right way, and may this way bring you back to us!”

X.



IN the garden of the villa, as in most Italian gardens, there were several buildings, each designated by some high-sounding name : there was Erminia's cave, Angelica's rock, the tomb of the Guelf, etc.; then in the centre of a verdant plot, where several walks converged, there was a dilapidated, moss-covered pavilion of rock-work which had long been condemned to disuse on account of its evil antecedents. The country people called it the Chamber of Love, and made a kind of little *Tour-de-Nesle* of it; insisting that the ghosts of the numerous lovers of a certain Princess Livia, who had had it built for her own private use, sometimes came and walked there at night. There were not many persons who had ever seen the interior of this little house. Madame Volonzoff had taken the key under pretence of seeing if it could not be converted

into a summer house, but subsequently seemed to have abandoned her project. Still, on the day when she took it into her head to receive Bernard there, the old boudoir presented quite a gay appearance with its tarnished mirrors, its crumbling cornices, and its figured, rat-eaten tapestries. Seated in the dim light that filtered through the lowered blinds, somewhat pale, as is fitting when one acknowledges one's self conquered (it was the first serious appointment that she had accorded Bernard, and the probable end of the Platonic chapter), Annette, to judge by the portrait of a powdered nymph who had long been subject to the ravages of dust and damp, was more irresistible than the Countess Livia had ever been. Her morning dress of lace and muslin was in perfect harmony with the scene and the situation. At the sound of a footstep in the distance, she placed her hand upon her heart. "I really love him!" said she.

The shutters were tightly closed and there was nothing to indicate from the outside that there was any one in the pavilion. Annette had guarded against every contingency, and there was nothing to fear; still she trembled, a chill passed through her, she was more dead than

alive. These sensations, so different from the comedy of coquetry in which she had been pre-eminent until now, affected her with a singular trouble and made her still more beautiful.

“You let me wait—already!” said she, with a smile which, the day before, would have brought him to her feet. He knelt, in fact, but more like a condemned man suing for mercy than a happy lover. His features showed such change that she cried: “What is the matter? You frighten me.” Then with the incoherence of despair, he stammered that he was unworthy of her, that he prayed she would forget his boldness, that honor commanded him to fly, that he appeared in her presence for the last time, that he would die rather than carry her down with him into such a foul abyss. At first Annette was disposed to pity this madness. “The poor child,” she thought, “is out of his head; his happiness has proved too much for him;” and half in joke and half in earnest, she tried to reassure him; but when he mentioned her husband, she said, drawing herself up haughtily, “I did not suppose that you were here to talk about him. Again I ask you, what has happened since yesterday?”

This was the only question that he could not answer. Determined to keep his secret, unnerved by his tortures, the bitterest of which at the moment was the sense that he had made himself supremely ridiculous, he talked without knowing what he was saying, unable even to recognize the sound of his own voice, until at last the Countess, passing by him with an air of disdain, cast at him from the door these crushing words, accompanied by a low, cutting, scornful laugh :

“It is very evident, Monsieur, that you have been in the neighborhood of the theological school. You have been preaching me a sermon; you forget that sermons are not to my taste, especially when the time is so ill-chosen.”

She turned and left him, swift as an arrow, grazing the long laurel hedge as she went. But she lessened her speed and looked back, waiting for him to follow her. But no; the path was silent and deserted. Suddenly she stopped and listened, with laboring breath, tempted on the one hand to return to the pavilion, on the other, restrained by a last remnant of pride. There are some women who can never bring themselves to admit that a man, whatever he may be, can resist or escape them.

Madame Volonzoff's attention had first been attracted toward Bernard by his extreme reserve and by the chilling disapprobation of her which was frequently visible in his manner. She had next amused herself, there being no more exciting pastime at hand, by trying to bedevil his senses, and the mischief that she had hatched for him recoiled upon herself, without, however, taking full possession of her. When, contrary to all probability, he would have nothing more to do with her and repulsed her advances, she at last felt how much he was to her.

Was this love story, then, whose incidents she had controlled with such art, in expectation of a very different termination, to wind up with a simple adieu, supplemented with a lesson in morality? She allowed her clenched hands to fall to her side upon her dress, and there they found the traces of Bernard's tears. "He was crying!" she said to herself. "I was too quick in my anger. These fears are childish, but they are touching; they always exist in company with a fresh, tender, submissive love, a first love, in a word. I failed to understand him." Annette continued with fresh anger, this time directed against herself, "But he will come back to me,

and the quicker that I shall use no means to bring him back."

The fear that he should not find her there with his pardon all ready and awaiting him, made her press on more quickly. She wished him to think that she was angry with him. "Who wouldn't have been?" She was ashamed of her weakness.

As she entered the house she came upon her husband, talking with Doctor Scharf. He seemed troubled and anxious.

"Well!" said he impulsively, "you know that Bernard is going to leave us?"

Annette felt her knees giving way under her; not daring to trust her voice in reply, she fell into the nearest chair.

"You are as much astonished as I was myself," continued M. Volonzoff. "This morning he told me that necessity compelled him to return to France at once. I tried vainly to make him tell me why; he is impenetrable. I wanted him at least to give me his promise to return, for I dread Dima's grief. The child has had more fever the last few days. I was just talking to the Doctor about it. It is really a great annoyance."

"Is there no way of keeping him? Money changes so many plans," Scharf insinuated.

“You are not a good judge of men. Our friend’s disinterestedness is above all suspicion. If he says that he cannot even grant us a respite, there are doubtless motives that we must respect, much as we regret that they should exist. Annette,” the Count continued without raising his eyes, “have you any idea of the cause of this departure?”

Her only answer was a gesture in the negative.

“No one knows anything of M. Bernard,” said the Doctor, “either from whence he comes or whither he is going.”

“Oh! it is very well known that you have always looked upon him as a rival,” drily replied the Count. And he commenced to silently perambulate the room, as was his habit whenever he was trying to overcome his anger or mature some plan. He was angry with womankind in general and with his own wife in particular. He thought that Bernard was doubtless flying of his own accord from a foolish passion which he knew there was no hope of being returned; he cared nothing for the love episode, but why must Dima be made to suffer?

In the meantime rapid glances had been exchanged between Annette and the Doctor, which

signified on the one side, "I have something to say to you," and on the other "I am at your disposal." After one more turn from the fireplace to the door, Mr. Volonzoff left the room without having devised any remedy for the trouble which he thought he now had a clear idea of, although it seemed to him of very small importance.

"Doctor," the Countess then said with forced calmness, "what do you think of all this?"

"What! about the tutor? I think that the lady who is awaiting him down yonder, mistress or betrothed, or whatever she may be, is becoming impatient, that she wants to see him again, and that he is obedient to orders. His love for her is stronger than his pretended attachment
———"

"You have already mentioned this woman more than once," Annette interrupted, and her eyes all at once assumed a greenish hue and emitted feline glances that augured ill for somebody. The Doctor made a sign of assent.

"Well, I don't know how you could have been deceived so, for there is no such woman in existence."

"Ah! he told you so, did he, and you believed him? You believed him in preference to me?"

“ You did not give me any proof.”

“ Because I could not have supposed that the love affairs of an inferior would interest you.”

“ I would not say that they interest me; that is too strong an expression; but I am curious. This sudden departure perplexes me.”

“ Still there can be nothing plainer ; he spoke to the Count after the arrival of the postman, who brought him a letter.”

“ Are you certain ? Pshaw ! a letter from his family, probably.”

“ You know that he has no family. That is all that our mysterious young friend has condescended to tell us about his affairs.”

“ But perhaps he has a gentleman friend who writes to him.”

“ Is it probable, Madame, that he would keep such letters under lock and key, tied up with ribbon, and in company with a likeness, a tress of hair and pressed flowers ? ”

“ Have you seen all that ? ”

“ And then I can assure you that this friend has magnificent eyes—in a word just as like a young lady of eighteen as you can imagine.”

The Countess gave a little shrug of her shoulders. To a casual observer she would



have appeared incredulous and indifferent, but it was not easy to deceive Doctor Scharf. Beneath that palpitating breast there was a raging storm of outraged pride, rage, jealousy, and a burning thirst for vengeance. So he had dared to lie to her! While sitting by her side, his thoughts had been with another, and this person, some Parisian grisette, no doubt, though far away, had worsted her in the conflict and was about to deprive her of her prey!

"Of course, it doesn't matter much to you," continued Scharf, "but you doubted my veracity once because I could not produce my proofs. I should like to show you that I am right. Would you like to see these proofs?"

The Countess, in her eagerness, stretched forth her hand, but disguised the involuntary movement by taking her fan from a table that stood near. "I don't believe that you can produce them," said she. Her lips, to which she summoned a forced smile, were pale and trembling. Scharf drew near and stood before her, looking her in the eyes.

"Madame," said he, "to satisfy a desire of yours, I would dare anything." She drew back her chair, disconcerted by the brutal intentness

of his gaze. "I am yours, body and soul. I have no doubt that you are well aware of this, although I have never said so in words. I am no longer satisfied to be counted as one among the throng of your adorers, and that, too, in the rear rank—to stoop to pick up the crumbs of love that you condescend to scatter around you. I was never cut out for the Angelic rôle; that is too suitable to beardless young Frenchmen. It is my ambition to leave you something that will make you remember me, even if it be at the price of my life, and in exchange to receive from you a favor that you have never granted to any one."

"A favor for a service; what you propose seems to me very like a bargain," said the Countess with disdain.

"Everything in this world is a matter of purchase and sale, Madame. I cannot endure to be a dupe. Reflect, that theft will have to be committed here. I spoke of my life; I would risk even more than that at a word from you. Are you unwilling, in return, to run the risk of compromising yourself? This evening, this very night, at an hour that we shall agree on, I will bring you, or rather you shall come and

demand from me, the proofs which will clear up every doubt in regard to what you desire to know. I have in my mind that lonely pavilion, the Chamber of Love, as it is called, among the trees of the park."

"I fail to see the use of such romantic preparation."

"Pardon, Madame, it is to be all my recompense. Let your accomplice bear away with him the illusion of having been once received as your lover."

The Countess had listened to this strange speech, swayed by the magnetism of an overpowering will which seemed to stupefy her. As Scharf finished, she raised her eyes and was terrified by the expression which she read in his face, from which he had let fall the mask that habitually concealed it.

"To-morrow, perhaps, he will be gone, and you will never learn what you want to know. Do you accept my offer, or do you refuse to trust me, and my respect for you?"

She hesitated ; then in a voice that betrayed deep agitation and at the same time expressed an undefined threat, she said : "Let it be as you will."

XI.



TO any one who could have read the minds of the inhabitants of the villa there would have been an exhibition of the most conflicting passions. Annette's wounded susceptibilities, in connection with her burning curiosity, had displaced the mistrust with which she had at first regarded the Doctor's impudent offer. Women who consider nothing in the world but themselves and their passing fancies always go straight to their end, using every available means, disregarding every risk. Scharf was, in her eyes, the tool that is to be broken after it has been used ; perhaps he was a more formidable instrument than it suited her to believe. It was the first time that this man had given free rein to instincts of the strength of which he was himself ignorant. For three long years he had subordinated them with stern inflexibility to calculations that were more important to

him than anything else—to the task of building up his fortune. For three years the Countess had been to him as the star is to the child who would seize it in his grasp, set high in the heavens at an immeasurable distance beyond his reach. But when he saw her descend from the firmament where she gravitated in company with her satellites, Russian generals and Italian princes, to throw herself into the arms of a little French tutor, he made oath to himself that he would at least stand on as good footing as this contemptible rival. When he burned his ships, it was with a kind of rage against himself and against her who had thus made him recreant to the principles of his whole life; but it behooved him to see that the ships were not burned without something to show for it. The Doctor's plan embraced three objects: Revenge on Bernard, whom he was jealous of; also on M. Volonzoff, who had so often wounded his personal pride and patriotic susceptibilities; finally to retaliate on a coquette, from whose influence he could not abstract himself, while at the same time he held her in detestation. He felt assured that this libertine Frenchman had been carrying on two love affairs at once; he knew where to find the

documents that would denounce him, and he trusted to the Countess' indignation at sight of them, to darkness and solitude, to his own eloquence, to other and more decisive arguments if they had to be used, to gain for him the reward of his stratagem. This euphemistic way of putting it sufficed to quiet the hypocrite's not very troublesome conscience.

It was an easy matter to get possession of the casket of letters, for Bernard was devoting his entire evening to his pupil, whom he now in his mind called brother, and who now seemed to have a closer claim than ever upon his tenderest attentions, although he knew that he should have to leave him before long. The effect of Madame Désaubiers' revelation had been like that of an alarm-cry sounded in the ears of a man sleeping on the verge of a precipice and awakening him from some intoxicating dream. His first impulse was to banish his criminal passion ; he was filled with horror at the nearness of the danger he had escaped. He could not forget Annette quite yet, but neither could he forget that she was his father's wife. His father ! How often had he dreamed of finding him and making himself known to him by some heroic action ! He had

accomplished a noble deed, it is true, but silently and in the dark ; there was no apparent merit, and there could be no possible reward. It was to be followed, too, by another, no less incomprehensible and almost equally painful, the parting with Dima. Twenty times did Bernard's lips part to say the word *Farewell*, and each time the word was arrested on his tongue by some fond word from the poor child. Besides the feverish little hand which clasped his own interceded more powerfully than the most touching speech could have done ; it seemed to say :

“I shall not have many favors to ask from you. Do not rob me of a single one of the minutes that you can pass at my bedside, which are now so few. Let the sunshine which your presence has always brought to me continue to irradiate what little remains to me of life. When you are gone, what will become of me ? Suppose that I should die while calling upon you, reproaching you with your forgetfulness ? Could you ever pardon yourself for my death, which would be so sad without you at my side, which would be so sweet and resigned if only you would let it be so ?”

These were the words that Bernard heard in

imagination, and passing his arm around the child as if to protect him, he could only murmur in his ear, "My child! My poor child!"—so that Dima went to sleep without having learned of his instructor's intended departure on the following day.

"Were it not for seeing her again," he thought with a shudder, "I would remain another day. I may have more courage to-morrow, or perhaps he will be stronger and better able to bear the parting."

M. Volonzoff was greatly agitated. After a close examination of the motives which could have induced Bernard's sudden resolution, he had abandoned his first conjectures. He had no doubt that the young man was in love, but was it despair that had influenced him to go away? Might not Annette at last have fallen victim to her own wiles, and experienced the love which she was only trying to inspire in another? It was possible that there was an understanding between them, and that a lingering delicacy restrained Bernard from betraying him in his own house; or did he wish to place himself on a more equal footing with the Countess by renouncing his salaried, dependent position, which he felt as

a humiliation? These considerations occupied M. Volonzoff's thoughts during a portion of the night; he was turning them over in his mind with all the coolness that he was capable of, when a watch-dog barked under his windows and then was silent, as if he had recognized some one of the inmates of the house. Under the influence of his present preoccupation, the Count went to the window and looked out, taking care to let fall the curtains behind him, so that the front of the villa might remain in darkness and not betray his wakefulness. The night, which in the Italian spring-time is generally bright with stars, was dark; great storm-clouds were hanging low over the grounds; still he thought that he saw a shadow cautiously leave a small turret in which was a private staircase leading to the apartments of the Countess. This was sufficient to make him leave the house, first slipping a loaded pistol into his pocket. The figure was some distance ahead of him, but having once seen it plunge into the labyrinth of shrubbery, M. Volonzoff promptly skirted the long hedge, on the other side of which he was conscious of rapid feet skimming over the gravel. When he reached the turn where stood a great marble

vase, the apparition that he was following vanished within the pavilion which stood there.

For a long time the Count had systematically treated his wife with the extreme of toleration, but this toleration had its restrictions and its limits ; there was no one less likely than he to assume a place among complaisant or deceived husbands. "At this time of night she can only be expecting a lover," he thought, as he took his position, leaning against a tree. "Well ! let him come ; there is a warm reception awaiting him!"

With a concentrated, cold rage that made even his lips white, but which did not cause his hand to tremble, he cocked his pistol and stood waiting with his finger on the trigger ; five minutes scarcely, but they seemed five centuries to him. He would have been glad to have less time for reflection.

"I am right," he thought ; "she has brought it on herself. Still, it will be a merciful act to spare her. Yes, I will leave her to her remorse. As for him, miserable fool ! Will he never come ?"

A thousand other thoughts came to him, mingled with his resolves for vengeance. He recalled Bernard's youth, and the esteem, confidence and

friendship which he, usually so sparing of such feelings, had always evinced toward this ingrate.

His just anger was almost overmastered by a bitter feeling of sorrow. It was not a night that invited murder, although it was dark and mysterious. Heavy odors floated in the moist, motionless air. Everything seemed to slumber; beneath the thick shade of the foliage faint little sounds were heard, like half-drawn sighs. An unutterable peace, source of deep, voluptuous delight, diffused itself from the veiled sky and arose from the sleeping earth; all nature seemed instinct with the sense of love, while here there stood a man, defiant of all these sweet influences, given over to hatred, waiting to shed blood.

At length footsteps were heard again, and a second phantom, masculine in form this time, emerging from the shadows of the shrubbery, advanced in the direction of the pavilion. Quick as lightning M. Volonzoff had covered him with his pistol, but his hand fell to his side involuntarily.

"No," he murmured, "I will not kill him in cold blood." He could not bring himself to fire upon his enemy from behind, without warning. Already, however, the dark figure was knocking

at the shutter, which creaked upon its hinges. "One word!" said he, coming forward from his place of concealment.

The other person turned with a start. "The Count!" he exclaimed, thunderstruck. The exclamation sufficed to tell that it was Scharf. M. Volonzoff experienced a strange sensation of relief as he recognized the voice.

"What! it is you?" he said in turn. "Will you explain what you are doing here?" And as the Doctor hesitated to answer, seeking to collect his thoughts, "Perhaps you would rather that I should kill you like a dog?"

Scharf felt the pistol against his throat; he pushed it away, and in a tone of injured innocence: "If you kill me," he said, "you will be punishing an act of blind devotion on my part. I know that appearances are against me, the most faithful of your servants. You would not believe the truth that I can tell about this affair."

"Tell it without further words. And first, this assignation——"

"There was no assignation," replied Scharf, intentionally raising his voice, while the Count spoke in low tones; "I am alone; I came here to leave some papers that are to convince a

certain person, whom I respect beyond all else in the world, of a deceit that her generous nature would not have allowed her to believe without these proofs. She resented the insulting advances of a coxcomb by driving him from her presence, but that is not sufficient; she must know the exact degree in which the wretch was guilty toward her."

"And so you came in the depth of night——"

"It was not I who selected the time for assuring the safety of these letters that Madame the Countess will read and acquaint herself with when she sees fit."

"Come, come! you are trifling, Monsieur Scharf," the Count interjected, angrily pushing open the shutter of the pavilion. "Let us make an end of this ridiculous story. Do you think that I don't know that there is some one waiting here for you?"

Without relaxing his hold on his prisoner, he entered the building and struck a match. Its light showed the room to be untenanted. Like all structures of its kind, the place had two doors. Annette, therefore, at the first sound of high words, had made her escape by one of the covered alleys which terminated at the round-

point. The Doctor, who had anticipated this, breathed more freely. M. Volonzoff was thoughtful, glad perhaps that the scandal was no greater, though his inmost convictions on the subject remained unchanged. After a short pause, he resumed, in a sharp, imperious tone :

“Where are those papers that you spoke of?”

Scharf had the casket concealed beneath his cloak ; he produced it and placed it on the table. “They are here ; but I shall only deliver them,” he added, with returning boldness, “to the person whom they concern.”

“I will see that the person gets them,” said the Count, laying a firm hand upon the stolen letters. “You will understand, sir, that I am curious to see for myself what there is in all these underhand proceedings. As regards yourself, let me say to you that I can allow no one to be, unknown to me, so jealously careful of my honor ; excessive zeal is a mistake. You will receive letters from your family to-morrow, summoning you home in all haste, and you will leave this house. You understand me?” And as the Doctor was on the point of making further explanations, he added : “You need say nothing more. I understand you perfectly.”

The words thief and traitor were not uttered, but none the less Scharf could read them in the scornful look that burned into his soul like a red-hot iron. He was blind with rage, and would have had recourse to violence had he not luckily remembered that he had to do with a man of equal, if not of superior, strength to himself. The cocked pistol, too, was particularly efficacious in bringing him to his senses. He yielded, therefore, with the comforting thought that he had discharged this Parthian arrow against Bernard by accusing him as he had done, and that the arrow was poisoned and would prove fatal.

A few moments later the Count was back in his room, bending over his desk, on which lay Madame Désaubiers' letters. The first words to meet his eye, after he had broken open the casket, in which he had expected to discover matter of a different kind, were these: "When that chance which to me seemed providential so unexpectedly decided your future, if I had said to you 'You will be living under the same roof with your own father, you will meet him in your daily intercourse,' would you have accepted the position with Count Volonzoff?" He read the

letter over many times, and the light which he dreaded, while he desired it, dawned upon his mind. All beside, compared to this, was as nothing. Memory carried him back to years long past, to a bright spring morning when, among the roses that were blooming around her, he had met a little rose of flesh and blood that his passing caprice had breathed upon and blasted ; he had never turned back to see what became of her after she had been trodden under foot in the mire which God never intended for her. Poor forgotten little rose ! the memories of her that now arose in him were tenderer than ever they had been before ; a fragment of his vanished youth came back to him with her. And then there passed before his inner vision a second form, purer than the first, nobler, loved with a deeper and better love ; the only one of her sex who had ever inspired in his heart that tender feeling that he could not bestow upon a mother or a sister, being an orphan and an only child ; the only woman who had ever succeeded in really reaching his heart, from which that death, which we call absence, had never been able to displace her. He could not recall her without at the same time waking in her company a train of

the tenderest feelings ; he felt that he could not look upon her with indifference, even if she were grown old and changed beyond recognition ; she would always be in his eyes, as she had always been, the ideal woman ; for others, no matter in what station of society, he felt only disdain. Why had he always made pleasure his supreme end in his intercourse with women ? Why had he made birth and wealth the condition of his ill-mated marriage ? His sad thoughts were turned to the bitter fruits that had been the product of this union, the result of the dictates of a senseless pride, vexations without number, and a frail scion that was doomed to die. If the present outlook was gloomy, the future was no less so. Involuntarily M. Volonzoff took refuge in the past, which lay in the bottom of this Pandora's box that had been stolen by fraud and opened by violence, and the past was presented to him in the features of this young man, so like the son that he would have wished for to worthily carry down his name. " And he is really my son ! " he thought with an ineffable, confused feeling of joy and stupefaction.

In the eyes of this man, who attached a

supreme importance to the laws and customs, and even the slightest prejudices of the world, it appeared a monstrous injustice that one of his children, who had acquired his education in obscurity and retirement by dint of sheer hard work, should have been produced by such a train of circumstances to undertake the education of another child of his. He was moved as he thought of the blooming youth of the one sacrificed to the sickly childhood of the other, and a mist, which he brushed away with his hand, arose before his dry eyes, which knew not how to weep.

“What is to be done?” he asked himself. It did not seem as if he could let Bernard go, and still he saw no way of preventing him; he could not open his heart to the woman to whom he must shortly appear in the character of master and judge. He spent the remainder of the night in anxious deliberation upon this dilemma. The candles had burned down to their sockets and the bluish daylight was beginning to appear through the windows when he arose from his chair saying: “In the first place I will test him.”

And this is how he made his test.

Very early in the morning, the Count, ex-

tremely pale, entered Bernard's bed-chamber. "Do you still persist," he asked, "in the resolution that you spoke to me of yesterday?"

"There is no other course for me to take," the young man replied.

"We are in great trouble. Doctor Scharf is obliged to absent himself for a time, and then again change of air is recommended for Dima, who is suffering from a feverish attack. I want him to go and take up his summer quarters among the Alps, but who will go with him, if you are unwilling to take charge of him?"

"Will you not be there with the Countess?"

M. Volonzoff shook his head. "We shall not go until a little later on. For the present, there is no one that he needs so much as you."

Bernard had no suspicion of the true state of affairs; he wondered whether the Count was proceeding on guess-work, or whether he had discovered everything. This latter hypothesis seemed the more probable to him when later on he became aware, with an agitation that may be readily conceived, of the disappearance of the letters. At all events, circumstances seemed to favor him, and he yielded to their guidance.

"Such being the condition of affairs," he an-

swered, "I cannot refuse to remain at my post—temporarily at least—no matter what the sacrifice." There was something more than gratitude in the look which the Count bestowed on him as he thanked him.

He did not see Annette again. One of those indispositions, which nervous women know so well how to summon up when needed, explained the reason why Dima, before he set out, was the only person that she said good-by to. The child came from the interview in tears ; his mother, too, had wept, so he told Bernard, as if she never expected to see him again. "And still," he repeated in a tone that was half interrogative, "we shall all be together again in Switzerland."

XII.



THE Châlet that had been hired for Bernard and Dimitri was too near Clarens for us to attempt to compete with Rousseau by venturing on a description of this bank of Lake Lemman. It stood in front of a well-shaded slope covered with chestnut groves, in full view of the mountains of Savoy, whose stern beauty contrasts admirably with the fertile, pastoral aspect of the *Pays de Vaud*. On one hand were vineyards, pastures and orchards ; on the other the domes, peaks and gigantic pyramids known as the *Aiguille du Midi*, the *Dents d'Oche*, the *Chaumeny*, the *Vélan*, and the dark walls from which rise the rocks of *Meillerie* were grouped in a panorama that defies description ; but the nearest object to attract the gaze was the Castle of Chillon, mirrored in the lake, deep sunk in whose depths, like roots of stone, lie its courses of masonry, hewn from the living rock,

and that square tower, gazing from between whose bars Byron has shown us the sad, stern features of the prisoner, who, so powerful is time, at last came to love his chains. There is a feeling that is well known to all who have travelled, or rather sojourned, among the Alps ; it is the sensation of restfulness that is instilled into the most troubled minds by various natural causes acting in concert ; the grandeur of the scenery, the purity and clearness of the air, the prattling murmur of the water courses, and the awful silence of the glaciers in their resistless, never ceasing march. Bernard, after the violent efforts that he had made to regain his self-control, his energy exhausted, had sunk into a discouraged state of doubt and perplexity. What might be M. Volonzoff's intentions ? If he was ignorant of his guilty passion, why had he afforded him the opportunity of going away, and if, on the other hand, he was cognizant of it, why did he give him a mark of such absolute confidence as to entrust to his care that which was dearest to him in all the world ? He sometimes suspected Scharf's treachery, whose departure he was unable to account for ; but more frequently he seemed to be merely a passive instrument in the

hands of a father, who was powerful to do with him as he would. His face, too, would flush and blaze with shame at the thought that she, who was the cause and the witness of his weakness, would never understand that conduct which he could never explain and which she would retaliate by her ineradicable contempt. What must Annette think of him? It seemed to him that there could be no more dreadful punishment than to see her again, and meet the silent reproach of that scornful smile. He interdicted himself from thinking of her, and he no longer dared to think of Rose. The mocking dream had faded, and the holy, sweet reality had been banished by his fault. There was left to him, nothing, nothing only this child, who, thank God, had need of him; nothing, only a task which must be sufficient for his wounded feelings; for self-devotion, much more than mere personal happiness is the end and object of our existence.

Such was the sublime lesson that Bernard learned among the valleys of the Alps. Day by day he saw the same sun vainly cast its everlasting beams upon the immemorial snows which never melt; he saw the unchanging verdure of the pines smile upon the Cyclopean ruin that the

avalanche had torn in the mountain side, and the great waves of the lake, excited to fury by the storm, fall back tamed into repose and quiet. Insensibly his troubled spirit was penetrated by the peace, the harmony, the grandeur of its surroundings. Passion, born of a flash and dissipated by a breath, seemed to him nothing more than a fit of delirium by the side of love which resists everything and survives all things. But that true love—he had cruelly wounded it, and felt that he was no longer worthy of it.

Bernard's whole life was now devoted to Dima, of whose condition he wrote every day appraising M. Volonzoff. Their time was passed in the open air, often in a boat, rowing on the lake, a pastime which afforded the sick boy great pleasure. Lying on his cushions, he yielded himself to the gentle rocking of the little waves, while the oars, plied by his sturdy companion, struck the clear water with measured strokes.

"I do not regret now the amusements of other children, whom I used to envy so," he would say. "I would give them all up only to be here with you."

Sometimes they took a light carriage and drove over the by-roads, of which there are many

in this frequented portion of the Alps. Dima pretended to have a great desire to climb with Bernard's legs and see with his eyes. So he sent him to explore those elevations that were inaccessible to him on account of his weakness, as if he comprehended the moral benefit that is derived from contending with the obstacles of nature, compared with which the accidents of our poor little lives are so mean and transitory. As we rise above the earth, the ghosts of times that are past and gone vanish like a wreath of smoke on the horizon, and the noxious exhalations of the world are under our feet, like the clouds that interposed between us and the pure ether while we were in the valley. The sadness that had lain so heavily on Bernard at his departure, passed away, and Dima's watchful eye observed that he was regaining his old cheerful calmness. The rare flowers that his young friend had sent him to look for on the mountain tops were health, quiet and oblivion. Inured to every extremity of suffering in his own person, he could not bear to see a trace of it in his friend. As regards himself, on the other hand, he had learned to be resigned, and his intelligence was developing to such a degree as almost

to cause alarm. Bernard could not help thinking of those fruits which ripen too quickly and fall prematurely. The ardor of an affection that swayed them both to such an extent served to increase the anxiety which he felt on this score. Every time that he received a letter from the Count, he trembled with the fear that it contained the announcement of his coming, which would be for him the signal of separation. But M. Volonzoff seemed to be in no hurry to end his respite, beyond which Bernard could descry nothing but the anguish of another parting. He asked himself, What would there be left for him to do then ?

His question did not remain long unanswered. That year of 1870 saw the outbreak of war between France and Germany. The unwarranted hurrah of victory which we raised at the beginning of the struggle was immediately succeeded by the most overwhelming disaster. Like so many others, Bernard's love for his country had been weak so long as he thought her invincible ; when the day came that France was in danger, he felt that he was a Frenchman. The impossibility flashed upon him of his remaining any longer in this mountain retreat, outside of which

only the day before he had seen no place for himself in all the world, and the day after Reichshoffen he notified the Count of his intention to enlist. M. Volonzoff answered his letter in person ; he must have been much disturbed by Bernard's resolve, for he did not lose a moment in coming to dissuade him from his purpose. He arrived unexpectedly at evening ; as he entered the low room of the *châlet* where the two friends were engaged in following the advance of the German troops on the map, Dima uttered a cry of joy, immediately followed by a sigh of disappointment :

“Where is Mamma?”

“Your mother could not come just now,” shortly answered the Count. Then, turning to Bernard, he went on impetuously : “Did you mean to ask for my advice?”

Bernard shook his head. “If I had asked you for advice, it would have presupposed indecision.”

“Your mind is made up then—you are resolved to commit a folly? Do you think that one recruit more will materially strengthen your army?”

“If every one looked at it in that light, no one would do his duty.”

“Do you believe that the French army, reduced by its successes in Italy, as well as by its reverses in Mexico, is anything like that army which whipped us in the Crimea? In the state that it is now, without allies and without leaders, it will have no chance against a nation of fighters. It is doomed to defeat.”

“Even admitting that you are right, which I very much doubt, glory is not the only incentive to love of country.”

“But your patriotism is only a young man’s vanity. The poorest peasant will make better food for powder than an educated man like you, and his life is not so valuable.”

“I am no better than the peasant that you speak of. I hope that I shall fight as bravely as he would, and then I shall not have the fear of leaving a family unprovided for, which would harass him.”

“So the fact that you are alone in the world is what decides you?” said the Count in a changed voice. “If you had a mother to beseech you——”

“What is the use of forming suppositions?” said Bernard, looking his interlocutor in the face. “My mother is dead.”

“Would you disobey the orders of a father?” said the Count with a violence of feeling that he hardly tried to conceal.

“If my father were alive, he would not exact that his son should disgrace himself by a cowardly action.”

“It is not cowardly to await the summons, instead of anticipating it.”

“You do not take into account, sir, that there is more due to my country from me than there is from other men. It adopted me from my birth, almost, and has been all in all to me, father and mother at once.”

M. Volonzoff bowed his head; then, pointing to Dima, who had been a breathless witness of the scene: “I thought that you loved him!” said he reproachfully. Bernard’s only answer was to embrace the child.

“Go!” cried Dima with energy. “I would do as you are doing, if I were in your place, and I, too, will show that I am brave by giving you up. We shall meet again—I feel sure we shall! I will wait for you.”

M. Volonzoff had turned away to conceal his emotion. “He has instructed the boy in honor, too,” he murmured. “You are two against one.

Can I not do anything for you?" he added, addressing Bernard in mute anguish.

"For me, nothing," replied Bernard; "but should I fall—don't be afraid, Dima; as you said, we shall meet again—if I should fall, there is one person in the world whom I should like to recommend to your protection. Who can foresee what will happen in a campaign? The young girl is poor, with no one to befriend her. . . ."

"I know whom you mean; Mademoiselle Rose Aymès."

A gesture that escaped Bernard showed his surprise.

"Chance placed your secrets in my hands. They are safe with me. You may depend upon me to do what you ask. And is that all that you have to say to me before you go away?"

The two men looked each other in the eyes again. Bernard's gaze expressed a silent prayer that could not be set in words. The Count answered it by opening wide his arms to his son without speaking.

XIII.



HE first thing that Bernard did when he reached Paris was to enlist in a regiment of the line. When by doing this he had reinstated himself in his own esteem, he felt courageous enough to do something that he could not have done before. He felt that he could now present himself before Rose, for he was commencing a new life, and was becoming worthy at least of her esteem. Full of that deep-seated and honestly earned contentment that arises from a duty accomplished, he bent his steps in the direction of the lonely quarter and the gloomy old house where she lived. When at a distance he descried the balcony, way up near the sky, from whence she used in old days to watch for his coming, a wealth of tender memories arose within him, while the more recent occurrences disappeared like a dream. No, they had never been parted ; he would soon hear

her cheerful, ringing voice calling to him from the distance; already he thought he heard it. As he was half way up the staircase, the concierge stopped him and asked where he was going. Mademoiselle Aymès, he told him, had left the house after her mother's death, and was living in the country.

"Her mother's death!" Bernard repeated. He made enquiries about the lingering illness, which had not been unlooked for, to which Madame Aymès had succumbed. It was less the news of her death that upset him than Rose's silence, the thought that he was so completely obliterated from her affection, from her memory, from her life.

All the bright images which had so cheered him but a few moments ago died out, one by one, in presence of this heart-breaking evidence of her indifference. For a few minutes he was undecided as to what he should do. Should he go to Madame Désaubiers? He had no doubt that Rose was there. How would she receive him? After all, he thought, I shall only trouble her a moment. I will go. The way there had never seemed to him so long, and yet he dreaded to reach the house. The sight of every well-known

spot was a pang to him. Why is it that inanimate objects always look the same, while our feelings change so ?

Sending away the conveyance that had brought him thus far, he followed, as he had so often done before, the tow-path along the margin of the Seine ; there he had taken many a walk with Rose, there he had——. Suddenly Bernard came to a halt. A few steps in advance he beheld a slender form clad in black. Her step had lost its old freedom and elasticity, but he still recognized her. She stood out in relief against the bright sunlight on the level strip of sand, which stretched away between its two margins of turf like a long white ribbon. He was conscious of the weary droop of her head, of the black veil that concealed her tresses, of the neglected book that she held open in her hand. On the flowery slope of a little cove that he knew well, she stopped and seemed to look at something ; perhaps a swallow, skimming the water in his swift flight, perhaps the reeds, concealing the slippery treacherous bank with their waving stalks ; but no, she was not conscious of any of these things, nor of anything else that was within her ken. She was saying to herself that here

was the place where she had caught her first glimpses of that deceptive happiness in which she had trusted, as she trusted in her God, and that she would have waited for its fruition with a patience that nothing could have wearied, had not he, from whose hands she was to receive it, himself disabused her hopes. He saw her wipe away her tears. Ah! how many tears had he caused her by his unfeeling abandonment of her, more bitter to her than death! The blazing summer sun shot his fierce rays down on this sorrowful little black speck among the surrounding brightness, a mute protest, as it were, against the brilliant beauty of the landscape, but she would have been insensible to the flames of a seven times heated furnace; perhaps she was unconscious as well of the sound of hurrying footsteps behind her; she only turned when she felt a hand laid lightly upon her shoulder. Could it be the phantom which she had been invoking that now appeared before her? She gave a weak cry, tottered, and would have fallen, had not Bernard supported her.

“You were weeping,” he said, not daring to press the hand which she had given him. Her only response was to point to her black dress.

“And you did not let me know! How could you treat me as if I was a stranger? The punishment was greater than the fault, however guilty I may have been. Rose, do you know what I was thinking of just now, before I met you? I was thinking that, no matter how hard I may try, I shall never accomplish anything good or great in this world, unless you give me the support and assistance of your friendship. You were too hasty in depriving me of it; I did not deserve to lose everything at a single blow.”

“You have always had my kindest feelings,” stammered Rose confusedly, “and if I had thought that my friendship would have been an assistance to you, and not a burthen——” The poor girl checked herself, and a vivid blush overspread her features. It was tender feeling for him, and not anger or jealousy, that had prompted her to cease writing to him, and had enjoined upon Madame Désaubiers to refrain from mentioning her name in writing to him. Why should she step in and interfere with his new love? The greatest pain of all would have been to know that she had inflicted on him the sufferings of remorse, or had even caused him one distressing recollection. If she could have

obliterated herself and her feelings more completely still, she would have done so ; but how could she tell him that ?

“I would at least like to have your pardon,” humbly said Bernard.

She blushed again, and her habitually serious expression, which contrasted so singularly with her childish features, assumed an aspect of sternness. “I have nothing to pardon ; you have not wronged me.”

“Do you mean that you hold the wrong I have done you in such utter scorn that you refuse to acknowledge its existence ? Ah ! I appeal from your pride to your compassion ; it will teach you kinder words ; reflect that what you say now will perhaps be the last words that I shall ever hear from your mouth.”

“The last words—what do you mean ?”

“I have joined the army and am going to meet the Prussians. I am a soldier, passing his last free day at your side.”

She did not wound his feelings by any expression of astonishment. “It is well,” she only said, but extending to him, this time with warmth, her hand, which she allowed to linger in his own. Wordy protestations would have

found no favor with her and would have left her cold and incredulous ; her favorite proverb, which she lived up to, was, "Deeds are better than words." Actions alone had power to convince her, and this action of his seemed to her to be worthy of a man of feeling.

"And so," she said in a gentler tone, "you want me to pardon you. A resolution such as that which you have come to atones for many a fault!"

"But many a man makes this resolve without having any faults to atone for."

"Yes, all will come to it, no doubt ; otherwise they would be less than men ; but the merit in your case is greater than it is with most."

"Why so?"

"There were so many ties, so many interests, to detain you yonder in Switzerland."

"You are mistaken," quickly replied Bernard ; "you are mistaken, upon my word you are. Ah ! if I could only tell you all, if this secret did not concern others beside myself. . . ."

"I would not let you tell me," the young girl feelingly interrupted ; "I wish never to know it. There is but one thing that I care anything about: that you have done your duty to-day, and that you came to me to tell me about it."

“I thank you! How I am running into debt to you again, dear Rose!”

“Pay it to your country. We all owe everything to her.”

“But whether I live happily or die nobly, I have, and shall always have, need of you. Tell me that, if I never come back, you will think of me without anger or bitterness for the wrong I have done you.”

“Of all the past I shall remember only one thing, and that is, how fondly I loved you,” cried Rose, maidenly reserve yielding to a great wave of kindness.

“As a friend?” Bernard whispered. She was silent. “Answer, Rose. Who can tell if we shall ever meet again as we are now?”

“No separation is eternal,” she said, fixing upon him her eyes that were so full of trust, “I have felt that ever since my mother left me.”

“Ah, Rose! If I should come back alive—and if you could love me!”

“Come back!” she said, and the words contained every pardon and every promise.

They went together to find Madame Désaubiers, and Rose explained what Bernard had done. And the return of the prodigal was never celebrated in grander style.

XIV.



VIOLENT emotions and unexpected visits now followed rapidly on each other's heels in the little house that had so long stood peaceably by the water's side. Bernard had scarcely got away to join his regiment when one morning old Mariette, her eyes still red with weeping over the young soldier's departure, came hastening to her mistress with a wild look in her eyes, and announced that there was a magnificent gentleman down stairs, whom she did not know, and who had given her his card. Madame Désaubiers upon reading the name on the card trembled and became so pale that Mariette exclaimed :

“Madame is ill !”

“No,” she replied, with a quivering of the lips that bore but faint resemblance to a smile, “it is nothing but surprise.”

But it was something more than surprise, it

was terror as well. "Count Volonzoff!" And he was there, in her house! What purpose could have brought him there? It was no doubt to reproach her for having brought shame and trouble to his house by her romantic imprudence and seeming duplicity. A single sentence of Bernard had caused her the greatest perplexity:

"The Count knows all!" What answer could she make to his reproaches? What justification had she against what was, to all appearances, a base conspiracy; against what was, under whatever light it might be regarded, a wrong against him?——for nothing could have given her any right to impose on the father the presence of a son whom he had disowned. She could not rid herself of her responsibility by shifting it over upon blind destiny; our will was given us that we might counteract, when necessary, the decrees of fate. What use had she made of her's?

These reflections distressed Madame Désaubiers horribly, and at the same time overmastered the joy which she would otherwise have felt in beholding a face that for many a long year she had ceased to consider as being among the living. His every feature was engraved upon her heart, illuminated by that ideal halo which sur-

rounds everything that has been long past and gone. And now, alas ! they were at last about to meet again, changed, no doubt, both of them, in more ways than one. His first words to her would be words of bitterness, and she, upon whom he had once looked with admiration and esteem, was to appear before him as an accused person ! With faltering steps Madame Désaubiers descended the stairs that led to the drawing-room. When she reached the vestibule she hesitated again and stopped with her hand upon the door-knob. A sound which struck her ear tended to reassure her ; it was Rose's voice ; then she heard the tones of another voice which recalled the happiest days of her life, those restful, well-filled evenings, when M. Volonzoff used to come and knock at that same door, putting behind him the great world for which a sincere attachment had for the time being inspired him with disgust. " I have only to cross your threshold," he was wont to say, " to feel that I am in the refreshing shade of your calmness and your goodness, my whole being penetrated by a delicious sense of repose, like the devotee in his temple." Reassured at last by the remembrance of her old-time power over him, and by the

thought that there was a third party present, she entered the room.

M. Volonzoff had taken the place by the chimney that he had always preferred of old. He was absently twisting a little agate chaplet around his fingers, as he had invariably been wont to do in those days, like most talkers, who are at a loss without a plaything of some kind in their hands.

Madame Désaubiers might have thought that there had never been any break in the old routine, so naturally did he return to it. Rose, modest and self-possessed, was seated at a short distance from him, answering his questions briefly and to the point. Any one who knew how to read her thoughts in her eyes could easily have told that she was deeply interested in what he was saying, and profoundly sympathetic. When Madame Désaubiers appeared and the stranger advanced to meet her with outstretched hands, she arose discreetly and would have retired, but a slight gesture, which still did not escape M. Volonzoff, stopped her.

“In your absence, I have taken the liberty of presenting to Mademoiselle Aymès one of your old friends, and one of the best of them, I hope,” said the Count. “I am not mistaken in

supposing this to be Mademoiselle Aymès, am I? I should have known her, I think, even if I had not seen a certain miniature, which leaves me no room for doubt." He looked with interest toward the young girl, who was visibly moved at the mention of the love-token which she had formerly given Bernard. "You did well in not allowing her to leave the room; for we shall need her concurrence in a plan which I propose to lay before you presently."

The situation could never be difficult in the presence of a man like the Count. His readiness and his perfect ease of manner, if they were unavailing to restore to Madame Désaubiers the faculty of speech, at least rendered it easier for her to breathe and raise her eyes.

It was he; there could be no doubt as to his identity. The only change that the lapse of years had brought to him was to bring out more strongly his resemblance to certain portraits of Van Dyck and Velasquez, in which the haughty cavaliers seemed to have gained rather than to have lost by their being no longer young, thanks to their noble bearing, to their dignified carriage, and the strength and power clearly mani-

fested beneath their elegant forms. Madame Désaubiers glanced rapidly at the mirror that faced her ; a woman is none the less a woman for her being a saint. As she looked, her fine features lighted up with something of their youthful beauty under the touching, wistful look that her eyes expressed. He, too, could look back into his thoughts and find her unchanged from his memories of her. Their conversation was serious and restrained on either side, but through it all there vibrated a note of deep affection. It is generally believed that love can be transformed to friendship at will. This is not the case when a worn-out love is in question, or when by love is meant that form of passion which is just as violent and just as selfish as hate. When the ups and downs of life bring together again two persons who have once been lovers, either absolute indifference, bitter hatred, or some painful emotion, whether it be regret or whether it be remorse, must be the feelings that lie beneath those ashes that are partly extinguished, or else grown wholly cold ; while on the other hand friendship is always the end and reward of a courageous struggle against an inclination which has been overcome, and the

thought of which therefore carries with it no feeling of shame.

In view, however, of the delicate circumstances in which they were placed, there could not be entire unconstraint between them. Neither of them spoke of Bernard. Nevertheless they talked freely on every subject, and particularly on that which was of such distressing interest in those terrible days. The war and the approaching siege afforded them an inexhaustible topic.

“And what do you intend to do?” M. Volonzoff finally asked. “You cannot stay here, in a country place like this, and wait for the Prussians to come. It is not a safe place for two women.”

“It is my intention,” replied Madame Désaubiers, “to go into Paris before they close the gates. There will be the sick and wounded to take care of. Every woman has a duty plain before her.”

M. Volonzoff tried ineffectually to persuade her to seek refuge in the provinces or abroad. Would she not come to Switzerland? He was wholly at her orders.

“You might as well try to make a soldier desert on the day of battle,” said she, shaking her

head with the smile which he very well knew denoted an unchangeable resolution.

“And is Mademoiselle Rose to go with you? Young and delicate as she is?”

“Oh!” said Rose impetuously, “there is nothing that I am not ready to undertake, nothing that I cannot go through, now!”

“Now?” the Count repeated.

“Yes,” Madame Désaubiers explained, “happiness makes us fearless, and after having endured much suffering, Rose is happy now.”

The young girl’s eyes sank under M. Volon-zoff’s penetrating look.

“Our strength,” said he, after a moment’s pause, “is not always equal to our courage.”

“Alas!” replied Madame Désaubiers, “I have thought of that. She is nervous and impressionable, and her recent trials have nearly broken her down. No doubt she will suffer greatly from the privations that must be expected in a city in a state of siege.”

“I shall suffer in good company, and there will be plenty of it,” said Rose unconcernedly.

“You would soon be one of Madame Désaubiers’ sick folks,” said the Count, “and you would only be a care and hindrance to her. As

I have been intrusted with the care of looking after you, Mademoiselle (possibly you may not be aware of it), I cannot give my consent to any such rash proceeding. Do you feel inclined toward deeds of charity? Let me tell you of one which will take you away from Paris. There is a poor friendless, sick boy, who needs some one to console him in his grief for the loss of his only friend, of whom this wretched war has bereft him."

"Your son?" ventured Rose. "Oh! I know him very well already, and I love him!"

"And he needs your love. You may be assured that nowhere could your tenderness and goodness find a better object for their employment."

Rose was silent; she seemed to hear Bernard's voice appealing to her to say yes.

"Well! what is your answer?" urged M. Volonzoff. "I will take good care of you on the trip down there, you will have a place of safety in which to await the cessation of the storm, and afterward, if you require it, you shall have your freedom again. You will have done a good deed, and will have carried out," he added with marked emphasis, "the heart-felt desire of one

who is fondly attached to you and who is now far away."

Rose requested time for reflection and consultation ; alleging this as her reason, she left the room as the Count was saying to Madame Désaubiers :

" And now, let us talk about him ! "

The ice was broken and any preliminary explanation was unnecessary ; she understood what he wanted, and they talked at length of the past. She told him everything, from the day when she had received the abandoned child, standing by the bedside of his dying mother, and how the boy had grown up under her wing without her ever having detected in him a single impulse that was otherwise than good and noble.

The Count listened eagerly, as if he would have put back the clock of time and regained that which he had lost ; he made minute inquiries, and seemed to understand by intuition anything that was omitted from the narrative, so that Madame Désaubiers stopped more than once to say : " Why, you know him as well as I know him myself."

It was a delightful hour that, stolen from the cares and troubles of the present. However

slight the ties which united them, they still had that interest in common which sanctifies love and makes it eternal, a child whom each could love and to whom each had equal claim, for Madame Désaubiers had been a mother to him in the highest sense of the word; she had developed his soul and formed his understanding. "Our child," she would say when mentioning Bernard, with an ingenuousness that an honest woman can display, even when her hair is gray, without making herself ridiculous. But the Count, with great tenderness, would reply :

"He is yours, yours only ; for you gave him your care during his childhood, and whatever he is, you have made him."

"Ah !" said she, "I should have been faithless to my trust, if I had failed to teach him, above everything else, his duty toward you.

"Duty—to me ? He owes me no duty," said M. Volonzoff, "since I have neglected mine. If I could only hear him say that he does not hate me, that he can make some allowance for my neglect of him ! He is gone to risk his life, and I shall lose him at the very moment when he was restored to me ; it is only what I have deserved."

"May God preserve him !" was Madame Dé-

saubiers' fervent prayer. "But consider, we must place our firm belief in that kingdom where whatever is obscure shall be made clear, and where those shall be reunited who have been separated by earthly accidents."

The Count sighed and shook his head. He was wanting in that great virtue of Faith, which carries with it its own reward, by affording courage and consolation to those who possess it.

"Well!" said he, in reply to Madame Désaubiers' heaven-ward glance, "intercede for me with your God, who is about to condemn me, so nearly an old man, to bitter solitude! If He can read all our thoughts, as you believe, He should pity me, for truly I am more wretched than you can imagine, more than I care to tell, wounded as I am at once in my pride, in my affection, in my honor. I have nothing left, nothing, nothing."

"Ah, poor friend! if you could but pray!" He made a gesture of impatience. "But you will come to it yet," said she.

When alone with Rose after this conversation, Madame Désaubiers strongly urged her not to reject the offer which had been made her.

The young girl hesitated. "What, and meet that woman! Perhaps live in the same house with her!"

"There can be nothing to distress you, or even embarrass you, in any hospitality which M. Volonzoff may offer," confidently replied the older woman. "I do not fully understand what he is aiming at, but you may be sure that you can trust in his good faith and incur no risk in doing it."

"He said that Bernard would approve of my going," Rose thoughtfully remarked.

Their deliberations ended in their assenting to the plan.

XV.



SEVERAL months have passed. Bernard has returned, as he promised he would, but even Rose would have found it difficult to recognize him in the emaciated, swarthy, sad-faced man who stepped briskly ashore at Villeneuve one stormy evening from the Geneva boat. The worthy citizens who had been his travelling companions in the sail across the lake had whispered to each other : " He is a French officer ! " They had seen that same expression on so many other faces that they had come to know it well. He gave them no opportunity, however, of entering into conversation; engrossed in his thoughts, Bernard stood leaning against the bridge, communing with the lake, on whose dark surface he seemed to read a heart-rending and heroic story, his country's and his own. The threatening West is red with the blood and fire of war. The black clouds passing

with wild, quick flight over the rising waves are the devastating hordes of the invader. The great mirror shows him every one of the tragic episodes in which he has played his part. He sees the regiment to which he belonged sent to the front before the men had learned the manual; he sees prodigies of individual bravery achieved without result, for lack of that military education which produces discipline. He was a hero in those days, as who indeed was not! While the old army, the only *army* in fact, was held captive in Germany, the new troops, hastily levied, without arms, ammunition or clothing, stood and took their inevitable defeats.

The food was insufficient; the fatigue of forced marches, the cold winter nights passed shelterless in the snow, the disease that is engendered by such misery, cost more lives than did even shot and shell. Bernard had experienced all these sufferings, cold, hunger, want; and what was bitterer yet, he had felt the rage and despair of surviving a disgrace that was worse than all else combined. Himself sorely wounded, he was forced to witness, sorrowfully and impotently, the death-struggle of France, and lying on his hospital cot, from which he prayed that he might

never rise again, the dreadful sentence:—"It is all over!"—sounded in his ear. It rings there yet in the depths of his heart, like a funeral knell, but at the same time he hears a low and supplicating voice, Dima's voice, urging him to hurry—and he fears to be too late. And so at last he steps on shore.

It is a brilliant season at the lake, and the hotels are filled with tourists; from all the projecting balconies that adorn the front of the hotels and boarding houses comes the sound of conversation in every language of Europe; now and then the notes of the inevitable piano burst out and summon the English girls to more exercise: they climb all day and dance all night: others are walking by the lake-side, trying to find a breath of fresh air, for it has been very warm all day; red and white wraps flit to and fro in the twilight, and the sound of stifled laughter indicates that flirtation is brisker when carried on in the open air than in the drawing-room. A belated excursion party makes its way down the rocks of Naye by the winding pathway of Recourbes. Bernard has to stand aside and wait to let it pass; there is a lively clatter of cracking whips, jingling bells, female cries and shrieks, and

guides calling to their mules ; he looks with amused impatience, dashed with a little contempt, upon the scatter-brained party that is so easily amused. But down yonder, nestling among a clump of larches, which rear their heads like funeral hangings under the lead-colored light of the storm, more like a child's toy in its fantastic outlines, is the Châlet from which he went forth a while ago, full of martial ardor, to answer the summons of the cannon which he seems to hear again to-day in the thunder reverberating among the mountains. How mournful and sullen it sounds ! And the rain, which now begins to fall in slow drops, seems to him like tears.

Catherine, Dima's old nurse, is sitting before the door. Bernard's fears oppress him : "There is nothing wrong ?" he asks.

She shakes her head and points to a dog that lies stretched out at her feet, sleeping with his muzzle on his paws : "He has whined all day, and that is a bad omen," says she. "Our little dove is going to take his flight. Oh ! my God ! that he should be called away before me !"

She arises with what alacrity her great age permits and shows Bernard into the vestibule. As he puts foot in it, he hears these words pain-

fully articulated from an adjoining room: "I know his step!"

Dima had been placed in this great room so that he might breathe more easily, and also that he might watch for the coming of his friend and be the first to welcome him. "I want to speak to him before any one else does," he keeps repeating, under the returning influence of his old time jealousy.

There is not a breath of air stirring, and the windows are opened wide to admit the invigorating odor of the fir-trees; still only a dim light falls upon the objects, animate and inanimate, in the room. Bernard imperfectly distinguishes M. Volonzoff, the doctor from Geneva, and a woman whom he does not dare to look at closely. She is using her fan to create a current of cooler air around the sick boy. At his approach they all draw back from the bed.

"It is he!" cries Dima, raising himself upon his elbow, and a hectic flush appears upon his cheeks. Bernard runs straight to the bed and wraps the wasted little form in his arms; he feels his short, labored breath upon his cheek. "You have come at last! I told you that I would wait for you!"

They hold each other in a long embrace, then Bernard releases himself with all the gentleness at his command, and replaces the pale face, illuminated by an ecstatic smile, back upon its pillow. A lamp is brought in, which serves to disclose this smile, and also shows only too plainly the ravages of the disease.

Bernard gives a start and trembles at the sound of a female voice close beside him : " Do not fatigue him too much." It is Rose, whom he had mistaken for the Countess in the uncertain evening light.

" What ! you here, Rose ? "

" She has tried her best to fill your place," says the child, summoning up his remaining energy to make the pretty speech.

" Do you not think," said the Count, coming forward, " that Mademoiselle Aymès was better here than she could have been anywhere else? I thought that I knew what you wanted, and I acted accordingly. While you were away, we cheered ourselves by hoping that we might greet your return by more than one pleasant surprise, but a stronger will than ours has decreed otherwise." The Count's voice failed him as he uttered these words.

“Why do you talk like that?” Dima interrupted: “I do not wish that things should be different, and Mademoiselle Aymès, too, is satisfied. She has been very good to me! We talked a great deal about you, Bernard; I could not have got along without her, and she must stay here always, although I shall not need any one’s assistance much longer; but you are here!”

“You are talking too much,” says the doctor, and a spasm which convulses his patient shows that he is right.

In the profound silence which now reigns, nothing is heard but the ticking of the clock and the echoes of the retreating storm. Bernard presses his lips to Rose’s hand and casts a look of thanks toward M. Volonzoff; his heart is full to overflowing, but death, hovering about them and filling the room with his solemn, threatening presence, checks any expression of his gratitude or his love.

Dima is the first to speak: “How many things you must have to tell me! and I too have a great deal to say to you. It seems as if there will never be time enough.”

“I will sit up with you to-night, if you would like to have me.”

“Oh! yes! I should like so much to have you all to myself!”

As every wish of Dima's is a command, they are left alone together. As soon as the door is closed, he says to Bernard: “Raise me a little; I do not breathe easily.” Bernard draws him to himself and places his head upon his shoulder, where he appears to rest contentedly.

“How beautiful the stars are!” the child sighs, turning his great eyes toward the darkness which is becoming more and more impenetrable; no doubt his vision penetrates it and is conscious of things beyond, “And that music, too! Listen!” The storm had passed away, and the rippling melody of the waterfall is distinctly audible, and from time to time there comes to them on the night air another sound of harmony, pure and liquid as the falling waters. “It is mamma's voice,” continues Dima joyfully; “it is so long since I have heard it! I did not tell them so,” he said, pointing to the door with his trembling finger, “but I feel that I am going to meet mamma.”

Can this be delirium? Bernard trembles from head to foot as he asks: “Is she here?”

“You know that she is not. The angels have

taken her away. Hush! Papa has only spoken of her to me once since I parted from her at Sestri; then he told me that I would never see her again. I cried a great deal, but now that I have seen you again, there is nothing to keep me from going to meet her. If you could only come too! Shall I have to wait for you long?"

He lets his heavy head decline upon the shoulder where it has been pillowed so many times, and shuts his eyes. Bernard forgets him for the moment. His thoughts are with Annette, who is no more. Can it be? Is it possible that nothing remains of that dazzling beauty, of all those dangerous charms? Can that form, so young, so overflowing with life, have become food for worms? He tries to picture to himself the end of such a woman: Annette in sickness, Annette gradually wasting away beneath her sufferings. But no! his imagination quickly turns and dwells upon another, the most dreadful of all pictures that can be conceived: suicide, the logical consequence of ill-directed passions, the last refuge for lives without principle and without faith, for violence and weakness. With all sense of responsibility gone, so to speak, so successful had she been in stifling conscience; de-

ceived and led astray by her idle fancies ; with no firm anchorage ground, and her desire of pleasure unsatiated, although she saw its futility ; she must at last have reached the abyss that yawns for us in our weariness and despair, and have seen no other way of putting an end to the evils that she had brought upon herself. Had she not said to him more than once : "The drama of life, to be interesting, should not be too long. I have reached the last act of mine, and I want it to touch the audience. Cleopatra's asp, or Phaedra's poison, would have no terrors for me at a pinch." Probably she was not in earnest, but she had always been accustomed to treat the most serious affairs lightly.

Thus under the influence of spectre-breeding night, and still more, tortured by the remorseful feeling that he might have been for something in the inception of this crime, the idea of suicide, that had gratuitously presented itself to Bernard's imagination, assumes the proportions of a dreadful reality. Scarcely conscious of what he does or says, he sits on the edge of Dima's bed and mechanically sustains the child. "Wretch !" he says, addressing himself, "you have considered only your own repose, your own conscience !

What you called virtue was only selfishness and cruel obduracy. She loved you, and her blood is on your hands just as much as if you had struck her with a knife and slain her."

He had fled from her without looking back ; were she alive, perhaps, he would have hated her, but dead, she has become holy in his eyes. Bernard will not learn the whole disgusting truth for some time yet. Annette, seeing no better course for herself, and thirsting to be revenged on her husband, had prevailed on M. de Fossombrone to run away with her. The severity of the Russian laws against crimes like hers having estranged her from her family and put a barrier between her and society, she pitched her tents in the east in company with her lover, who had already begun to feel the embarrassment of so great a happiness.

It is far better for Dima that he should think he is motherless. But what a night it is for Bernard, alone, save for the company of his horrible illusion and the child, already motionless as if he were in his coffin ! Only once again during the long night does he open his eyes, calling his friend by name :

"Do you believe what Catherine says, that I

shall have wings up there? Only think, wings!" repeats the poor helpless creature, with a yearning for space and liberty that causes his frame to thrill. It was the last word he spoke, and when M. Volonzoff comes to relieve Bernard at daybreak, Dima seems to be sleeping peacefully.

Bernard had gone to his room and thrown himself on the bed that had been made ready for him, but he cannot sleep. There seems to be a mysterious presence in the room, something that floats about him and surrounds him, something like a loving little spirit, that has followed him there and lingers, unwilling to say farewell; it seems to him that Dima is at his side and whispers in his ear. It may be so. The sun has hardly risen when old Catherine, her rigid features contracted in the solemnity and holiness of her grief, enters his room: "Come!"

Rose, her tears falling freely, is waiting for him; she puts her arms around his neck. It is the Heaven-appointed mission of woman to assuage our sufferings with the balm of their pity and the sweet consoling tenderness of their love. Rose gives him her first kiss in commiseration of his bereavement; had he felt his loss less keenly he would not have received it then.

“ Let us not lament over his deliverance,” she says ; “ his sufferings are ended, he passed away without awakening.”

* * * * *

Morning, with its odorous freshness and its indescribable harmonies, enters the room between the parted curtains, and fills it with floods of light. Are these crystalline vibrations which fill the blue transparent atmosphere of heaven or of earth? Where does earth end? Where does heaven begin? Everything is pervaded by light and gladness. The burning bush of scripture blazes on every mountain side; the majestic, towering summits are seen dimly through a golden mist which rises from the bosom of the sparkling lake that lies beneath, unruffled by a wave. Never was there a more resplendent glimpse into eternity and the infinite vouchsafed to mortal vision; the glory of it is too great for the eye of man; yet the glory, and the blessedness, and the beauty which are immortal, are still more faithfully depicted on the transfigured lineaments of him who so short a while ago was Dima. The sun wreathes his forehead with a saintly aureole, the wounded bird has found his

wings, he is victorious over life. M. Volonzoff has at last bent the knee before the avenging God whose presence he recognizes by the side of this bed of death. He seems to be listening for something rather than praying, there, with his face covered by his hands.

“What could have been the reason of summoning him to earth, where he has suffered so?” he asks himself. “What was it appointed that he should do, except suffer and endure? Is there such a thing as justice?”

And a voice that he had never heard before answers :

“He was a stainless victim ; it was appointed that he should yield his life in loving and expiating, that he should bring together those who were separated and should be united, that he should fill the place of another until the time should come to yield it up.”

The father understands ; he will obey. Slowly he turns toward Bernard, who has moved back a little, influenced by his grief for the dead and his respect for the living : he has met death on the battle-field in its most fearful forms, but never has he been affected like this, even when he had seen the arrow pointed at himself.

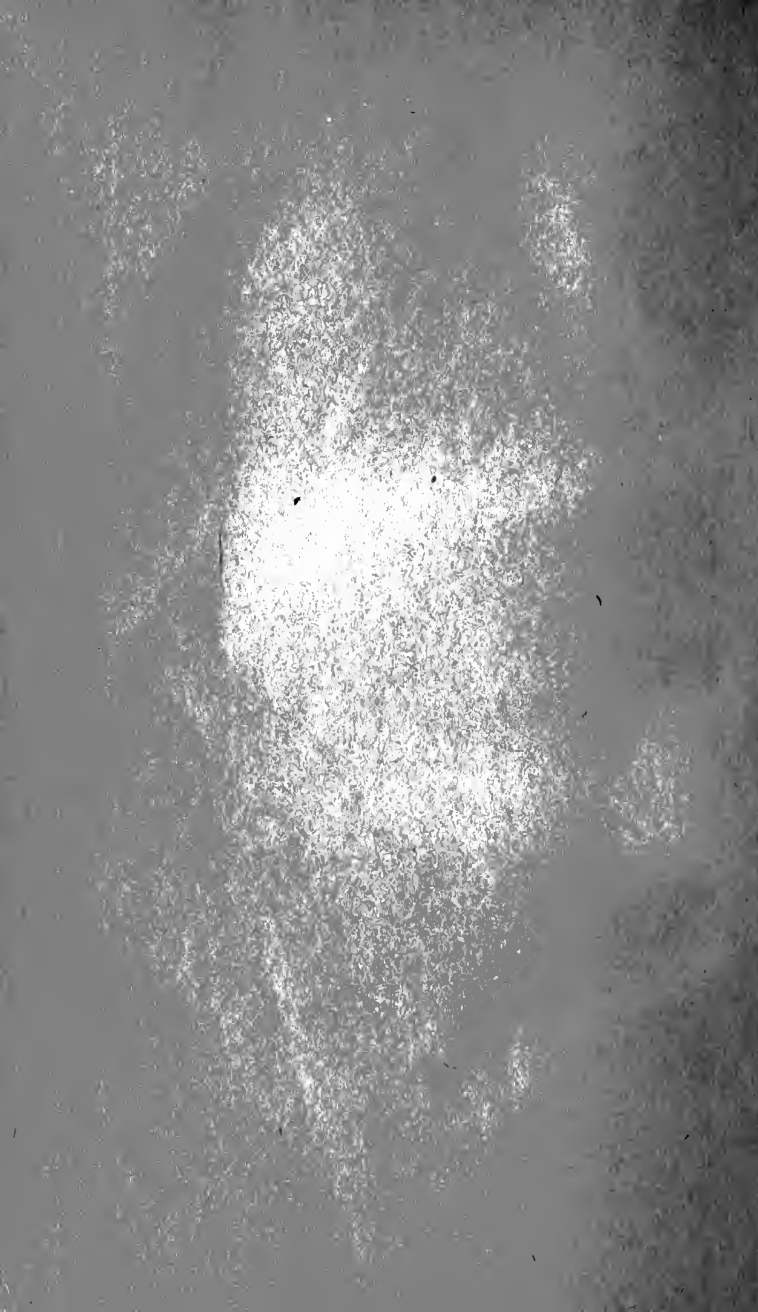
M. Volonzoff signs to him to come forward :

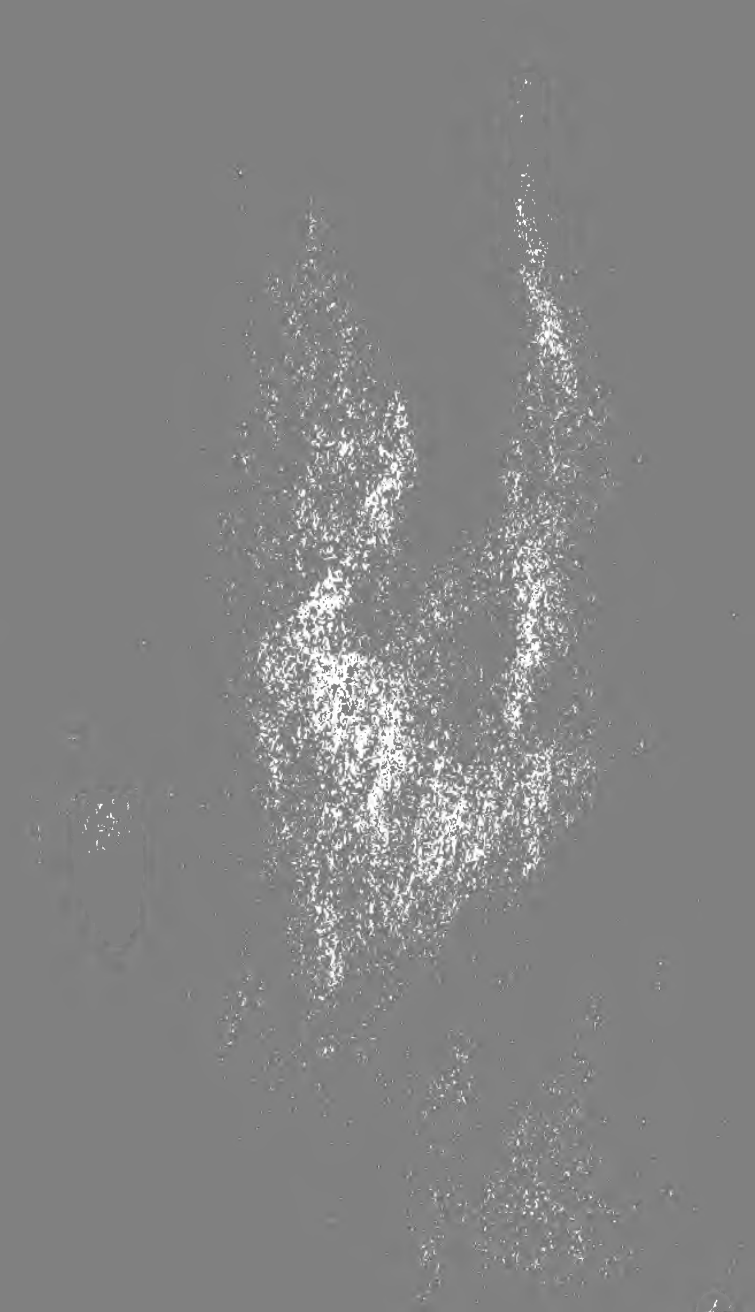
“We will submit,” he says, endeavoring to restrain the sobs by which, spite of his efforts, his form continues to be shaken. “It was Dima who brought you to me, Dima adjures you to pardon me——my son !”

FINIS.









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